

Cities and Diseases: Fighting the Invisible

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Author's Profile

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Introduction

When we were celebrating the coming of 2020 last December, no one could guess that we, the people of the world, would face a new pandemic disease called the Coronavirus disease, i.e. Covid-19. And since March of this year, as it was officially declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic disease, hundreds of researches, studies and papers have been made or produced all over the world. Politics, economy, security, and basic rights and freedoms of almost all nations are dramatically affected. World governments either limited or totally halted various facilities of daily life since March 2020. As of June, since the increase of the infected or the death toll seems to be gradually decreasing, daily life routines restarted in some countries of the world.

This paper aims at a general historical overview of pandemics and their impact on world cities. Starting with the definition of some terms related to the issue, as many people are confusing the definitions yet, this paper will continue with a short historical background of diseases that affected the world throughout the history of humankind. As the core of this paper, it will evaluate some world cities and their fight against diseases and its consequent results. Finally, this paper will end with the current pandemic engagement of the world, namely Covid-19. By means of this paper, hopefully we will be helping to understand the pandemic diseases and the

necessity of cooperation in worldwide level both among the governments as well as people of different ethnicity, religions and regimes.

Definition and the Historical Background

A disease may occur in different forms and sizes. The extent or sphere of influence of a disease leads to definition and/or name of it. According to the English dictionaries of Oxford, and Cambridge, if a disease appears in a large number of people at the same time, and within a special time and as result of causes, it is called *epidemic*, originated from the Greek word *epi-demos*, i.e. upon or over people. If an epidemic appears or exists over a very large area affecting a large proportion of a population, in other word in almost all of an area or of a group of people, plants, and animals, it is called *pandemic*, originated from the Greek word *pan-demos*, i.e. all-people. To call a disease pandemic, it should be worldwide scale, not infecting or leading to death of people but also it should be infectious or contagious according to WHO and other respected health authorities. Covid-19, first appeared in December 2019 in China, and officially declared as pandemic by WHO in March 2020, became the last pandemic of the world, affecting more than 200 countries. Up to the present day, there were 21 pandemic diseases appeared on earth, and these were pandemic diseases of plague, cholera, influenza, AIDS, typhus, malaria, yellow fever, smallpox, measles, diphtheria, etc.

Throughout the history, pandemic diseases have appeared in different forms and affected millions of people across states and empires of old ages. Following some pandemic diseases, experienced in different forms of influenza and plague throughout the lands of civilizations of first ages and killing millions of people, the first pandemic outbreak was in the 6th century, when the Byzantine Empire, as the surviving part of the Roman Empire faced a bubonic plague, believed to travel from Central Asia. The disease resulted in not only huge human losses in the empire but also control of her sphere of influence. The result of this pandemic was of the loss of approximately 50 million people, i.e. 13% of world population of that time. Another and a worse wave of pandemic, again bubonic plague originated from Wuhan (China) and spread via Kaffa (Crimea) into the cities of Europe. On 14th century (1347-1353), the European continent lost about 60% of her population, and as a consequent spread of the plague it is believed that about 200 million people died, which was about 42% of world population then. Third pandemic wave, again bubonic plague, appeared in Yunnan (China) in 1855, and led to the death of about 12 million people in China and the Indian Sub-continent (CuriosityStream.com, 2020). Finally, it was Spanish Flue, between 1918-1920, that dramatically hit the world and resulted in the death of people up to 100 million. In the following years, humanity faced with different pandemic diseases, in various parts of the world resulting in deaths of millions of people (LePan, 2020).

As of March 11, 2020, with the official declaration of WHO, a new pandemic disease, called Covid-19, came to the scene. It first appeared in Wuhan (China), and then with no clear reason, it spread to world cities, killing thousands and leaving billions of people doubtful about their future. In level of governments, the reaction changes and thus impact of the disease differ from one country to another.

Diseases and the Cities

In this part of this paper, one will see some world cities and their fight against diseases and its consequent results. While choosing cities, I tried to cover world coun-

tries in the widest angle possible. The period covers a length from middle ages up to the present time. By this, one may understand how much the struggle against the pandemic was developed. Moreover, this section may support the idea of if there is a relation between spread of pandemic diseases and political or economic interests of world governments.

Plague of Athens was an epidemic appeared in 430 BC in Athens, when the city was in war with the city of Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. The outcome of it was tragic as it killed 75 to 100 million people, and spread from Piraeus, city's port and economic gate. It was these years that there was respect left among people to law, honor and religion, moreover the concept of diseases was under discussion (Holladay and Poole, 1979) like as the causes and impacts of the plague (Littman, 2009).

Plague of Sheroe was effective during the reign of the Sassanid Shah, Kavad II Sheroe (628) in mainly Aso-restan province. The capital city of the empire, Ctesiphon, and the surrounding cities were hit by the plague, and this resulted in the loss of half of its population, including the Shah himself. Even the plague was named as Sheroe's Plague, and it is considered as leading to the decline and fall of the Sasanid Empire which was one of the biggest powers of the middle ages (Mark, 2020).

The Black Death appeared in 14th century in China and arrived in the city of Constantinople (today's Istanbul) in May 1347 with ships from Kaffa (Crimea). The city was the capital of the Eastern Romans since 395, and might have been considered as one of the leading trade centers of the world then. Thus, ships of merchants were warmly welcomed and no one would question what they carry besides goods of various cities. The Italian merchants carried the disease with their ships from Constantinople to the ports of North Africa, Italy and other European cities. The disease reached to Moscow in the east and to London in the west, killing about 50 million people, i.e. 60% of Europe's population. This experience was again showing the impact of trade and business in the spread of such pandemic diseases (Benedictow, 2005).

Cocoliztli Epidemic of 1545-1548 appeared on the Spanish newly conquered territories of in today's Mexico in the 16th century leading to death of mostly native people, estimated as 5-15 million, i.e. 80% of total population. The spread of disease became fast as the colonial social and hygienic conditions, as well as droughts of the time led to the disease (Acuna-Soto, et al, 2005, Vågene, et al, 2018).

The Ottoman Plague epidemic arose in Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, in July 1812 as another wave of plague epidemics since the 16th century. From the capital, the disease spread to other cities and regions of the empire, like Egypt, Greece, Wallachia, Bosnia, and Albania. The neighboring cities and states were also hit by the plague, Georgia, Crimea, Odessa, Moldavia, Ukraine, Malta, etc. According to the Ottoman records, about 300 thousand people of different ethnicities died as a result. Trade, business, as well as migration and settlement policies of the Ottomans and her neighbors, like Russian Empire, seem to be the leading causes of the spread of this disease (Robarts, 2010, Aksakal, 2003, Kotsiou & Michalaki, 2017).

1918 Influenza Pandemic (the Spanish flu) appeared in 1918 in different countries of the world. Caused by H1N1 Influenza A virus, it led to the death of people as high as 100 million in two years. European countries (Spain, France, Germany, UK), and the US cities were harshly hit by the pandemic. Though records and research results of spread of disease were censored by the Western governments of the time, except Spain, at the beginning, the international community learned about the real losses in the following years. Believed to be starting in Kansas (USA) on March 1918, the disease spread out to the world via either soldiers or war prisoners as far as, Mexico, South Africa, Japan and Australia by 1920. There are different approaches on the origin of the disease. Another wave of an influenza pandemic caused by H1N1 influenza virus was seen as late as 2009 again worldwide killing about 150-576 thousand people (Trilla et al. 2008, Rosner, 2010, Barro et al. 2020).

Covid-19 Instead of a Conclusion

It was on December 2019, that the first case of Covid-19 was reported in Wuhan, China. No later than 4 months, the disease, caused by SARS-CoV-2, spread to more than 180 countries in the world. On March 11, 2020, WHO officially declared it as a pandemic disease. As of June 2020, more than 10 million cases were reported around the world, leading to death of people around a half million. Not only daily routines of world states were affected by Covid-19, but also regional and international economic and political relations gone under an intense pressure (Novel, 2020).

As far as the recent reactions of world governments' show, it seems that the struggle with Covid-19 will continue for a while. Some countries like the ones in Scandinavia and the Baltic have not applied quarantine for Covid-19 whereas Mediterranean countries like Spain, and Italy enforced strict rules and limited daily life for their citizens. Countries like Turkey, on the other hand, partially applied quarantine rules and gradually lifts limitations on daily life. Although the number of people under Covid-19 threat is not much compared to the past centuries' diseases, the differences in policies and results of struggle seem to be affected by political and economic incentives (Velavan et al., 2020).

The history of pandemic diseases shows us that, viruses might be responsible for diseases. Yet it was usually economic and political motives that spread these diseases. The use of power in some world countries turned into an authoritarian way, and leaders of these countries use struggle against Covid19 as their excuse for violation of basic rights and freedoms. And many economically dependent countries feel more pressure from debt-providers with pandemic excuses. Moreover, the difference in reaction of local governments leads to difficulties in prevention and extinction of diseases. Instead of blaming other countries or regimes, world capitals surely need to cooperate in survival against global problems like pandemic diseases. To eradicate the reasons behind these dis-

eases, like malnutrition, overpopulation, illegal or forced migration, etc. countries of the world should bring their disagreements to a reasonable level. The developments in medicine, technology, and living standards in many countries might be hope promoting, yet many countries, especially those in the southern sphere of earth still faces crucial problems of underdevelopment. Thus, in brief, either we go hand in hand with all people of all nations or we suffer the devastating truth that takes out our beloved ones or ourselves one day, when we are still waiting for the cure or vaccine to be discovered.