Beyond the global reset

Pandemic panopticons or something radically new?

Sanjana Hattotuwa, ICT4Peace Foundation
Covid-19 as a wicked problem

Responses add to complexity
Exponential growth
China’s outbreak has come to a halt and South Korea has flattened its curve, but COVID-19 case numbers are still rising rapidly in many Western countries.
Are older problems

New drivers of violence
New outgrowth of old roots

- Seclusion exacerbates exclusion
- Vulnerability today is violence tomorrow
- Digital divide now as an existential crisis
- Intrusion and invasion of personal and geographic spaces normalised
- Acceleration of democratic retreat (couched as pandemic response)
- The privatisation of essential services
- Long-term implications of contemporary decisions & decision-making processes by SM companies
We are in this together, we will get through it together.
Let's imagine together.
Sing with 🎤
All love to you, from me and my dear friends. #WeAreOne ... #KisterWie #JamieDornan
Contours of frontier & front-door challenges

Sri Lanka as portal
Accelerated authoritarian entrenchment & expansion, suspension of democratic oversight, coordinated, amplified & sustained influence operations on Facebook, rise in disinformation, Chinese propaganda signatures, heightened mobile phone surveillance led by the military, hostility to privacy safeguards, rapid increase in Islamophobia, heightened religiopolitical rhetoric, normalisation of militarisation, racism & discrimination against religious & ethnic minorities, rise in majoritarianism, seed & spread of rumours & misinformation over WhatsApp, incitement to hate & violence by leading private TV channels close to government, terrestrial broadcast content featured social media resulting in emotional contagions, coordinated production of thinly-veiled propaganda on Facebook to overwhelm critical commentary, rise in nationalist rhetoric, a pandemic response framed as war effort, strategically produced media frames supporting populism & cult of presidency, clamping down on Freedom of Expression, complete impunity enjoyed by those close to political authority, doxxing & abuse of select Covid-19 patients, an illegal curfew, suspension of parliamentary oversight, public vilification of those who call for restoration of democratic governance, chaotic & confusing crisis communications, government policies anchored to electoral advantage instead of pandemic containment, suspended judicial oversight, arrest & prolonged detention of a senior lawyer, a growing economic debacle including credit downgrades, debt servicing challenges, unprecedented decline in remittances, shambolic tax structure, export & tourism sectors wiped out and a bankrupt government.
A new chapter for the attention economy

Media effects
### Popular times (March 2020)

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### Total Interactions

- **Gossip Pages:** 26.89M
- **News - Sinhala:** 8.16M
- **News - English:** 166.9K

### Average Daily Interactions

- **Gossip Pages:** 16.61M
- **News - Sinhala:** 5.48M
- **News - English:** 106.7K

### Daily Interaction %

- **Gossip Pages:** 2.08M
- **News - Sinhala:** 589.8K
- **News - English:** 46.9K
Abundance amplified as censorship.

Manufactured consonance, instead of democratic dissonance.

An information deluge as distraction. Post-pandemic imagined landscapes.
“What we see emerging now is the “democrat’s dilemma” - controlling information is inimical to democracy, but allowing it to spread unchecked creates disinformation that can undermine democratic discourse.”
Automated review & algorithmic oversight

How San Francisco’s shelter-in-place & WFH impacts global discourse
Mis/mal/disinformation & propaganda during Covid-19 / Coronavirus pandemic

Capture and brief analyses of content on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram anchored to the government’s Coronavirus pandemic response in Sri Lanka, as well as the general (social) media and information landscape at the time.

Sanjana Hattotuwa
The masking of structural inequity

Despotism disguised
The pandemic as opportunism

- Discrimination as benevolence (existential concerns trump human rights)
- Silicon Valley’s entrenchment in everything (the pandemic as reputational laundromat)
- AI hostage to post-pandemic geo-politics between US and China (increased weaponisation)
- Health passports and issuing authorities (creation of a new elite)
- Tighter border controls and xenophobia (infection as “imported”)
- Debt diplomacy leveraged to prop donors (foreign policy propaganda pivots and puppets)
Syndromic to systemic surveillance

From epidemiological tracing to citizen tracking
@harari_yuval believes that extreme measures will continue to be taken by governments globally, "we'll see a big battle between privacy and health and health is likely to win."

The issue, says Harari, is that such steps could "form the basis of an extreme totalitarian regime."
Seeing things for what they are, not as we want them to be

A new vocabulary?
Agency to & agility at the edges

Chronos vs Kairos
• Decentralisation as institutional DNA
• Less 38th floor, more ground floor
• Less pensions, more ideas
• Radical intersectionality and interconnectedness
• Map, monitor & plan for disruption
• The new normal is the abnormal
• Deviation is innovation
• Values & voice over tradition & trepidation
• Network(ed) intelligence
Rapid iterations from the unthinkable to policy

A new Overton window
The world as it must be, not as it is.
Repulsion, alignment, attraction

Murmuration
Change as a constant, fluid leadership, edges inform response

Embrace swarm dynamics
From IRL to URL and the implications thereof

PKO problems & potentialities
Post-pandemic mandate implementation

- From troop contributing to data sharing countries
- The privatisation of data gathering, retention, access and analysis
- The digital is not the terrain: employing human & remote-sensing proxies at scale
- Systemic confluence of contagion and conflict vectors
- Can virtual oversight supplant physical presence
More of the same, or time for something completely different?

UN’s role, reach & relevance
Endogenic reform for exogenic relevance

Structural vulnerability demands a global response anchored to local realities.

Global governance models required, including for social media.

LEGO pieces, not model. Convene to build.

The UN as service stack instead of system.

Austerity as impetus to rescale, reform, reskill and retool.

Fund paradigm shift. Defund status quo.
Sun flares, internet outages, climate change, cyberattacks, bio-terrorism, pandemic, fresh-water contamination, market collapse, failure of trans-Atlantic political leadership, sentient AI

The next pandemic disruption
“We know what we are, but know not what we may be.”

Hamlet, William Shakespeare
Thank you

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