

## Artist Statement – Shane O'Neill-Talty, 18261752

My initial idea for this project was to criticise power dynamics of the wealthy coming from the angle of Bill Gates having a significant role in blocking the waiving of patents for COVID-19 vaccines. I realised after receiving the feedback, that this idea was maybe too focused on the wrong elements of the issue of vaccine inequality. I looked deeper into the supply chain of a vaccine and what can cause issues in the supply of them to certain areas.

For the artwork I created a system similar to an arcade racing game. There are two sides to the game, the player on the left represents a “richer” country and the player on the right represents a “poorer” country. The difference in conditions between the two areas are obviously exaggerated, with a glowing golden road and green grass on the left side, and a dark ‘hellish’ purple road on the right surrounded by decayed grass. This is to represent the inequality between “developed” and “under-developed” countries and how there is a large wealth gap between some countries that plays a factor in vaccine inequality. “Apart from the ethical argument that no country or citizen is more deserving of another, no matter how rich or poor, an infectious disease like COVID-19 will remain a threat globally, as long as it exists anywhere in the world.

Inequitable vaccine distribution is not only leaving millions or billions of people vulnerable to the deadly virus, it is also allowing even more deadly variants to emerge and spread across the globe.

Moreover, an unequal distribution of vaccines will deepen inequality and exaggerate the gap between rich and poor and will reverse decades of hard-won progress on human development.” According to the UN: “vaccine inequity will have a lasting impact on socio-economic recovery in low and lower-middle income countries and set back progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the UNDP, eight out of ten people pushed into poverty directly by the pandemic are projected to live in the world’s poorest countries in 2030.”

The “cars” are made from vaccine vials with wheels that are clearly labelled, number one with a green label is for the richer country, while number two with the red label is for the other. This is a slight reference to the original idea of the project, in the notebook that was submitted, I made reference to Bill Gates saying: “And so moving something that had never been done - moving a vaccine from say a J&J factory into a factory in India - it’s novel. It’s only because of our grants and our expertise that that can happen at all. The thing that’s holding things back in this case is not intellectual property. There’s not like some idle vaccine factory with regulatory approval that makes magically safe vaccines. You know you’ve got to do the trials on these things, and every manufacturing process has to be looked at in a very careful way.” – despite 60% of vaccines being produced in India already. The red label and the number 2 on the vial/car of the poorer country is a minor reference to the vaccine of that country being of lesser quality or value than the one made for the poor country, despite the only major difference being the label.

The objective of the game is to win the race to end the global pandemic by getting your vial/car to the finish line to be distributed. When you first load up the piece, it is immediately noticeable that the vial/car of the poorer country is progressing much slower and has significantly more obstacles to avoid along the way, which can reset the car’s progress if they are collided with. These obstacles make reference to a few examples of supply chain issues that I found in my research. The obstacles include: an American flag, a symbol representing spending or loss of money, paperwork and a storage container alongside a thermometer

indicating that the temperature of the container is too hot. These are common issues with vaccines that disproportionately affect poorer countries and countries that are a longer distance away from other developed nations.

The American flag is an attempt to almost humorously make reference to the stockpiling of vaccines by the U.S. According to the NY Times: “Tens of millions of doses of the coronavirus vaccine made by the British-Swedish company AstraZeneca are sitting idly in American manufacturing facilities, awaiting results from its U.S. clinical trial while countries that have authorized its use beg for access.” This is a problem for the supply of vaccines to other countries, and the obstacle is basically saying that the U.S. bought a big supply of vaccines so your country is losing out, this is obviously an over-simplification for the sake of the artwork, but it is a significant problem for the supply of vaccines.

The loss of money symbol is quite self-explanatory, for some countries and people, vaccines may not be affordable. According to a paper titled ‘Challenges to COVID-19 vaccine supply chain: Implications for sustainable development goals’: “The development of a financially affordable vaccine is vital for the successful alleviation of the dangerous COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination cost and lack of financial support for vaccine purchase for manufacturing and maintaining a cold chain restrict the vaccine development and distribution.

The paperwork represents any paperwork problems that might make a difference to the supply of vaccines. According the same paper: “Difficulty of tracking of vaccinated population can reduce the transparency and equal distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. Countries without a central health registry of their population will face challenges to monitor and track the total number of vaccinated populations.” This can also include the effects of mismanaged scheduling and planning of vaccine rollouts.

The high-temperature storage containers represents an inability to keep the right temperature for the vaccines to still be effective. This particularly affects countries that either do not have space to store the vaccines properly, can’t afford to store them properly or who lose vaccines to temperature due to the long distance travel needed to get to them. To quote the supply chain challenges paper again: “Some COVID-19 vaccines are temperature sensitive. Inability to maintain the recommended temperature while transferring vaccines from manufacturers to consumers may reduce the efficacy of VSC, especially in the tropical regions.”

I put all of these as challenges for the poorer country in the race to show that poorer countries have a lot more challenges in attempt to end or move past the pandemic. I only included the temperature-specific store as an obstacle for the richer country as I wanted to leave an obstacle for that side, but I wanted the race to be easier for that side. I chose not to include the stockpiling, money and paperwork as obstacles for the richer countries as while these are problems for every country, they do not affect richer countries nearly as much as they do poorer countries.

The main thing you’ll notice when you play the “game” is that the car on the right is significantly slower and moves less freely, it can only catch up a certain distance to the car on the left and it also faces significantly more obstacles. However, you’ll also notice that the car on the left can only speed a small distance ahead and that despite the introduction saying “win the race to end the pandemic,” the race never actually ends and cannot be won. I think this is what makes this project more of a net.art work as opposed to a game. The statement I wanted to make here was that no matter how much faster the richer countries car is, if it continues to race ahead of the poorer country, the pandemic will never end as COVID-19 will still have a strong effect on countries that struggle to vaccinate their populations and as society becomes more globalised, there’s no way to avoid spread between different countries.

It's also worth noting that the richer country's car can only get so far away from the poorer country's car despite appearing much faster, this is also representative of the statement that the pandemic cannot be ended/the race cannot be won as the world needs to come together to help supply a "people's vaccine" that is accessible to as many people as possible.

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