Will COVID-19 Bring the Armageddon? Expanding Psychosocial Support and Environmental Care: An Autoethnographic Research

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This article presents an autoethnographic examination on how people are living and experiencing the turnabout in their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the educational landscape going towards faith in mankind to the psychological, social, environmental, and philosophical arena, this article gives reflections on hopes for a democratic future. In sharp contrast, the post-pandemic world is open to social disparities, digital divides, health inequalities, and social crises, but there are also new possibilities and realities. The next generation of students should be educated to be humane, to face the fear of the unknown, and to protect planet earth from biopolitical ecology and neoliberalism. Until such time, the article calls on unity in the fight against COVID-19 while maintaining a balance between reality and disorientation and holding into a psychological blanket of social support through cyberspace amid the crises. **Keywords:** COVID-19, Facebook, environmental sustainability, psychosocial support, autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of learning worldwide experienced their greatest challenge to date—COVID-19. How have universities reflected on the quality of education they fostered to their students prior to the pandemic? How should the learning of those millions of graduates be measured when humanity is confronted with a question of a biopolitical nature? How can educators help the students find solace in the virtual world during this emergency? How can we better educate our students to create a democratic society and spearhead for social justice in the environment (Toquero, 2020a)? How could have the institutions done better? These questions and more questions, *ad infinitum*.

Through an autoethnographic research, I explored rationalizations on the need to answer these prevailing questions. But, what is autoethnography? Autoethnography is a research writing approach that rigorously analyzes personal experiences to understand the wider cultural experiences, political and social meanings, and systems of power (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Johnston, 2020). It is an innovative orientation for the qualitative research with the use of self-reflection or reflexivity "intentionally to illuminate and interrogate cultural beliefs, practices, and identities (Adams & Herrmann, 2020, p. 2). Thus, the focus of my narratives is to evoke emotions but to be responsive and constructive simultaneously to the social realities with the hopes to initiate real change (Poulos, 2020).

The start of real change demands social action in one's sphere, so until this defining moment of crises, numerous mind-boggling questions beset me and I even recalled the time that I was waiting for a renewed sense of accomplishment for the afternoon class while I sat in my desk at the faculty office. Though I had an idea that anytime soon the classes would be suspended due to the coronavirus, I pretended as if the news about the virus were still new to my system. Taking over a glimpse on my phone every minute, every hour, it seems like an eternity mystified me. Reports are running in fast despite my slow bandwidth, feeling aghast of the experiences of the people worldwide. They lost their loved ones, hundreds, thousands worldwide in inconceivable circumstances.

That country is on the brink of giving up, that painting of an Italian artist illustrates how the virus dominates a blood-filled hand raised to the blue heavens asking for help in the midst of COVID-19 while the medical workforce is surrounding and reviving the hand. This is the portrayal that the survival of the human species now rests in the hands of a higher being. I see the power of such a strong depiction of emotions in that painting. This confirms the findings of a study that religiosity is a "stress-buffering social psychological resource" (Stroope, Walker, & Franzen, 2017). Holding into a leap of faith keeps humanity from submerging into the hiatus of disillusion brought by what people say as the "new normal," which I shun

Table 1. Confirmed Cases of Coronavirus Disease (WHO, 2020 June 8, Situation Report-140)

Globally	6 931 000 cases (131 296)	400 857 deaths (3 469)
Africa	135 412 cases (4 088)	3 236 deaths (88)
Americas	3 311 387 cases (76 512)	181 804 deaths (2 410)
Eastern Mediterranean	641 429 cases (17 745)	14 602 deaths (276)
Europe	2 286 560 cases (18 258)	184 120 deaths (388)
South-East Asia	364 196 cases (13 654)	9 970 deaths (298)
Western Pacific	191 275 cases (1 039)	7 112 deaths (9)

until today. Instead of using the term new normal, I would prefer—new reality. They say we only live once— but I say, we only die once but we can live every day. Each day brings a new reality where we can create something new to live for despite all these world's tensions that are heavily weighing in our bodies enough for our minds to become petrified in extreme situations.

Times of Vulnerabilities

These are times of vulnerabilities though for I honestly avoided reading the news recently. It may be in an exaggerated way, but my emotions are piling and giving up. I already repulsed the sad emoji in Facebook because the news of confirmed cases and people dying due to COVID-19 never seems to run out. It is sickening of hearing and reading news of the fatalities in the worldwide cases (**Table 1**).

Looking intently in the Philippines, it has a reported 21, 895 confirmed cases of COVID-19 based on the same Situation Report (WHO, 2020). The cases are heightening each day and people are getting desperate as the economic recession is also pillaging nationwide and worldwide. With a threat on the worst employment crises in the country, COVID-19 has opened the gateways of social disparities, health inequalities, and digital divides that can massively rampage for inequalities in the post-pandemic world. For example, I read the case in Chicago where less than one-third African-American population resides but 72.2 % who died were Black (Fairchild, Gostin, & Bayer, 2020), and this reflects the long-standing social inequalities. COVID-19 also exposed the toxicity of neoliberalism on employment and the educational system.

Thinking about these dire situations, the pain that I experience is as 'simple' as home quarantine, social distancing, and community lockdown. But what those people are experiencing in direct contact with the virus and those who are suffering from the lack of legal, economic, and health support are sorrows, deep sorrows that looms in the abyss. Love is as strong as death for those who lost their loved ones.

Virtual Relationships

Though the world was shut behind doors, my Facebook opens a new stellular projecting dimension of similarity that I can relate to in a bitter-sweet relationship as "social relationships influence psychological well-being" (Burke & Krauke, 2016, p. 265). I can see how people are learning, making conspiracy theories, being saddened, socializing, losing hope, volunteering, and extending help to society to battle against COVID-19.

Within the virtual dimensions, we can be able to help others find comfort during these distressings times (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Manalel, 2017). Living for the people we love and helping others push through in this fight gives us

a sense of psychological safety and social satisfaction especially during these times when we all need social support. It can be within the portals of our homes or through the doorways of the virtual realm, all of us need to support each other (Waddingham, 2020). The bottom line is all of us will need to face the fear of the unknown. These are unprecedented and depressing times and we never know when we can seize liberation from this dire situation.

Despite the negative events, the constructivist theory reminds me "to look at a problem from multiple perspectives and provide the opportunities" (Dagar & Yadav, 2016) for people whom I can reach out to. I may not be able to change the entire world, but I can reach out to my students, in my own sphere of influence, never losing hope that I can offer assistance whether emotionally, academically, or socially to consider certain aspects that I can help mankind one way or another even through the virtual realms. The students should be taught and then act as educated for "character and action are intertwined so intimately that one's professional duties, or even what is perceived by others as one's duties, cannot override one's conscience without negatively affecting (and changing) one's character" (Mitchell, 2015). The world longs for a generation of lifelong learners who can reflect kindness and demonstrate social justice through their actions to the society and to the environment as being educated in all sense.

Environmental Utopia

On a positive note during this global health emergency, there are reports (Dantas, Siciliano, Franca, da Silva, & Arbill, 2020; Zambrano-Monserrate, Ruano, & Sanchez-Alcalde, 2020) of restored environments and good air quality. As I interpret these environmental articles, I can assume that the flora and fauna are enjoying the time of their lives during this pandemic. Amidst the biopolitical commotions, this is the moment for reclamation among the animals as they seized the democracy to the vast forest-like horizons in the middle of the cities seeking dominion in territorial boundaries. This biopower creates a zoomorphic rewilding experimentation as the ethico-political foundation is happening in the heart of the city and we do not want to miss the opportunity to reminisce the fauna city dwellers enjoying their environmental intimacy (Lewis, 2020). These beautiful creatures should not be deprived of this balance of ecological protection due to the greediness of mankind and the lack of awareness thereof on environmental literacy that creates greenhouse effects instead of greener pastures.

Aside from the non-human city-habitats, the blue heavens are magnifying its real beauty as there are significant reductions of air pollutants (Dantas et al., 2020). The waters and beaches are clean due to the social distancing measures (Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2020), showing crystal-like

forms. These wonders of real nature are what I need at the moment to breathe away from the previous artifice of nature composed of the aroma of smokes and burns from the chemical waste of industrial and manufacturing companies. Hence, I reminisce the day that the animals can live together with humans as their natural birthright granted to them by the supreme being. The forests should be protected from the geopolitical conspiracies of humans that in the post-pandemic world, we are hoping it will not be the same green-paper business depleting the verdant forests. We need to remember that nature always finds its way for revenge—look at where we are now.

CONCLUSION

Going back to those questions above, I am hoping that soon we can find answers—for we need to educate the students for a better world. Together, we need to educate the students to address environmental issues (Punzalan, 2020; Toquero, 2020b). There are challenges along the way as we face the post-pandemic era and we need to reshape education (Cahapay, 2020) to answer the pressing issues due to the political, social, economic, and psychological impacts of COVID-19. Lest we are not going to unite against COVID-19, more inequalities will prevail in the post-pandemic world.

So, will the virus bring the Armageddon to this world? Even if I may give up, but others will not, even if I cry a thousand rivers because of the negative news I read each day, but others will not. If they give up, I will not. So, why should I give up when they are still fighting. Though it will be in a cyclical motion, so long as one stands still, COVID-19 can never find its way to conquer the world. Lives may be stolen, but the spirit of unity remains. Latin says it perfectly "unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno," That is, one for all, all for one. United we win— against COVID-19.

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