Covid-19 and the Future Scenarios of Muslim Societies

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Abstract

Covid-19's shock to the world economy is greater than both the 2018 Financial Crisis and the Great Depression 1929-1939. In two weeks, 10 million became unemployed in the United States, far exceeding the 2008 financial crisis of which 8.8 million lost their jobs in 106 weeks. Nations that were previously seen as sustainable and recession-proof also looked shaky and some countries have already tumbled into economic recession. The world has seen a trillion-dollar stimulus package injected, including developed and rich countries, to breathe a sigh of relief into the economy. By adapting the content analysis methodology and pragmatic critical thinking processes, this article attempts to provide a new perspective on the dynamics of the Muslim Societies in the future through three impending scenarios namely the Disowned, the Outlier, and the Preferred. These scenarios are significant and can be used as a reference or consideration for post-pandemic strategic planning. Muslim Societies need to have the right post-pandemic vision to ensure change towards a better future.

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1. Introduction

Most of the analyses and comments on Covid-19 whether from the economic, social, and cultural point of view implicate humans negatively. In comparison to the complex and complicated financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic is easier to understand. Nouriel Roubini in his article *A Greater Depression* stated that Covid-19's shock to the world economy is greater than both the 2018 Financial Crisis and the Great Depression 1929-1939. In two weeks, 10 million became unemployed in the United States, far exceeding the 2008 financial crisis of which 8.8 million lost their jobs in 106 weeks (Roubini, 2020). Nations that were previously seen as sustainable and recession-proof also looked shaky and some countries have already tumbled into economic recession. The world has seen a trillion-dollar stimulus package injected, including developed and rich countries, to breathe a sigh of relief into the economy.

Covid-19 is a pandemic that will surely create a renewed norm of human life. It will alter directions and behaviours including the lifestyles of many societies in the world, including the Muslim Societies. This article attempts to provide a new perspective on the dynamics of the Muslim Societies in the future through three impending scenarios namely the Disowned, the Outlier, and the Preferred. These scenarios are significant and can be used as a reference or consideration for post-pandemic strategic planning. Muslim Societies need to have the right post-pandemic vision to ensure change towards a better future.

2. Envisioning the Futures of Muslim Societies

When it comes to envisioning the future, we can discover many literatures that explores the facet such as *the Age of the Unthinkable* by Joshua Cooper Ramu, *Physics of the Future* by Michio Kaku, *Mind Set: Reset Your Thinking and See the Future* by John Naisbitt, *Future Shock, Third Wave and Revolutionary Wealth* by Alvin Toffler, *the Post-American World* by Fareed Zakaria, *the Future of Asian* by Parag Khanna and *Asia 2038: Ten Disruptions that Change Everything* by Sohail Inayatullah and Lu Na. Nevertheless, most of these books are not related to envisioning the future of Muslim Societies.

There is relatively scarce literature on the future of Muslim Societies. Fuller (2003) in *the Future of Political Islam* asserts that religion has come to play a central role in politics, and the outcome of the struggle between extremists and liberals Muslims will determine the future of political Islam. Esposito (2013) on the other hand, provided another dimension of the future of Muslim Societies. He introduced a new generation of Muslim thinkers who preach toleration and pluralism and advocate women's rights. The future of Islam will be much influenced by this new breed of scholars and thinkers.

Abul Hasan Ali al-Nadwi is one of the Muslim scholars who analysed the state of Muslim Societies and lamented the lack of the proper intellectual planning for envisioning the future (Abul Hasan, 2003). Nevertheless, the analysis was not justified by relevant data and evidence. Sardar, Serra, & Jordan (2019) in *Muslim Societies in Postnormal Times: Foresights for Trends, Emerging Issues, and Scenarios* offer an interesting evaluation on the future of Muslim Societies in Postnormal Times. They provided a detailed analysis of contemporary trends, thus identifying and exploring emerging issues. What is more important is that this book can be considered as a guide for the Muslims to navigate their preferred future. (Sardar, Serra, & Jordan 2019).

Mastering the knowledge to study, predict, and subsequently create a strategic future is a necessity and perhaps, is now one of the obligation (*kifayah)* for Muslims. *Al-Quran* and the life of the Prophet have many future-oriented lessons. Future thinking, consciousness, literacy, and methodology are very important. The Future Triangles, Macro History, Emerging Issues Analysis, the Futures Wheel, the Sarkar Game, Causal Layered Analysis, the Integrated Scenario Method, Visioning and Back casting are among the methods used by futurist for envisioning. In reality, despite Islam requiring Muslims to plan for their future well-being, Muslim Societies are still far behind their Western counterparts in the area of future studies. With proper envisioning of the future, it is hoped that the advent of the next century would herald the final political and economic liberation, the intellectual ascendancy, and religious renaissance of Muslim Societies.

3. The New Narrative of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic caused the global system to pause and nearly all nations put in place the Movement Control Order. Residents were required to stay indoors while factories, shops, offices, and various business premises were sealed off. The number of vehicles seen on the road and pollution intensity were no longer the same. This saw the environment as being clean again. A study conducted by Marshall Burked of Stanford University unravelled that the air quality data in China during the Covid-19 pandemic changed dramatically for the better. This good air quality can save about 1400 children under the age of five and 51700 adults over the age of 70. Previous studies have shown that air pollution in China is the leading cause of 1.1 million deaths of the Chinese people a year (McMahon, 2020). Even the Ganges River in India, which is known as one of the most polluted rivers in the world, is now recovering.

The Covid-19 pandemic delivered an important message and opened the eyes of many to the opportunities other countries offered thus emerging to lead the world in the future. The real capabilities and resilience of developed countries with the sophistication of the technology they possess still failed to deal with pandemics effectively. The world has seen how even developed countries like the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain struggled and were unable to effectively deal with this pandemic, in comparison

to developing countries. The military and economic strength of developed countries were not only the sole and main factors to deal with pandemics. To this day, the United States has recorded the highest number of infections and deaths in the world than any other countries in the world.

Despite the desolation and significant impacts on the socio-economic conditions, the pandemic opened a new paradigm and created a new opportunity for us. Unlike the majority of literature that affords the negative side of the pandemic, Scheidel (2017) in his book *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the 21st Century* took a different perspective by stating that pandemics can reduce inequality. This book states four pillars that can reduce inequality throughout the history of the world from Roman times to the 20th century: war, revolution, state failure, and pandemics. Walter Scheidel tried to demonstrate through historical narratives that despite the negative effects, pandemics such as the Black Death and the Spanish Flu opened up spaces for humans to realise opportunities in balancing or reducing inequalities in the society (Scheidel, W. 2017). The Spanish Flu pandemic is said to have helped Europe create better health services and a modern welfare state. In other words, the pandemic does not necessarily bring negative impacts only but also creates opportunities for us to transform our societies and to improve the existing system. In this regard, this article offers different dimensions of future scenarios of Muslim Societies.

4. The Future Scenario of Muslim Societies Post Pandemic

The world needs to have the right post-pandemic vision to ensure change towards a better future. Mair (2020) in his paper *How will coronavirus change the world?* lists four future scenarios of post-Covid namely State capitalism, Barbarism, State Socialism, and Mutual Aid. Inayatullah, & Black (2020), in their article *Neither a Black Swan nor a Zombie Apocalypse: The Futures of a World with the Covid-19* put four other scenarios viz. Zombie Apocalypse, the Needed Pause, Global Health Awakening, and the Great Despair. Kesson (2020) on the other hand, assumes three future scenarios in the context of education, namely Regression and Devolution, Status Quo or Business as Usual, and Evolution or Revolution.

Covid-19 will surely change the world from various aspects. For instance, the SESRIC COVID-19 Pandemic Database recorded a total of 649,212 confirmed cases and 18,128 fatal cases have been reported in 56 OIC member countries as of 21 May 2020. It is reported that 38 OIC countries are facing a critical shortage of health workers. According to the United Nation, 6 out of 9 of the most vulnerable countries are OIC member states. The pandemic has impacted the level of production, employment, consumer spending, international trade, food security, and learning. The average per capita income level in the group of OIC countries is expected to fall from US\$ 11.5 thousand in 2019 to US\$ 11.1 thousand in 2020, corresponding to a 3.4% decline (SESRIC, 2020).

Highlighting the previous history, Muslims seem to be fascinated by the rhetoric played out that the 15th century, after *hijrah,* belonged to Islam. Islam will again dominate the world in the 15th century, after *hijrah*. During then, many waited for November 21, 1979 (1 Muharram 1400) to see the Islamic world return to the forefront of the 15th century after *hijrah,* as it was once enjoyed during the Golden Age of Islamic history. However, what was said did not happen. Muslims were once fascinated by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 which eventually went into vain. The Muslim Societies continued to decline, and wars and internal conflicts continued. The majority of Islamic countries remained poor and the quality of education, as well as the advancement of science and technology, were still lagging.

Now, we are in the middle of the 15th Century Hijrah and are heading towards 16th Century Hijrah on 28 November 2076. Muslim Societies need to plan to create a better future. The Covid-19 pandemic seems to provide various insights and opportunities for Muslim Societies to rise and restructure its power. The Covid-19 pandemic is said to accelerate the Fall of American Power and the rise of new nations as world powers. Campbell, & Doshi (2020). in their paper *The Coronavirus Could Reshape the Global Order* see China as the future world leader. The failure of the Americans to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic efficiently could be a major cause of the American decline, similarly to the Suez Crisis of 1956 which saw the end of the British Empire as the world power.

The question to whether Muslim Societies have their preferred future scenario and strategic planning with all the preparations to face the challenges ahead particularly post pandemic era exists. Sardar, Serra, & Jordan (2019) imagine three tomorrows of Muslim Societies namely the Extended Present, Familiar Futures, and Unthought Futures. Nevertheless, these three imaginations do not directly link and connect with the Covid-19 pandemic. El Alaoui, Inayatullah, & Salameh (2020) provide the future scenarios of the Islamic World from a geo-political perspective and these include the Changing of the Guard, the Revolution of the Youth, Hold the line; and the New Planetary *Ummah*. This paper offers interesting preferred and least preferred futures of the Islamic world but does not prescribe the qualities and form of societies that can bring the change to Muslim communities. In light of the recent situation and reality of the pandemic, it is essential for us to have another dimension of the preferred future scenarios of Muslim Societies. This paper offers three future scenarios of Muslim Societies post-pandemic namely the Disowned, the Outlier, and the Preferred. It is important to note here that this is not a prediction of the future but rather a rational forecasts of the probable and preferred future scenarios of Muslim Societies.

5. The Disowned Scenario: Stagnant Muslim Societies

The first scenario refers to a situation where no change occurs in Muslim Societies. The situation remains unchanged. The majority of OIC member states continue being the most vulnerable nations. Covid-19 has exposed weak health systems in almost all Muslim Societies. There is no real and impactful measures in preventing the outbreak. Muslims

societies are just followers, consumers and not producers. Even with the advent of Covid-19 vaccines, many Muslims families are sceptical to vaccination as they are suspicious that pork gelatine and non-permissible ingredients are present in the vaccine. The virus mutates and further accelerates the infection. As a result, the pandemic has impacted numerous sectors - economic, social and cultural, education and politics.

The pandemic has significantly caused direct impacts to Muslim Societies. Two-thirds of the Muslim world continues to remain poor and highly indebted. Unemployment rates remain high, freedom and the democracy index remain problematic, lack of economic development, and internal conflicts continue. Muslims in conflict-ridden and war-torn countries such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kashmir remain troubled and oppressed without any viable solution. The leaders of the Islamic world remain weak and divided. The Covid-19 pandemic does not seem to change anything for Muslim Societies who merely reacts with no innovations in envisaging to create a better future.

6. The Outlier Scenario: The Downfall of Muslim Societies

The second scenario sees that the Muslim Societies are weakening, and even the economy continues to decline, and new conflicts exist. Despite the pandemic, political leaders in Muslim Societies continue to be in conflict with each other. The majority of OIC member states allocate their national budget for weaponry and luxuries while consistently neglecting the healthcare sector. Saudi Arabia's normalisation with Israel further stimulate and deepen the crisis in the Middle East. Due to the health sector crisis, many medical front liners have lost their lives because of Covid-19. Thousands of medical professionals left Islamic countries in search of a better pay and life. Covid-19 has now become a real nightmare to the health care sector in most Muslim Societies.

The pandemic has also significantly impacted the economy. The OIC Economic Outlook records the worst unemployment rate. With oil prices plummeting, OIC countries that depend on oil yields are suffering the most. Many Islamic countries that rely on the tourism industry are affected significantly. The health sector collapsed, and millions of people have perished. The global spread of the pandemic finally led to an education crisis and governance disaster. The political crisis and weak leadership caused states failure. The effects of the economic downturn created several new conflicts in the Islamic countries that eventually saw civil wars and humanitarian crises continue, including the emergence of new dictators.

7. The Preferred Scenario: Progressive and Dynamic Muslim Societies

Scenario three refers to the ideal preferred futures of Muslim Societies. Muslim communities are more pro-active and creative in combating the Covid-19 pandemic. Muslim societies are also innovative in seizing opportunities. Several Islamic countries successfully develop effective vaccines and immunisation programmes. This vaccine then generates billions of

dollars and stimulates the economy. This further improves and boosts the health care sector. All Islamic countries cooperate and mutually share their resources, experiences, technology and knowledge to fight the pandemic.

With the stability, the majority of OIC countries have successfully implemented their strategic plans such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Oman's Clustering System 2040, UAE's Vision 2021, Lebanon's Vision 2030, Malaysia's National Transformation Plan 2050, Indonesia's Vision 2045, and Turkey's Vision 2023. Due to the implication of the pandemic that demands more online and virtual ways of doing things, it further accelerates the digital transformation towards a high-tech country in line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0. New industries are created, jobs increase, and investments skyrockets. The pandemic also shifts the dynamics in the economy and creates new opportunities and trends such as socially responsible investing and sustainable lifestyle. The decrease of national income due to plummeting oil prices makes Muslim Societies more creatively turn to renewable energy.

In terms of education, the impact of western countries' policies that restrict the entry of international students into their countries due to Covid-19 triggered the rise of the education system and in turn, becomes a catalyst for the development of high-level research in Muslim Societies. In addition, unfriendly immigration policies and visa restrictions in western countries have resulted in many top Muslim scientists and researchers returning and working in Islamic countries. This trend improved the quality of research and education as a whole. The development of a high quality education and a more independent and transparent system witnessed the emergence of new leaders who are calibre and credible, leading Muslim Societies in a more dynamically and progressively fashion.

8. Towards Creating a *Madani* Society (Balanced and Harmonious Society)

The above three scenarios illustrate and envisage the alternative futures of Muslim Societies. The time has come for Muslim Societies to create their future and seize the opportunity for major reform. Covid-19 proves that the human element is a key pillar in dealing with the crisis and a prerequisite to create the preferred transformative future. Flam (2020) in his article *Post-Virus Reopening is More About Ethics than Science* concludes that ethics is the key determinant and pillar of fighting non-scientific and technological pandemics. Bellazzi, & Boyneburgk (2020). also highlight the same and emphasized the importance of exercising virtue ethics to deal with the practical concerns of life during the pandemic. The notion of bringing back ethics, virtues, and values to the mainstream is actually in line with UNESCO's declaration of the four pillars of education namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

The main question here is what is the form of society that can lead to progressive and dynamic Muslim communities? This triggers the call for all Muslim especially intellectuals

and activists to create a new narrative of Muslim Societies. In this regard, this paper intends to promote and rejuvenate the idea of *Madani* Society or *Mujtama al-Madani* as the ideal form of Muslim Societies in the post-pandemic world. *Madani* Society refers to a balanced and civilised society founded on moral and ethical values that are inclusive and universal. The discourse on *Madani* Society is relatively not new but was popular and well-received by the intellectual community in the 1990s. Anwar Ibrahim promoted the idea in the 1990s and considered it as a community that guarantees the balance between individual freedom and community stability (Ibrahim, 1996).

The preferred scenario of Muslim Societies can be achieved through the framework of *Madani* Society that promotes moral values, ethics, peace, and justice including equality before the law without discrimination. *Madani* Society challenges the narrative of Islamic state whereby it stresses the civility of the Muslim Societies which is democratic in nature. Tariq Ramadan in his book Islam and Arab Awakening also advocates the notion of replacing the concept of Islamic State with an idea of a Civil State guided by universal and inclusive ethics (Ramadan, 2012). The nature of Civil State corresponds with a spiritual, social, political, and economic dynamic and finally able to create a balanced and harmonious society namely *Madani* Society.

In the context of post pandemic world, the problems and crises of the Muslim world can only be overcome through ethical systems, human attitude and spiritual strength and not just technology. A society that adopts a value-based system where its community possess a good attitude and is not individualistic, will succeed. However, a society that continues to glorify the market system filled with people that are individualistic, selfish, and lack spiritual strength and ethic, will fail and meet with problems and even crisis. This opens up space for us where the human values, virtues, and ethics raised by Islam itself are now proven to be the main pillars of human survival, and not the reliance on scientific and technological advances. As Islam is a system of thought and action based on these normative ethics, values, and virtues, the futures of Muslim Societies will also be dependent on the extent of how we can internalize and embrace all these qualities.

9. Conclusion

As compared to the imagination of previous generations to see the rise of Islam in the 15th century of *hijrah* with no data and information like today, we can now create more realistic future scenarios. The author tries to give imagination through three scenarios of the futures of Muslim Societies post-pandemic world. With the data, information, and experience we have, we can think of the road map and comprehensive planning of Muslims Societies facing the future covering aspects of education, politics, governance, and governance, economy, agriculture, media, health services, culture, environmental sustainability, information technology, Islamic thought, science and technology, socio-economic management and political leadership. The failure to restore the glory of Muslim Societies is due to the

weakness of planning and visioning. Indeed, this important message needs to be given serious attention if Muslim Societies want to create a more glorious alternative future and at the same time avoid past mistakes and recurrences. In conclusion thereof, the preferred scenario of balanced and harmonious Muslim Societies can be achieved through the framework of *Madani* Society or *Mujtama al-Madani* that promotes moral values, ethics, peace, and humanities.

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