CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Disaster Capitalism and COVID-19

Working Group Description:

Disasters present opportunities for change, but also highlight tension between those advocating for social transformation and those protecting the interests of the powerful and wealthy. This group studies COVID-capitalism around the world to understand whether social and economic justice are being served, or whether state and non-state actors are using the pandemic to consolidate control, to financially profit, and to protect systems of oppression.

If you would like to connect with this Working Group, please fill out this form.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

This Working Group has come together to study the phenomena of disaster capitalism (DC) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—in essence an evolved phenomenon, COVID-capitalism. The priority research topics below at times also connect to classic concerns of disaster capitalism outside of the pandemic window. This is because we believe that many of the solutions to the ills of COVID-capitalism are structural, and require long-term, radical adjustments to all facets of society.

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. The Underlying Causes of (and Conditions for) Disaster Capitalism	- Research Question 1: Why does disaster capitalism occur? - Research Question 2: How does history inform our understanding of disaster capitalism in the present? - Research Question 3: What theory and practice underpin disaster capitalism? - Research Question 4: What decisions/actions set the scene for COVID-capitalism behaviors?
2. Disaster Capitalism Behavior	Research Question 1: How and why does disaster capitalism manifest differently

		around the world? When and why are the manifestations similar across time and geographic space?
		• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What types of exploitative behavior exemplify disaster capitalism?
		• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How do profiteers of disaster organize in advance of "shocks?"
		• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Why is the public so quick to frame individual small acts of disaster capitalism as "anti-social" but excuse corporate (faceless) profiteering?
3.	Resistance and Organizing against Disaster Capitalism	• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How are individuals and communities resisting COVID-capitalism?
		• <u>Research Question 2</u>: Who is resisting and why?
		• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What theory and practice are resistance movements drawing on?
		• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Why do some mobilizations against COVID-capitalism succeed and others fail?
		• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What are the pathways to transformation for community organizers?
4.	COVID-Capitalism and Development	• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How does the development engine itself condition COVID-19 solutions towards disaster capitalism?
		• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How is risk being created and re-created in the context of COVID-19?
5.	Narratives of COVID-Capitalism	• <u>Research Question 1</u>: What narratives about COVID are serving or opposing capital?
		• <u>Research Question 2</u>: Who creates narratives and for whom (e.g., consider differences between various media outlets, educational systems, private sector actors, etc.)?
		• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What is the role of corporate social responsibility/public relations in normalizing disaster capitalism?
		• <u>Research Question 4</u>: How do narratives shape public acceptance or rejection of COVID-capitalism?
6.	The Struggle of Economic Ideas	• <u>Research Question 1</u>: To what extent has COVID-19 revealed how economic growth is normalized, despite costing lives?
		• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How significant is the advance of new economic ideas (Green New Deal, Doughnut Economics, Degrowth) as alternative pathways that could avoid DC in future?
		• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How can neoliberalism be challenged in a post-COVID-19 world?

7. Power and Politics	• Research Question 1: Has COVID-10 encouraged discussions around power and voice? • Research Question 2: Who are the oppressed and the oppressors in disaster capitalism? • Research Question 3: Why do we see a rise in repression and authoritarianism during a pandemic? • Research Question 4: Is liberal democracy able to deal effectively with a pandemic?
8. Visualization	• Research Question 1: How can we communicate/ represent data on disaster capitalism to different audiences? • Research Question 2: What are the most effective means of using visualization to engage communities and facilitate organization against disaster capitalism? • Research Question 3: What is the best visual means of reaching different audiences about COVID-capitalism?
9. Place and Scale of COVID-Capitalism	• Research Question 1: How have borders increased or decreased the manifestation of disaster capitalism? • Research Question 2: How cultural context affects manifestation of disaster capitalism?
10. Intersectional Struggle	• Research Question 1: What are the unique modes of discrimination exposed by COVID-19? • Research Question 2: How can social and political movements for change based on one identity come together in this moment to challenge established power? • Research Question 3: What methods are deployed to prevent revolutionary groups from coming together to challenge the status quo?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

This research agenda contributes towards ethical disaster studies in that it challenges established and normative historic views on the origins of disaster risk and emphasizes the importance of treating disasters as political processes rooted in decisions driven by the interests of the powerful. As a research community we must not be concerned only about the distribution of power; but our moral and ethical agenda must lead us to interrogate how we relate to each other and all life on earth. Further work must establish a critical framing around different forms of capitalism, exploring whose voices are being heard and whose voices are being hidden, how this is deployed and by whom. Methodologically, researchers need to be mindful of the interpretation of historical 'facts' as portrayed in normative discourses. Moreover, the actions and events that currently manifest disaster capitalism are often temporally and spatially removed, making them hard to capture. The origins and consequences of DC are truly transnational, bringing further ethical and moral dilemmas around culture, language, and geopolitics. A research agenda drawing together theorization and application is critical. The former needs to be considered if we are to draw connections between micro-level case examples and macro-level historical processes, as well as make linkages across geography. The latter is critical for mobilizing political action, resistance, and generating actionable knowledge for practice.

Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:

What We Are Working On (join us!)	*Recommended Resources*
• Case study white paper (in progress) • Academic article (in progress) • Website • Social media presence • Press engagement • Podcast narratives • Grant applications	• Coronavirus Capitalism Teach-ins • COVID-19 & Disaster Capitalism (Solis, Klein, 2020) • COVID Calls • Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States (Pirtle, 2020)

There is still so much work to do! Again, if you would like to connect with this Working Group, please fill out this form.

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