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## Markets, Globalization & Development Review



## ***Film Review***

# **Water Avengers and their Endgame**

At this juncture in history, with population increases and fossil fuel emissions heating the atmosphere, we are creating a global heating crisis, with water for all life as a major challenge. The United Nation (2019) states that “water is the primary medium through which we will feel the effect of climate change”. As water becomes more valuable than oil, the neoliberal capitalism solution is to treat water as a commodity for sale and privatize city and municipal water systems. The counternarrative, as Donna Haraway (2018), cognizant that water has emerged as a right and a condition for survival of all species, including humans advises in “Staying with the trouble for multispecies environmental justice”, is to build thick kinships, human and cross-species.

It is as if the blockbuster movie, *Avengers: Infinity Wars*, shares a common plot with the big fossil fuel firms heating the atmosphere; as well as with multinational water businesses that pollute our freshwater supplies, divert water so rivers no longer flow, and exhaust groundwater so aquifers collapse. As global heating occurs, only the poles will be left to grow food, and most of the rest of the planet will be uninhabitable. In the new Avengers’ movie, the villain Thanos, a Titan, has a plan to wipe out half of humanity across the entire universe, to save the other half, before overpopulation exhausts all natural resources, and the greenhouse gases overheat every part of the planet. The ‘Official Trailer’ for the sequel, *Avengers: Endgame*, has Natasha (Black Widow) giving an update about the ‘apocalypse’ to someone who has been around for some time. In the trailer, we hear her tell someone: “Thanos did exactly what he intended to do, he wiped out 50% of the world’s population”.

In the *Infinity Wars*, Thanos is on a twisted hero’s journey quest to save 50% of humanity and the destroyed planetary ecologies by downsizing the overpopulation. The difference between mega-corporations and Thanos is that Thanos randomly selects whom to wipe out via genocide. In contrast, ‘big water businesses’ steal water from the poorest 50% of humanity in order to profit by selling freshwater at premium prices to the super-rich 1% of the world population. In the teaser-trailer of *Endgame*, Tony Stark (Iron Man) says he ran out of water four days ago, which – as is well known – causes the body to have irreversible dehydration damage. In our own times, the contemporaneous second

decade of this millennium, some four billion people experience severe water stress. For these billions, at least a month out of each year there is no tap water.

To provide context for those who are not familiar with *Avengers* series of films, Table 1 provides a chronology of these movies.

**Table 1: A Simplified Chronology of the Avengers Movie Franchise**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Movie</b>	<b>Plot</b>
<b>2012</b>	The Avengers	Earth's mightiest superheroes come together, learn to fight as a team to stop the villain Loki and his alien army from enslaving humanity
<b>2015</b>	The Avengers: Age of Ultron	When Tony Stark and Bruce Banner try to jump-start a dormant peacekeeping program called Ultron, things go horribly wrong
<b>2018</b>	The Avengers: Infinity War	Thanos, an intergalactic despot has the goal to collect all six Infinity Stones, and use their unimaginable power to eliminate half of humanity (including half the Avengers), in order to simultaneously deal with overpopulation and the global heating crisis
<b>2019</b>	Captain Marvel	Captain Marvel is an extraterrestrial Kree warrior who finds herself caught in the middle of an intergalactic battle between her people and the Skrulls. She survives and arrives in 2019 just in time to join the Avengers, helping to resolve the cliff hanger of Infinity Wars
<b>2019</b>	Avengers: End Game	With the help of remaining allies, the spared Avengers reassemble once more, then use quantum tunneling and time travel, in order to reverse Thanos's actions and restore the exterminated half of humanity, and end Thanos, as well

In his twisted quest, Thanos must collect all six Infinity Stones to get the necessary power that the Infinity Gauntlet needs, so he can snap his fingers, and return half of life in the universe to dust. The parallel to 'big water business' – in the ongoing 'Water Apocalypse' – is that these enterprises need to assemble six kinds of their own versions of multi-

colored gems (or, should we say, poison pills?) for their version of the Infinity Gauntlet:

1. **Space Stone (Purple)** – Big Water Business plans to build mega-dams to keep Mediterranean Sea from rising and flooding cities and beaches. Other mega-dams are planned to encircle San Francisco Bay, Miami, etc. to keep them from flooding.
2. **Time Stone (Orange)** – Mines are polluting rivers, lakes and aquifers. Agribusinesses are over-pumping aquifers to the point that they collapse, creating sink holes in the ground, draining these precious water sources well before the time it takes Mother Nature to replenish them. In response, big water companies are privatizing municipal water systems.
3. **Reality-Mattering Stone (Yellow)** – Big businesses are building desalination plants to convert ocean saltwater into freshwater, at a price that only the richest 1% can afford to pay.
4. **Power Stone (Red)** – Bottled water corporations engage in storytelling to fool consumers into believing that the (mostly tap) water that they bottle in plastic – with red, green, and blue caps – is not releasing quantum-nanoparticles of microplastic throughout the food chain, and entering animal and human lung tissues.
5. **Soul Stone (Green)** – Businesses are already diverting upstream river water for one nation at expense of ‘green’ freshwater needs of (less privileged) downstream nations, resulting in predictions of ‘Water Wars’.
6. **Mind Stone (Blue)** – The storytelling tactics of multinational water businesses, taught and learned in business schools, are seizing control of consumer and voter minds, who are mesmerized into believing that there is no water shortage.

The first three stones (Space, Time, Reality-Mattering) are what we – the scholars working in the field of ‘quantum storytelling’ – call, ‘*spacetimemattering*’, and the fourth (Power) shows how quantum storytelling, done by corporate and intellectual perpetrators, is changing the material world of freshwater access into polluted wastewater (Boje 2020, *in review*). It was not dentists, for example, who introduced fluoridation into public water systems. Instead, Alcoa – the aluminum company – found a way to dispose of their waste product in the toothpaste. It was not nutritionists who added aspartame to soft drinks and

to thousands of foods and beverages. Rather, it was a giant chemical firm Monsanto, when it acquired the aspartame inventor J.D. Searle and Company. Most people do not know the artificial sweetener used in Coca Cola, Pepsi, NutraSweet, Equal, and so on is actually made from the waste byproducts of genetically modified E. coli bacteria (Butler 2019). It is produced using a cloned microorganism of host E.coli strain, a common practice for factories making over 150 recombinant pharmaceuticals approved by the FDA (Ferrer-Miralles et al. 2009). To keep selling these toxins in the food, beverages, and pharmaceuticals to the public, it takes a lot of fake storytelling by businesses making such waste byproduct additives.

Ironically, or perhaps not so ironically, in December 2019, columnist Luke O'Neil reported the following, about Donald Trump and Thanos, in *The Guardian* (O'Neil 2019):

Donald Trump is a genocidal warlord hell bent on destroying half of existence in the universe. That's not a criticism from the unhinged leftwing media, it's apparently how the president and his team see him... Shortly after the House brought two articles of impeachment against the president for his efforts seeking foreign interference to bolster his own political interests, the official Trump War Room re-election campaign Twitter account posted a video to social media that superimposed his face over that of the villainous Marvel comic book character Thanos... In the scene from the movie *Avengers: Endgame*, Thanos snaps his fingers, attempting to destroy the diverse array of heroes from throughout the universe who've teamed up to defeat him. I am inevitable Trump/Thanos says... The video then cuts to footage of Democratic leaders like Nancy Pelosi, Adam Schiff, and Jerry Nadler who magically vanish much like in the movie.

The movie *Avengers: Infinity Wars* was a blockbuster, the highest grossing movie of 2018. It wove together the threads of eighteen superhero films into one cohesive narrative emplotment. The fans have a narrative expectation that the remaining Avengers (Ironman, Ant-man, Black Widow, Ronin and so on) will rally and save the day. Here is the big reveal: The narrative plot is radically different for the 'big water business' purveyors of denial and deception. A century of industrial capitalism, carboniferous capitalism, and now 'Water Capitalism' (Loomis 2013, White 2013; Boje and Saylor 2018) has created a 'climate change', which is

destroying the 'global water cycle' (GWC, also called Global Hydrological Cycle, or GHC). Corporations snap their fingers and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) endorses everything – chlorine, fluoride, aspartame derived from E.coli organisms, and more – and declares these substances as safe for human consumption. The difference is there are no 'Post-Snap' Avenger-superheroes rallying to save humanity from a 'business-as-usual' big water business scenario. GWC is already in a downward spiral and climate change is raising average temperatures that are melting Greenland, Arctic and Antarctica ice, thereby raising sea levels and creating increasingly unstable and extreme weather patterns.

The Endgame sequel saw the Avengers return to vanquish the villain Thanos. The problem in real life is that there is no Ironman hero to vanquish climate change. Indeed, in the absence of avenging-defending forces, conglomerate and multinational water businesses seem obsessed with the Thanos strategy: slow genocide of 50% of the world's poorest population, so they can sell water to the richest top percentiles. There is not enough fresh water for all, so the plan seems to be to let half the world's population remain thirsty and die in a 'Water Apocalypse.'

Together, we (the sensible, humane, forward-thinking folks) could oppose 'water-business-as-usual storytelling' to create a different future. There is the potential to create a zero-growth future, stop the mega-dams and strip mines; and instead launch a 'Blue Revolution' to use the power of solar energy, fix the leaky municipal infrastructure, stop privatizing water and stop the bottled water corporations from commodifying water and lobbying congress to look the other way. A 'Blue Revolution' means we will have to get smarter about 'fresh water virtual footprint' of businesses and change the curriculum of every business school that markets fake storytelling corporations as heroes when they are villains propagating false consciousness. It is well past the time to kick out the big water business lobbyists from their cozy nests around the government and education. The alternative is clear: work toward 'Blue Revolution' (Barnett 2011) future, and a 'water ethic' (Leopold 1997), that takes the entire global water situation – and not just the privileged 1 percent – into account.

I submit that '*There is no planet B*' (Boje 2019) we can go to, and continue the growth capitalism that destroys the life carrying capacity of planet Earth. The Avengers Movie Franchise titillates our humancentric notions of survival by the help of superheroes with superpowers or big techno gadgets, fighting the villains in the series of cliffhanger storytelling.

Ironically the Avenger movie audience watches how superheroes and demented villains deal with global heating and thirst, all the while guzzling water, soda, and power drinks from single use plastic water bottles, adding to their own dismal fate. Market capitalism asks the consumer to recycle the plastic, after consuming an unhealthy diet. What Avengers promotes is the same as 'survival of the fittest' capitalism, where those with the wealth try to buy their way out, techno their way out, jump off the planet, leaving rest of us, and all the living species of watery planets that support life, to pay the price of greed and growth capitalism. Climate disruption is no longer a future specter, but a punishing current reality that – without concerted changes in production, marketing, and consumption – will bring about the apocalypse that Thanos' home planet experienced. At least Thanos had a plan, a random way of picking survivors, a way to save half the species. We just let the rich decides who lives or dies, let Trump pull out of the Paris Climate agreements, appoint climate deniers to head up agencies, a practice being repeated in Australia and Brazil. Without the superpower nations, the big carbon emitters on board, is it at all feasible to hold down global average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius? The movie fails to deal with the species other than humans and aliens and does not give hope beyond chasing villains to how to deal with the pending extinction event that will happen unless we choose a very different future than business-as-usual. What we need is a multispecies storytelling where we begin listening to Gaia soon to avert the planetary breakdown of living systems.



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