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LIVING IN A “BROKEN WORLD”: DESTRUCTIVE DESIRE, DISCONNECTED DISCIPLINARITY, AND DISRUPTIVE DESCHOOLING

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Abstract

This paper is trying to show that our current situation on Earth is going to collapse phase and broken. Sustainable Development Program (SDG) can't give real action to resolve environmental, social, and economic problems such as poverty, biodiversity extinction, health, war and genocide, climate change, etc. On the other hand, the author describes that SDG only focuses on the technical solution and randomly decided criteria and standards for defining knowledge. Therefore, the author is seeking to encourage SDGs to see the problem from a wider point of view on this paper.

Keywords: *SDG, Broken, World, Destructive, Disruptive Deschooling*

1. Overview

The world is badly “broken.” All our efforts, including sustainable development goals that focus on the desire for growth and the false certainty/clarity of “disciplinary silo thinking,” are not remarkably helpful. For example, the ([Earth Overshoot Day, 2019](#)) and the ([Nine Planetary Boundaries, 2019](#)) show that our condition is not improving, and even the “Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor” ([Pope Francis, 2015](#)), i.e., the suffering of all sentient beings and the continued destruction of the life-supporting biosphere, is intensifying.

Young people have begun to voice out the present and future problems caused by world leaders in political, business, and academic industries. Recently, millions of young people have assembled and aired their concerns about how selfish, careless, blind, mindless, incompetent, and unprepared we are to face urgent global problems; as a consequence, we are now in a state of eco-socio-emergency ([Thunberg, 2019](#); [Cullis-Suzuki, 2019](#)). The IPCC 2018 reported the possible events 12 years before we face massive ecological collapse: “Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0 °C of global warming above pre-industrial levels, with a likely range of 0.8 °C to 1.2 °C. Global warming is likely to reach 1.5 °C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate.” ([IPCC, 2019](#)).

Considering this scenario, we must stop looking at our bank balance and start examining our conscience. We need to engage or promote a process of conscientization, transformative

learning, and disruptive deschooling to unlearn, let go, and relearn. The world needs radically new narratives, new lifestyles, new institutions, and new ways of knowing and being. Stories of rags to riches are not helpful anymore because of their hidden ecological costs. We do not need them in the midst of material, moral, and spiritual crises.

Globally, business as usual and business as always will no longer be helpful in the long term. Are we ready to let go and tread lightly on Earth? Are we prepared to ensure that no human and nonhuman beings will be left behind in principle and in practice?

2. Introduction

I believe that we are living in a broken world. We have an increasing number of sites of pain and suffering, destruction, and death across the world and in various aspects, such as biodiversity (Shah, 2014; Mongabay, 2019; Andrew, 2014), extinction, forest cover (Wessie & Goldman, 2017), environmental toxins (Greenpeace, 2019; Worldometers, 2019), wastes and e-waste (Wastedive, 2019), slavery (Global Slavery, 2019), refugees (UNHCR, 2019), genocides (Kranz, 2017; Genocide Watch, 2019), and ecocides, conflicts and wars (Our World in Data, 2019; Dobnik, 2018), ill-being, inequality (Oxfam, 2019; Elliott, 2019), stress, and unhappiness (World Happiness Report, 2019; Happy Planet Index, 2019; Madden, 2019). These problems need drastic interventions at all levels, including personal, professional, policy, and political. Poverty and affluence have their own cases of suffering and death.

I am among those who do not have much faith or optimism on sustainable development goals (SDGs). We will have numerous activities from these global and globalizing goals and targets, but we cannot really address the complex challenges and problems of an ecologically and socially collapsing world, where our children and young adults live in.

Even though we have made life convenient everywhere, we have consciously or inadvertently brought them into a world faced with the crisis of neoliberalism, extreme inequality, growth of virulent global fascism, collapsing biosphere and climate emergency, slow weaponization and militarization of everyday life, genocides, and ecocides. The world must be demilitarized, and a drive to destroy nuclear weapons must be promoted. SDGs simply cannot address these problems and make the world sustainable.

3. Drawing from Two Sources

In briefly and broadly presenting my position, I consider two sources:

1. My earlier and continuing deliberations addressing my difficulties in accepting the hegemonic notions of sustainable development proposed by international bodies and disregarding indigenous wisdom, notions, and practices of sustainability and spirituality. For me, this difficulty has grown into my critical attitude to SDGs and the given global agenda because they disregard moral or spiritual crises. Instead, SDGs propose and focus on technical solutions (Nadarajah, 2014; Bangkok Forum, 2018; Nadarajah, 2019).
2. My present ongoing concerns, exploration, and research into two global “seductions”: the seduction of “growth” (and more growth) and the seduction of “disciplinarity,” an increasingly limiting historical mode of knowledge production.

The desire for the first source has led to global “socioeconomic cancer” that we carelessly allow to grow. It is cancerous because it grows for growth’s sake. The second, disciplinarity, which has contributed to this broken world, is presented to us as a way to have privileged

scientific knowledge. However, it is just a historical stage in knowledge production. It is also arrogant and poses a God-like posture. In terms of objectivity, disciplinarity actually presents a caricature of social complexity in our daily life. Universities, which are the main institutional form of disciplinarity, are part of our current global problem, though they have a strong potential for transformation.

I am more convinced of what SDGs really are. They have come to give the challenged capital accumulation process another global fillip and save late capitalism from being transformed deeply. Ironically, SDGS are supposed to contribute to a global transformation program, but they ensure that we remain on the same track. Certainly, our current global condition is going to be business as always, not business as usual.

I am more concerned for the community that genuinely desires to transform the future. The saddest part of this whole global human drama is how successfully SDGs have mobilized our compassion for a better, safer, and more just world for all. For me, the concerns of ordinary people for the suffering of others, i.e., our compassion for humans and nonhuman beings, as well as living and nonliving worlds, are being compromised by our addiction and seduction to growth and disciplinary knowledge silos. In other words, they are being coerced by SDGs.

4. Criticisms: SDGs and Resuscitating the Neoliberal Order

Unfortunately, SDGs are uncritically incorporated into university curricula and national development programs. However, a systematic critical voice on SDGs is growing (Struckmann, 2018; Langan, 2018; Matikainen, n.d). I focus on growth addiction that serves as a basis for creating SDGs, not on SDG-related criticisms.

In Jacobin, a voice of the American left, an article appeared in 2015 entitled *The Problem with Saving the World* (Hickel, 2018). I share the following observation: “The core of the SDG program for development and poverty reduction relies precisely on the old model of industrial growth—ever-increasing levels of extraction, production, and consumption. And not just a little bit of growth: they want at least 7 percent annual GDP growth in the least developed countries and higher levels of economic productivity across the world. In fact, an entire goal, Goal 8, is devoted to growth, specifically export-oriented growth, in keeping with existing neoliberal models.”

What does this really mean? “The SDGs’ contradictory relationship with growth extends to their approach to global poverty. The Zero Draft promotes growth as the main solution to poverty, but this relationship is highly tenuous. Of the total income generated by global GDP growth between 1999 and 2008, only 5 percent was received by the poorest 60 percent of humanity. Given the existing ratio between GDP growth and the income growth of the poorest, it will take 207 years to eliminate poverty with this strategy, and to achieve this goal, we will have to increase the global economy by 175 times its present size. This vision is terrifying to contemplate (emphasis mine).”

The “metabolism” associated with this size of the economy is indeed formidable to imagine. SDGs have been established to stabilize present mainstream lifestyles and revive consumption-driven economic growth.

According to the proponents of SDGs, all global problems, including poverty and violence, can be addressed by GDP growth. They want at least 7% GDP growth per year in the least developed countries and higher levels of economic productivity across the world. This idea is

preposterous; that is, we are acutely aware of the need to change the notion that GDP growth is the measure of human progress, but SDGs consider this case as a nonissue (emphasis mine) (Hickel, 2018).

SDGs are not the sources of new narratives of different futures because they recognize no critical material, moral, or spiritual crises. The meta-story we will come to live by under the SDG regime is the same as the old one, which has been guiding individuals and nations: “Liquidate Earth. Turn it into property and prosperity. Flourish.” In SDGs, I simply see a facade of seemingly clean targets and technical processes for improving the future, carefully hiding “the driver” behind them. This driver is the same as the old one who has caused current problems. Now, the same driver pretends to be able to take us to a sustainable utopia of impactless, clean, safe, and endless growth.

Many governments and individuals genuinely believe that SDGs will deliver an ideal world. However, in reality, the only thing I want to emphasize is that we are not going that way. Imagine, in 2030 or even before that, if most of us survive the climate crisis, old age, or both, we will have SDG Version 2 or a similar goal with a different name, which will start with a comprehensive criticism of SDG Version 1, especially its implementation. We will have meetings, conferences, research projects, technological innovations, roundtable meetings, arguments, regional fora, policy papers, expert gatherings, commissions, national and international gatherings, protest marches, and other assemblies. We will spend trillions of dollars doing all these initiatives. I believe that such actions will not be good for the world economy, especially the GDP-based economy. Instead, they will have a negative impact on the economy.

SDGs are based on the neoliberal worldview guided by a strong market-centric and endless growth culture. We are now going through the fourth industrial revolution, and the fifth one is about to occur. SDGs seem to be poised to systematically open markets for a full-blown growth of a cybernetic world with smart cities, smart villages, and smart technologies. Smart things can be easily sold. They are the capital’s desires, and we want to have a complete control of these things. Such desires include capturing our future and setting the agenda for all of us.

We have many other ways to nurture a better, safer, more just, and more sustainable future, but we have to genuinely transform the way we live and design societies. This better future will allow us to relive an anticolonial moment. However, in deliberations on SDGs, no engagement with indigenous frameworks or sustainable cultures and practices is proposed. Heterodox or radical economic traditions have not been discussed or explored. Alternative global solutions developed and implemented successfully in other countries despite challenges have yet to be considered. In fact, SDGs seemingly teach us and our children to believe that we only have the neoliberal pathway and that no other alternatives are available. However, we know that this notion is a lie.

5. Back to the Basics: Re-Orientation

Will we wake up? Can we stop and turn back? Can we re-look and re-examine? Can we take a U-turn? Can we go underground? Can we get off the highway? Can we re-imagine and rethink? Can we rewrite the stories to live by? Can we let go? Can we create genuine and counter-hegemonic narratives and new stories to live by? Can we mindfully re-examine the basics?

Can we simultaneously consider all the following facets: symptoms and causes; being and having; maximum and minimum wages; affluence and poverty; labor and capital; people and profit; culture and economy; health, well-being, and medicopharmaceutical industry; wholesome nourishment and food industry; agroecology and agrochemical industry; mobility and transportation industry; peace, war avoidance, and demilitarization; learning, schooling, and education industry; appropriate and smart technologies; sustainable livelihood and “rags to riches” careers; minimalism, material possessiveness, and product line expansionism; compassionate foundation and competitive spirit; cultures of sustainability and economic growth; selflessness; indigenous elders and professional experts; spirituality and religion; and caring for all humankind?

6. Problematizing Growth and Disciplinarity

Today, we are faced with a crisis of imagination. Unless we seriously and consistently problematize growth and disciplinarity, we cannot rethink our future or find mid- and long-term solutions to problems that are gaining power to destroy human civilizations. The South Pacific Islanders may be the first to face this crisis and disappear, but their world is not sinking. Instead, it is being flooded by global greed. We are also soon going to flood and lose our coastal cities and rich coastal civilizations. Prof. Emil Salim predicted that Indonesia will sink by 2045 if we do not drastically and urgently address climate emergency (Widyanto, 2019).

I strongly believe that our destructive desires have taken us toward self-destruction and destruction of others. This destructive path is based on the defective knowledge of who we are and how we are intimately connected with one another and the rest of the world. Mainstream universities are a part of our problem. University faculties, departments, and study programs have to change drastically.

Sociology, economics, or political science does not exist in the real world. Our world is not a mechanical one with clear causes and effects. They are modern myths, and we do not live in a unidimensional and mechanical reality. Complexities are deeply interconnected and interdependent, multilayered, multifunctional, multidirectional, multitemporal, multispecies, material, spiritual, continuously emergent, and related to quantum tao. Disciplinarity is inadequate to understand such complexities.

We will not really have an understanding of these complexities by using the present mode of knowledge production and all related technologies, which we have developed. In a sense, this present mode is historically primitive and still evolving. We continue to make critical decisions based on knowledge produced by disciplinarity, but they are not enough. Unfortunately, we are not ready to acknowledge this serious problem. Universities or university-associated knowledge producers have become hegemonic. They have carelessly set the standards and criteria for defining knowledge. With these mindless strictures, they have marginalized deep cultures of practice, large bodies of knowledge, and vast terrains of the possible.

This hegemonic arrogance has many challenges. Historically, the movement from university to multiversity (Alvares & Faruqi, 2012) and transversity has been encouraged. Disciplinarity has promoted its institutional preservation and continuity by creating universities. Unfortunately, this historical institutional form and approach have become reified, i.e., ahistorical, assuming that “it was there, it is there, and so it will be there.” In other words,

disciplinarity is considered eternal. Generations have been schooled through this mode of engaging with the world and the mode of knowledge production. Learning has transformed into education, and education has changed into an industry. Universities have become knowledge factories with disciplinarity-based products on sale in the name of nurturing learning. This concept is supported by numerous assembly lines of consumers (i.e., students) and an ecology of national and international institutions, including ranking agencies, to make universities marketable.

The challenge to this historical stage is the growth of multiversities influenced by notions such as deschooling (Illich, 1970; Hern, 2008; Samuel, 2013) and conscientization (Freire, 1971). It is largely a movement in the developing world and questions the hegemony of Western knowledge and its production practices. It challenges the tyranny of experts and their approaches and attempts to recapture indigenous traditions of engaging with nature and knowledge production. Its approach goes beyond disciplinarity and focuses on interdisciplinarity orientation and transdisciplinarity, which is currently being developed. As such, a new institutional form called transversity has been widely considered (McGregor & Volckmann, 2013).

Therefore, these entire new pathways offer a disruption of the way we engage with the world, but this disruption is not associated with more technology, more growth, and a newer round of profit making. It is also not related to indefinite and mindless growth. Instead, this disruption aims to reclaim our humanity and compassion.

7. In Lieu of a Conclusion

My firm belief is that we need to transform our universities and their faculties over time to multiversities and transversities so that we can engage with our present challenges, problems, and dangers. We can also nurture the growth of such institutions for creating mindful and self-conscious integrative knowledge and for developing wholesome and authentic learning. One of the critical aims should be to engage with not only university knowledge producers but also all other nonacademic knowledge coproducers. In particular, we have so much to learn from the elders of many endangered indigenous communities. We also need to establish a serious and deep dialog between mainstream science and the arts to transcend the limitations of disciplinarity, considering that the arts are not just about entertainment. Equally, we should also participate in inclusive spirituality. We need to address the global assault on humanities and rebuild them as “new humanities.” If we want to survive on Earth, we should be open to the rich ways that new humanities will offer for our future.

Considering all these conditions, we should actively and systematically deschool the society from growth and disciplinarity. The forces of growth and disciplinarity will resist and demonize such efforts in the same way as how climate deniers have funded, denied, and demonized those who educated us about climate changes and problems due to anthropogenic causes. Thus, this initiative is also a critical political stand.

Deschooling is a structured effort that needs to be nurtured by conscientization, transformative learning (Sullivan, 1999) processes, and critical civic engagement (Storm, 2006; Morris, 2012). The deschooling project is not only a material project but also a moral and spiritual movement. It will prepare us to examine our conscience and unsustainable assumptions about the world in which we base our learning. We should reclaim our animality

(Abram, 2011; Carroll, 2004) and compassionate humanity and only then we will be able to generate disruptive new stories, new narratives, and new futures. Maybe then we will have a fighting chance of repairing the world we have broken and setting a new course.

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M. Nadarajah as author are fully handling the whole article

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