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COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE WORLD ORDER

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Abstract. This paper examines the origins, nature, and potential outcomes of the global crisis induced by the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors argue that the crisis has been animated by the two most important groups of factors that have been simmering in the world's economic and political system during the past six decades and have been accelerated by the pandemic. First, the dynamic of the Covid-19 crisis illuminated the existing challenges of the contemporary capitalist system, which is generally legitimated via the instruments of moral panic and media manipulation. Each consecutive crisis of capitalism ends with the redistribution of power resources to some groups of participants. Second, the Covid-19 crisis has been taking place within the conditions of a systemic and ideological struggle between two global elite factions that harbour drastically different approaches to the changing world order and have different politico-economic goals and intentions. The authors will argue that the crisis will not change the world drastically, yet it will amplify these ongoing tensions, illuminate them to many general observers, and deepen the already-existing systemic instability.

Keywords: Covid-19, globalization, systemic instability, capitalism, crisis, 'new normal'.

The Covid-19 pandemic accentuated a plethora of deep-seated societal contradictions and simmering political tensions evolving within the contemporary Western socio-economic system. From this point of `view, the recent health crisis provides an observer with a perfect opportunity, and a backdrop, to discuss the nature of the extant capitalist system, along with the world order built upon its premise. Contemporary capitalism represents the product of a complex evolution of economic and social relationships unfolding in Europe since the end of the 16th century. During the past century, this socio-economic system reached its most globalized, dynamic, but at the same time highly complex and incongruous stage. The main reason behind it is that societal contradictions have accumulated at a deep spiritual-philosophical level for the general public and at the structural level for politico-economic elites, who began to display disagreements on the nature of political system rather than on the issues of policy application. Such a situation may usher a period of further political transformation and instability marked by conflict, volatility, and flux [Abramowitz 1980: 178, 203; Easton 1965; Weldon 1946: 2-4].

In this light, the two features could best define contemporary political-economic life and its contemporary crisis: (1) societal spiritual deadlock and (2) a struggle between the two economic elite groups represented by global financial and regional industrial capital. These two critical features are tightly intertwined: systemic disagreements at the elite level rock the discursive foundations for the public, while waning of spiritual foundations of society makes the community gullible to political manipulation spun off the inter-elite battles. The Covid-19 pandemic illuminated

these tensions and is likely to intensify instabilities related to such trends. This paper argues that the 'new normal' introduced in the course of the pandemic will not become a permanent feature of human society, alter our human nature, nor permanently derail social progress or globalization. Yet it will stoke continued fear regarding liberty and human rights. The discussion also concludes that the coronavirus crisis will accelerate the ongoing clash over power, economic resources and financial control between the elite factions, which have divergent interests and views regarding the future of global development. This could foment international tension and instability and give a push-start to further recasting of the extant world order.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The discussion is comprised of a two-tier analysis of the nature of the contemporary 'coronavirus crisis'. The first section focuses on an historical analysis of the crisis by examining the disruption of the normative (Abrahamic) foundations of Western political-capitalist society and its consequences, namely a public gullibility to the rise of a new secular civil humanitarian 'religion' advanced by media and academia. The discussion then moves to an examination of an ideological battle unfolding between two global elite groups: financial capital represented by the neo-liberal ideological group and regionalist-industrialists represented by the conservative political cohort. The paper shows that, while the global neo-liberal elite promotes the redefinition of human interactions, family relationships, educational norms, medical care, travel, trade, and fundamental rights and freedoms, the conservative right endorses of the 'old normal order', which emphasizes social interactions, in person education, reopening the economy. The subsequent two sections examine the balance between the traditional understanding of human interactions and the 'new normal' and perspectives of the 'new normal' for the future of globalization.

THE NATURE OF CRISIS: THE LONG DURÉE PERSPECTIVE

Many twentieth-century philosophers [Cohen 1972; Hall 1978; Habermas 1975; Herman, Chomsky 1994] argued that crisis represents a permanent mechanism animating the Western political system. These philosophers also claimed that the crisis stems from the situation in which the normative base of society no longer satisfies the economic and political structure. This mismatch leads to the two most important outcomes. First, to motivate and control increasingly dissatisfied population, politics are conducted via the means of moral panic, mass hysteria, and flight from rationality. Second, this process creates a new socio-cultural normative base that better fits the economic system.

One reason behind this crisis-driven working of the system is that the Western capitalism has rested on and been legitimated through a set of pre-capitalist values that derive their roots in the Abrahamic tradition[1] [Habermas 1975; Plant 1982]. This tradition relies on a particular understanding of property, family, history, and community as the instruments of social cohesion and politico-economic progress [Calhoun, Derlugian 2011: 312]. Abrahamic tradition animated both medieval (pre-modern) and modern evolutionary paradigms, and both these paradigms have, in turn, created a socio-political entity that we know conventionally as the West. The recasting of all aspects of this tradition during the past six decades has begun to threaten rationality-driven progress and disrupted the traditional instruments of social motivation within the spheres of economic activity and political stability. Indeed, during the Renaissance, humanist and Reformation thinkers dominated

[1] Abrahamic tradition refers to the spectrum of normative rules outlined in the Bible and serving as a foundation for Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths.

the public debate in Europe due to their appeal to human reason, will, and faith, as well as the possibility of free religious expression, with Erasmus and Luther being the leaders. Scholasticism and Thomism expanded these ideas by giving rise to contemporary constitutional thought on legalism and political consent [Figgis 1956; Spitz 1963; Trevor-Roper 1967]. All these concepts have cumulatively contributed to the emergence of Western, and largely global, politico-administrative systems. The nineteenth-century Napoleonic code expanded those ideas towards the endorsement of equality, meritocracy, and rationality in running the bureaucratic machine of the modern state [Kissinger 2016; Fukuyama 2015]. Likewise, family buttressed the state politically, and various metaphysical theorizations of the early modern era firmly linked one entity to another (Filmer and Locke could serve as examples). Abrahamic faiths supported the idea of property and endorsed a particular work ethic that motivated modern economic activity [Gamble 1996: 30]. Within the conditions of inter-state competition and class-based society, conservative values of family and faith served as the instruments of voluntary public mobilization in defence of the ruling elites. History as a collective memory and communal responsibility for righteous action figured as a motivating civic mechanism [Levenson 1985: 42-45].

However, those values became redundant during the second half of the twentieth century, when the economic system obtained a global character and began to decouple from the palpable political realm [Habermas 1975; Harvey 2005]. Financial capital acquired unrivalled powers, and the gradual process of de-industrialization of Western states took place [Bichler, Nitzan 2013]. Global financial capital turned political and slipped into the shadows, forming the global and anonymous 'deep state' involved with 'turning capital into power' [Lasch 1995; Bichler, Nitzan 2013]. The role of the visible administrative state has become to steer the economy and serve as a 'manager' for this invisible sector of real politics. Hence, the rift between 'ruling' and 'governing' elites has become palpable – a point made by the SPD leader Karl Kautsky as early as in 1902 [Kautsky 1902]. Along with that, the introduction of unlimited consumption and unlimited credit since the 1960s created new political realities, in which the system was legitimized via a new type of economic behaviour and began to produce a new type of *consumer* – to follow Karl Polanyi's logic. Accordingly, global markets placed new demands on labour requiring mobility, narrowly specialized knowledge, flexibility, and the absence of stable connections to fixed collectives such as nation, hometown, family, gender, and workplace. Attempts to educate and produce this new global worker-consumer required redefinition of the extant normative and anthropological base. Therefore, the renewed political-economic system developed the need for a new spiritual tradition, which has been consistently lacking. The absence of a normative base represented a serious matter of concern, because values serve as a powerful motivational tool, a restraint on economic demands, and a reinforcement of work ethics [Habermas1975].

Within the conditions of spiritual deadlock, the public becomes gullible, and susceptible to political manipulation and control. Neil Clark cites the words of the Belgian playwright and translator Emile Cammaerts, who said: 'When a man stops believing in God, he doesn't then believe nothing, he believes anything'[2]. From this

[2] Clark N. 'How Covid-19 Became Britain's Newest Religion. – *Sputnik*. 29.05.2020. URL: https://sputniknews.com/columnists/202005291079454699-how-covid-19-became-britains-newest-religion/?fbclid=IwAR3hlBUmZxmf_m4X-HINtdSUp52PXyYJjkkEDSAL2UzcUnlF39k4fxp9FCM (accessed 29.01.2021); Cammaerts E. To the Men Behind the Armies: An Address Delivered on February 1917, at the Aeolian Hall, at a Meeting of the Fight for Right Movement. London: Classic Reprint: 2018 (Reprint).

point of view, a mechanism of constructed moral panic began to be used to rekindle compliance and interest [Cohen 1972; Hall 1978; Habermas 1975]. The dramatization of political events and exaggeration of negative scenarios were called upon to construct particular emotional responses and 'manufacture' the consent of the governed [Herman, Chomsky 1994]. More importantly, as Stuart Hall notes, each subsequent 'exhaustion of consent' is matched by the new 'rising tide of moral panics' [Hall 1978: 218]. This is accompanied by a flight from critical analysis and professional debate, a devaluation of rationality, and further restrictions on the freedom of speech[3]. Ulrich Beck referred to this phenomenon as the 'risk culture', in which public risks and fears are being exaggerated and socially constructed[4]. The promise that all potential risks can be controlled during the waves of moral panic leads to political explosiveness in a society during any slight real or perceived disturbance. More importantly, Beck argues that 'virtual risks no longer need to exist in order to be perceived as fact. Perceived as risks, they cause enormous losses and disasters. Thus, the distinction between "real" risks and "hysterical" perception no longer holds'[5].

In parallel to that, a process of creation of the new deeply internalized value base has been launched. It could even be argued that the state of permanent crisis will not cease until the new value base is formed and fully entrenched as spiritual dogma. The purpose of the new normative base will be to match the evolved economic structure, forcing the two realms to overlap, if not converge. At the same time, building a new tradition takes some centuries of mulling over a significant 'discursive event' [Foucault 1972] invoked by the teachings of figures like Moses, Jesus, Mohammed. In other words, new spiritual foundations should be able to compete with those of any Abrahamic faiths or at least display similar complexity and expression as pre-Christian Olympianism. Because of the difficult and complex requirements that the newly developing tradition does not succeed in meeting, it (tradition) settles for the mere negation of the extant traditional values and rationality. This new base tradition begins with an idea of emancipating oppressed subaltern minorities, endorsing alternative lifestyles, introducing unrestricted consumption patterns in all areas of economic and socio-political life, and upholding the unquestioned equality of all cultures. These proposed norms are imposed through the spirit of fanatical egalitarianism, often as totalitarian and restrictive as the very restrictions it intends to fight [Wilkinson 2019]. This new secular moral orientation aims to obtain a religious power and is often referred to as a 'humanitarian' religion or a 'religion of humanity'.

Many conservative and religious philosophers, such as Aurel Kolnai, Pierre Manent, Roger Scruton, Daniel Mahoney, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, following Vladimir Solovyov, problematized this development. They

[3] Dionne E.J., Jr. The New Politics of Fear. – *Washington Post.* 04.12.2016. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-politics-of-fear-is-gripping-democracies-across-the-world/2016/12/04/2de10712-b8c8-11e6-959c-172c82123976_story.html?utm_term=.1d6956e28049 (accessed 29.01.2021); Freeman H. Don't Play Identity Politics!' The Primal Scream of the Straight White Male. – *Guardian*. 02.12.2016. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/02/identity-politics-donald-trump-white-men (accessed 29.01.2021); Batzedek E. Identity Politics and Racism: Some Thoughts and Questions. – *Rain and Thunder.* 1999. No. 5. URL: http://feminist-reprise.org/library/resistance-strategy-and-struggle/identity-politics-and-racism-some-thoughts-and-questions/ (accessed 29.01.2021).

[4] Yates J.J., Beck U. Interview with Ulrich Beck on Fear and Risk Society. – *The Hedgehog Review.* 2003. No. 5-3. URL: https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/fear-itself/articles/interview-with-ulrich-beck (accessed 29.01.2021).

[5] Ibidem.

argued that treating man as a 'measure of all things' leads to the erosion of the Abrahamic normative foundation, which in itself undermines our ability to draw a balanced political judgement. Choices promoted by the new 'religion of humanity' are often farcical in their targeting of natural reason, conscience, and common sense. Daniel Mahoney argued that confusion is left in the place of rationality, the normative experience turns into a humanitarian parody, and people lose the ability to act as citizens and moral agents 'partaking in a concrete tradition of moral experience and judgement' [Mahoney 2018: xviii].

In parallel, the erosion of social cohesion has been developing through the destruction of the norms of civil discourse that could unite people around a constructive and rational discussion of common social and economic problems. This state of affairs corresponds to the reality constructed by the decades of post-modernism and digitization of human life. Social apathy, alienation, and withdrawal of trust in previously stable systemic institutions has led to the emergence of a series of unanchored individuals who are easily manipulated through their estranged digital screens. Recent decades showed a significant reduction of public trust in the mass media in Europe and America, and a sharp decline in the readership of leading newspapers and journals [Krastev, Sakwa 2013: 273-275]. More importantly, the overall decline in educational standards has resulted in a significant socio-economic stratification in this crucial sphere, further consolidating the crisis of rationality and professionalism [Fukuyama 2015: 460]. Similarly, the increasingly dogmatic nature of contemporary discourse has led to a serious decline in the standards of Western democratic institutions. Creeping bureaucratic and ideological control has allowed the firing and social ostracizing of even the most rational and moderate political opponents – the case of Joan Rowling could serve as an example [Bueskens 2020].

GLOBAL ELITE GROUPS AND THE PANDEMIC CRISIS

Another important contextual factor that determined the logic of the current coronavirus crisis relates to the battle between the two main global elite groups: representatives of global financial capital and regionalists-industrialists. These two global elite factions have operated in world politics since the launch of modernity, but have intensified their disagreements during the past six decades. If we were to adhere strictly to the spirit of political science and sociology, we ought to observe that elite groups are more numerous than just those two. Yet, representatives of financial and industrial capital still remain the two *main* cohorts exerting the most *decisive* economic and political influence, holding significant levers of power, and often absorbing other smaller groups into their midst. These groups determine the main trajectories of socio-economic development that could be supplemented with debates on the nuances of policy application provided by other networks. Addressing contemporary realities, Emmanuel Macron conditionally referred to those two factions as 'progressivists' and 'national populists' and argued that these factions have a ubiquitous supra-national character[6]. Donald Trump reconfirmed this idea indirectly by claiming that it is easier for him to find a common language with Russia or China than with the members of the Democratic Party[7].

[6] 'La concorde selon Macron.' – *L'Obs*. 23.04.2020. No. 2894.

[7] Kaczynski A., Massie Ch., and McDermott N. '80 Times Trump Talked about Putin.' – *CNN*. 2017. URL: https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2017/03/politics/trump-putin-russia-timeline/ (accessed 29.01.2021).

During the past five decades, the first party has been composed of the various factions of 'neo-liberal' elites that hold control over the flow of financial capital, portfolio investments, and information technologies. The second group has been represented by the conservative cohort of politicians backed by the industrial capital responsible for the production within the sectors of heavy industry, the military, agriculture, and resource extraction. Both parties have their representatives within the governments of states around the world and global political elites. Their relationship evolved in a complex and intricate pattern, leading them to part ways towards the end of the twentieth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, industrial capital led globalization in alliance with the financial capital that provided monetary resources for the expansion. Both strands of the capital were successfully engaged in the global production and distribution of goods based on the classic principles of accumulation and industrial capitalism. This symbiosis of global and industrial capital has imposed global rules and regulations, often deploying double standards and violating principles of justice where necessary to ensure success [Huntington 1996]. The newly emerged system commodified democracy by paving the way to lumpen liberalism. It tested the limits of depriving the workers of the benefits of the welfare state and created enormous wealth for the few.

At some point in time, however, financial capital got tired of playing the role of the younger brother to the industrialists and dared to set out on an independent journey in a world full of new economic and political opportunities [Bell 1996: 292]. Financial capital sought to relieve itself of the obligations to maintain social cohesion within the vassal states and not to cross the limits of pauperization. By the end of the 1990s, financial capital began to participate in global processes as a separate group of actors, independent from industrial capital and guided by a simple drive towards wealth accumulation. Somewhere along the way, financial capital dispensed with the principles of liberal economics and merged capital and power [Bichler, Nitzan 2013].

The pandemic largely revealed 'true colours' of each respective group and accentuated their goals, intentions, and strategies. Respective approaches and reactions to the pandemic by representatives of each group fleshed out their political-economic interests and demonstrated how such interests could be legitimized within the new crisis conditions. Before the pandemic, these global elite groups were locked into heated ideological debates on the future of humanity in all spheres of social and economic life. The most important battle has been unfolding in the normative realm, exerting a rift between traditional and newly developing norms and ethics. This ongoing debate has been eroding the social cohesion in Europe and America for some time and has, in part, reached other global centres such as Russia, China, the Middle East, and South and Central America. Habermas argues that the 'level of development of a society is determined by the institutionally permitted learning capacity, in particular, ...by whether discursive learning processes can take place' [Habermas 1975: 8]. From this point of view, universities have become the first hot spots for the ideological battles between the two sides. The curricula of universities have been redrafted to reflect this ongoing debate, in which traditionalists steadily gave ground to the globalists. The latter have appropriated the discourse on crucial areas of human activity and established their views as a dominant orthodoxy. The overwhelming trend within Western universities has been to defend neo-liberal positions, allied with the cultural leftist agenda, even at points when these views appeared controversial. More often than not, similar freedoms of thought, speech, and expression have not been extended

to equally controversial conservative and traditionalist speakers[8]. Means of achieving these ends have ranged from physically blocking the access of conservatively-minded speakers to lecture halls to demanding that administration disinvite distinguished controversial figures. That led distinguished observers and politicians, such as Nick Clegg, Michael Blumberg, Simon Jenkins express concerns over political correctness going awry, endangering free speech, and instilling the atmosphere of 'illiberal liberalism'[9]. Lockdown and social restrictions imposed during the pandemic are likely to sharpen those tensions and provide each side with an additional set of arguments.

Representatives of the global financial capital often speak with the voice of 'neo-liberals' and left-leaning liberals [Chebankova 2020]. The advocates of this faction press for the idea of homogenization of world cultures and the anchoring of global society on neo-Western, 'humanitarian' hyper-moralism in the social sphere and neo-liberalism in the economic realm. Significantly, theirs is a new *type* of West, or rather that part of the West that has forgone its Abrahamic metanarrative as a premise for future development. This group poses as a moralistic emancipating power, striving to construct social reality on the normative base of the 'religion of humanity' discussed above. The implementation of this model results in the growing stratification of society, as well as the selective application of law that is gradually separating emancipated minorities from the silent remainder. An earlier philosophical debate between the defenders of a mere moral 'recognition' of social groups and the advocates of the practical 'redistribution' of resources that should follow such a recognition reflected the impending limitations of this legal selectivity [Fraser, Honneth 2003; Glazer 1987]. The process of social stratification is fraught with the emancipation of the elites from the state, from law, and from the executive power, which represents the rest of the population. Such a liberalization of elites from the burdens of social responsibility also risks to place these elites 'above the state' and law. Values such as social cohesion, development, and progress also become redundant as they stand as an obstacle to the creation of wealth.

Representatives of industrial capital belong to the opposite elite group. It is motivated by different interests and therefore pursues a different logic. This group is driven by the idea of sustaining industrial development within nation-states and argues that such an economic structure can provide employment, economic growth, and the well-being of citizens. Industrialists in the United States are concerned that if national manufacturing is sent abroad, it could hamper the country's security. The production of antibiotics, for instance, according to Fox News, has been moved offshore and this shortcoming has become a matter of concern during the pandemic. These industrial groups still defend the traditionalist metanarrative of society that

[8] Mance H. Students Intolerance of "Incorrect" Thinking Imperils Free Speech. – *Financial Times*. 21.12.2015. URL: https://www.ft.com/content/d234163c-a7f9-11e5-955c-1e1d6de94879 (accessed 29.01.2021); Jackson A. Disinvitations to College Speakers Are on the Rise. – *Business Insider*. 28.07.2016. URL: https://www.businessinsider.com/list-of-disinvited-speakers-at-colleges-2016-7 (accessed 29.01.2021); Dandridge N. A Ban on Germaine Greer Would be a Threat to the Universities' Unique Role. – *The Guardian*. 13.11.2015. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/13/ban-germaine-greer-universities-free-speech (accessed 29.01.2021).

[9] Jenkins S. Fining Universities for No-Platforming Denies the Idea of Academic Freedom. – *The Guardian*. 27.12.2017. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/27/no-platform-universities-academic-freedom-free-speech (accessed 29.01.2021); Selingo J. College Students Support Free Speech – Unless It Offends Them. – *The Washington Post*. 09.03.2018. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/college-students-support-free-speech--unless-it-offends-them/2018/03/09/79f21c9e-23e4-11e8-94da-ebf9d112159c_story.html (accessed 03.01.2021).

can provide a legitimating platform for its goals, interests and profit/accumulation. Therefore, industrial groups insist on the equality of all before the law, greater social cohesion, and maintenance of order, stability, and the Abrahamic tradition.

Along with that, industrial groups support a traditionalist understanding of the role of the state in various spheres of socio-political life. Representatives of this political strand adopt the Hobbesian interpretation of the idea of the state, which matured since the age of Reformation in the Lutheran and Calvinist ideology of territory (*regnum*), faith (tradition), the person of the prince (leader), and the separation between the personality of the prince and the institution he represents [Figgis 1956; Skinner 1979]. The idea of the state was further expanded to involve the people residing within the territorial borders of the state and the particular culture and shared history of these people. This understanding of the state rests on the ideas of classical liberalism, Reformation-era humanism, and modern rationality, and largely caters to the needs of domestic industrial production.

Traditionalists often argue that contemporary globalist liberalism has turned into aggressive dogmatism and begun to subvert free speech. Traditionalists, backed by industrial capital, claim that they imbibed classical liberal ideas of the nineteenth century and can be regarded as the only true defenders of these values. In recent years, these groups began to vie for freedom of thought and speech and an equal (or colour-blind) application of social, political, and legal standards. Taking this base position into account, conservatism could give answers to the most urgent problems facing humanity within its metaphysical paradigm based on its particular metanarrative. Many of these crucial matters have been hitherto appropriated by the globalists as a unique area of concern. Among those are the problems of global warming, overpopulation, gender and family, history and education, the managing of information technologies and artificial intelligence, poverty, the depletion of natural resources and fresh water, high-level corruption, and safety and security. Such responses could be presented within the bounds of traditional rationality and meaningful intellectual discussion purged of mantras and dogmatism.

Pandemic: a reflection of systemic crisis

The coronavirus pandemic figured as a reflection of these complex and multi-faceted processes of systemic shortcomings and ideological conflict. The Covid-19 response was one of the most acute moral panics that affected global society in the twenty-first century. It has also revealed the two very different approaches to crisis management of the conflicting factions among global elites. The pandemic has become one of the most serious crises of rationality that climaxed in global fear and a proliferation of mass control. Neil Clark writes: 'It has become almost impossible to have a rational debate about Covid-19 and the policies that governments have brought in in its wake, as the virus has gone from being a health issue and instead become a religion'[10]. From this point of view, the coronavirus crisis falls into the general pattern of crises regularly experienced by the capitalist world. The complementary benefits exploited by this crisis were geared towards achieving a firmer control over the masses of people who lost faith and substantive rationality.

[10] Clark Neil. How Covid-19 Became Britain's Newest Religion. – *Sputnik*. 29.05.2020. URL: https://sputniknews.com/columnists/202005291079454699-how-covid-19-became-britains-newest-religion/?fbclid=IwAR3hlBUmZxmf_m4X-HINtdSUp52XyYJjkkEDSAL2UzcUnlF39k4fxp9FCM (accessed 29.01.2021).

It is unlikely that this crisis, as many of its predecessors, is capable of a radical transformation of the world, because a radical change would be equal to building a just order on a new economic basis or sliding into the unashamedly totalitarian abyss. We would be hard-pressed to envisage such scenarios upon the resolution of the global pandemic. Yet, the general course of this crisis follows the logic that distinguishes it from its earlier counterparts in some important ways. First, the crisis attempted to reformulate social communication in many essential areas of human life with the ideas of 'new normal'. The severity and extent of the lockdown are likely to leave a lasting fear about how the rights and freedoms of citizens have been rescinded. Second, the crisis has amplified the struggle between global competing elite groups represented by industrial and financial capital. Third, this battle of the global will invoke heated debates about methods of constructing and managing the globalizing world.

The coronavirus crisis is providing a new platform that could facilitate the attempts of financial capital to redefine social and anthropological foundations of human life. From this point of view, the reaction to coronavirus obtained ideological and – as some observers noted – even religious forms. The pandemic also provided ideological arguments conducive to legitimizing the already-existing course towards social stratification and political control. The 'new reality' that was promised in the wake of the crisis was to target many essential spheres of human life. These concerned interpersonal communications, family relationships, education, medical care, travel, trade, as well as some fundamental rights and freedoms. Overall, the creation of the 'new reality' aimed to legitimize new forms of management of public relations. Some analysts have claimed that the 'new world' will be reliant on artificial intelligence, 'smart cities', super-apps that accumulate large masses of data, monopolized technological ecosystems catering to the needs of consumers, electronic means of surveillance, and other 'advanced' forms of mass control'[11].

The introduction of various forms of contact tracing, along with other means of electronic monitoring, also helps to reformulate people's lives following the rapidly controlled political and social environment. Tracing apps might be expected to be widely launched, in the same way that CCTVs became normal as a result of the moral panic related to the youth disturbances of the 1970s [Cohen 1972]. Besides, power has slowly begun shifting towards non-financial forms of control, introducing novel means of social enforcement. Medical bureaucracy – not to be confused with medical care providers – could be deployed as an additional institutional means of managing public relations.

The role of the traditional state in this model takes a back seat, and the most meaningful forms of political power could be transferred to the leaders of the global financial, IT, and intelligence service areas. These developments could also result in the emergence of new forms of inequality based on an unequal access to technology, even in wealthier countries[12]. If carried through systematically and on a long-term basis, these developments could result in the establishment of a new culture, in which people will be dispersed, disengaged, disoriented, and unable to shape their future.

[11] Каким будет мир после коронавируса? [What Will the Post-pandemic World Look Like?] – *KPMG*. 29.04.2020. URL: https://mustread.kpmg.ru/articles/kakim-budet-mir-posle-koronavirusa/ (accessed 29.01.2021).

[12] Shift to Online Learning Due to COVID-19 Requires Rethink of Teaching. – *National Post*. 16.03.2020. URL: https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/shift-to-online-learning-due-to-covid-19-requires-rethink-of-teaching-experts (accessed 28.08.2020).

The collapse of natural reason and flight away from a systematic academic discussion of the events accompanied the 'new normal' proposals. Indeed, it has been argued that elaborate scientific debate did not take place before introducing the policy of the global lockdown. Decisions have been hastily adopted based on a select academic opinion led by a group of scientists from the Imperial College London and its affiliate structures, ignoring the views of the remainder of the academic community[13]. The chief of the Norway Public Health Agency, Camilla Stoltenberg, argued that a comprehensive academic debate on the nature, spread, and response to the Covid-19 challenge has not taken place. She claimed that, before implementing a comprehensive global lockdown, scientifically confirmed observation data, the number of 999 calls, and weekly figures of respiratory infections and deaths should have been investigated in an open academic debate. Some British and American media outlets[14] also called for an investigation of whether such drastic lockdown measures have been justified, both scientifically and politically, and wondered if those measured could have been limited to who were sick and those who have been in contact with the sick. Towards the end of the pandemic, the press was mulling over the idea that the infection might have appeared in Europe as early as December or even earlier than that, pointing to the lack of a comprehensive scientific debate on the matter.

In practice, the pandemic was able to reformulate for a short term many traditional patterns of human activity. We witnessed temporary-but-painful church closures, cancellations of weddings and funerals, redefinition of familial communication, redrafting of learning and education, the introduction of telephone medicine, and the expansion of 'work-from-home' practice. Distant forms of learning have been of primary concern. It has been argued that physical presence has been a crucial element of education for all participants for almost ten centuries. Agamben claims that 'during those crucial years of education, friendships are made, small study and research groups are formed based on pupils' cultural and political interests, and these links continue to future life long after the classes and university years have ended'[15]. Introduction of virtual forms of education could negatively impact human communication, eliminate the pastoral component of learning, and disrupt the very phenomenon of student life. In some countries, the coronavirus pandemic has become an additional argument in favour of distant learning. This situation threatens to result in stratification of human experience separating those who have access to personal learning and those who end up with a cheaper distant option.

Provision of medical services is another sector that has seen some adverse restructuring linked to the introduction of the 'new normal'. New forms of patient-doctor communication have been conducted via increased computerization and distant forms of treatment. Introduction of telephone medicine during the pandemic, in which a scaling down of personal meetings between doctors and patients took place, might become a stable and unwelcome trend of the future, adversely impacting traditional human relationships and increasing the rift between rich and poor. Both

[13] Bennett A. Hysteria Is the Most Dangerous Coronavirus Symptom. – *Telegraph*. 22.08.2020. URL: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/22/hysteria-dangerous-coronavirus-symptom/ (accessed 29.01. 2021).

[14] Norway Health Chief: Lockdown Was Not Needed to Tame Covid. – *Spectator*. 27.05.2020. URL: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/covid-19-update-lockdown-was-not-needed-to-tame-covid-says-norway (accessed 29.01.2021).

[15] Agamben G. 2020. Requiem for the Students. – *Diario della crisi*. 23.05.2020. URL: https://medium.com/@ddean3000/requiem-for-the-students-giorgio-agamben-866670c11642 (accessed 29.01.2021).

medical and educational spheres represent core elements of human activity necessary for the reproduction of society. Trends towards remote forms of work within these sectors could result in further economic stratification of society, which could threaten to further exhaust social consent in the future.

The outlets of global governance often become the advocates of this 'new normality' during the crisis. Within the ongoing crisis conditions, this group viewed the global lockdown as a chance to introduce and sustain the subsequent profound change to the lifestyle of billions of people. This is because the ideological message of the 'new normal' has been well aligned with the ongoing 'balkanization' of society and the control exerted over societal groups by ideologues of identity politics. Flight from traditional rationality further assisted in keeping people in check during the lockdown, while the bans introduced on social gatherings aimed at the erosion of social cohesion and reduction of 'bridging' social capital [Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993].

Many advisory and consultancy groups, representatives of the information-technology sector, artists, and scientists dealing with global financial capital espoused the 'new normal' ideas most enthusiastically. For many such advocates, these views have been fuelled by their pre-existing concerns over ecological justice, supposed overpopulation of the planet, and issues of identity politics. One example is an open letter to *Le Monde* from a global group of liberal artists and scientists who claimed that the lockdown should remain in place even after the pandemic has ended to protect the planet from the impending ecological disaster[16]. Should this global faction secure intellectual, social, and political success, the West will emerge as a renewed moral force that will insist on establishing its reformed tradition universally. It will also vie for the building of a single globalized culture anchored in this increasingly systematized discourse. Many non-Western states already have large elite factions that are supportive of this new ideology: Russia and China could serve as prime examples.

The response of the industrialist elite group to the pandemic has been logically determined by the philosophical positions of its representatives. While recognizing the seriousness of health risks and the need to control the spread of the disease, these elite groups have been convinced in the necessity of sustaining the 'old normal order', in which human behaviour remains essentially 'human' and correspondent to the bounds of natural reason. Politicians within this group emphasized the importance of interpersonal face-to-face communication, in-class education, in which a tutor has pastoral, as well as educational, contact with students, trade and globalization based on the alliances of states, as well as cultural, academic, and scientific interexchange. It has been stressed that reciprocal intimacy, friendships, rivalry, gossip, the passing of judgements and commentary, mutual help, and appraisal all figure as indispensable parts of social cohesion. Human *sociometer* [Leary 2012], they argue, describes the inner mental gauge that tells us every moment how we are doing in the eyes of our interlocutor. This instrument of communication acted as an evolutionary way of building and sustaining community by allowing people to view each other as desirable partners for all forms of social relationships[17] [ibidem]. In the eyes of the industrial

[16] Stars and Scientists Call for World Not to "Go Back to Normal". – *France24*. 06.05.2020. URL: https://www.france24.com/en/20200506-stars-and-scientists-call-for-world-not-to-go-back-to-normal (accessed 29.01.2021).

[17] Haidt J., Rose-Stockwell T. The Dark Psychology of Social Networks: Why It Feels Like Everything Is Going Haywire. – *Atlantic*. December 2019. URL: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/social-media-democracy/600763/ (accessed 29.06.2020).

groups, the community is a core element for sustaining successful production cycles and professional standards of a permanent workforce.

These elite groups also pressed for the speedy reopening of the economies, localized and limited lockdowns, isolation of the sick, and permission for the healthy to return to work. Advocates of these ideas drew parallels to the 1918-19 Spanish flu pandemic that, despite grave seriousness of the disease, did not result in the cancellation of many crucial socio-economic activities. These thinkers lament that the coronavirus response threw people off normalcy for a prolonged and indefinite period, even though a per-capita fatality rate of this disease is 99.2 per cent lower than that of the 1918-19 flu[18]. They largely blame the new culture of selective empathy, emotional self-focus, anxiety, and fear for making the lockdown of an unprecedented magnitude possible. Advocates of the industrial-elite group are concerned over a prolonged economic slump that will blight and derail countless lives across the world. While the lockdown becomes possible for the select few who are privileged to work from their home offices, it put the lives of those who are less economically advantaged on hold by hurting the larger industrial economy. As Walter Scheidel argues, the lockdown will leave a large part of the society 'mired in unemployment and precarity or stuck in face-to-face jobs that promise ongoing exposure. The young and the poor, already held down by inequality, debt, and fading prospects of social mobility, are bound to pay the heaviest price'[19].

IS THE 'NEW NORMAL' A NORM?

It is also important to remember that the imposition of a 'new reality' must require a larger plan for a full-scale recasting of human anthropology. In many ways, this is an attempt to create a new 'furloughed' civilization, easily managed via technological means of control and enjoying far fewer rights and freedoms. This civilization should have a streamlined access to wealth and services, as well as a new structural approach to opportunities. Does this plan of a 'new normal' have a chance to take over social life, or it is destined to be forgotten once the pandemic is over? We prefer to steer away from an apocalyptic prognosis and think that the success of the proposed 'furloughed civilization' is likely to be limited. Indeed, human history has experienced far greater jolts and stresses than the current pandemic has offered. Yet, those jolts were unable to derail the world from the logical sequence of events gradually determined by the years – if not hundreds of years – of intellectual and political evolution. The world witnessed the deadly 'Spanish flu' at the beginning of the twentieth century, two world wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and waves of migration from economically disadvantaged areas to wealthier places. While those landmark events significantly altered the general architecture of international relations and the political climate of the globe, they failed to derail the general course of human development that was simmering in prior times. Neither have these crises succeeded in altering the general parameters of human nature – our main needs, our existential questions, and our established modes of communication. 'New normality' is unlikely to entrench itself in the social fabric, because human society has developed particular ways of communication that have been deemed 'normal' and natural by thousands of years of evolutionary experience.

[18] Scheidel W. The Spanish Flu Didn't Wreck the Global Economy. – *Foreign Affairs*. 28.05.2020. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-05-28/spanish-flu-didnt-wreck-global-economy (accessed 29.01.2021).

[19] Ibidem.

Humans must be social creatures by nature, as Aristotle observed, and Christian medieval philosophers reconfirmed. Men are born to live in communities, as numerous Thomists argued, and it is natural for people to form collectives. Some scholars, such as Vittoria, insisted that the need to form communities was supplied to people by 'a providential force' and specifically by the 'will of God himself' [Skinner 1979: 161]. Some others, such as Augustine, Suarez, and Molina, argued that people create communities to protect themselves from the fallen nature and ill inclinations of others. Regardless of the reasons, a collective lifestyle has been recognized as a common feature of natural human life. Moreover, besides forming the most traditional forms of communes such as families, neighbourhoods, settlements, and nations, people also long for an apprenticeship in a professional education, pastoral care at schools and universities, academic exchange in scientific collectives, social experience in trade and leisure, and common exchange of knowledge in the search for answers to existential questions.

The biblical tale of the Tower of Babel presents us with a complex moral message that urges humanity to display moderation and temperance. It shows that globalization cannot be derailed, yet it must follow sage and measured steps. On the one hand, the story underscores the desire for communication, cultural, scientific, and technological interexchange, as an innate feature of the human mind and nature. On the other hand, it delineates the limits of the potential merger of cultures and civilizations, invoking the desire to defend particular traditions, religions, and languages. Indeed, ancient and medieval trading routes stretching from Asia to the Middle East, Northern Europe to Byzantium, and old markets blossoming on the sale of foreign goods, spices, jewels, silks and fabrics, largely determined the political and economic development of the world. Yet, despite this exchange, people strove to maintain their cultures and to function within their particular groups. This way of leading human life has been perpetuated throughout time and described by various medieval religious philosophers as the expression of natural law. Such an understanding of the indelibly social nature of human life leads us to question the very term 'social distancing' proposed by the pundits of the 'new normality'. The term comes across as deeply flawed, because it defies the social nature of humans and negates the core of their humanity. It sends a message that deprecates people's sense of self-worth and misinterprets the very foundations of human nature.

Having said that, despite the unnatural and irrational foundation of the 'new normal', the public is likely to remain pessimistic about the fate of its extant liberties. Fear for the future of human rights is likely to remain as the most identifiable vestige of this crisis. One of the most demonstrable outcomes of the lockdown was the ease with which people handed over their rights and freedoms in the name of the constructed or real threat. Political slogans often substituted for a rational discussion and 'faith' in the infection's sinister powers has almost replaced other forms of belief. People began to fear each other as carriers of some pathogenic disease but, above all, they demonstrated that the fear of death has replaced the courage to live. More importantly, the lockdown represented an unprecedented political experiment in curbing people's liberties, acting as a gauge of the extent to which citizens were willing to rescind their rights. Following the partial relaxation of rules, many world leaders stated that they would not stop short of another round of similar restrictions and would put the 'hand brake on' should the situation demand[20].

[20] Greta Thunberg: "Climate Change 'as urgent' as Coronavirus". – *BBC News.* 20.06.2020. URL: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-53100800 (accessed 27.01.2021).

In this connection, Habermas notes that 'society does not plunge into a crisis when, and only when, its members so identify the situation. ...Crisis occurrences owe their objectivity to the fact that they issue from unresolved steering problems' [Habermas 1975: 4]. Public flight from the constructive debate on the issue reflected pre-existing social and political alienation, the lack of firmly internalized beliefs, social apathy, and a spiritual void that pushed the public outside the bounds of traditional rationality. Hence, apart from its medical urgency, the coronavirus crisis also marked a crisis of identity, ideology, and metaphysical foundations, as well as economic affairs. The society that was already experiencing the crisis of identity and culture has easily parted with its rights.

PANDEMIC AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBALIZATION

The pandemic has also inflicted significant damage on world economic growth, caused a hike in global unemployment, magnified old and new types of inequalities, suspended for some period international travel, hampered cultural and academic exchange, and accentuated the already-existing tensions in international relations. These disturbances will no doubt raise questions concerning the future ways of managing inter-state dialogue and help to reform some of the existing supranational institutions. This crisis will also create additional arguments in favour of the already-existing proposals towards restructuring the world order, thus deepening the ongoing debate on the matter. The two elite groups under discussion will vie for their respective views on the world's future and the nature of international relations. The struggle between the existing views is likely to become more intense. One the side of the debate will be the advocates of a unipolar world architecture with a single centre, led by the neo-liberals and democrats in Washington. Their opponents, headed by the American and European industrialists, as well as traditionalists within the Russian, Chinese, and Indian elites, insist on the multi-polar world entrenched in a dialogue between large regions-civilizations.

The industrialists argue that the world's large geopolitical regions often referred to as civilizations, should be allowed to adhere to their traditional cultural and religious norms and pursue their views on human anthropology. At the same time, these regions are encouraged to trade and communicate with each other based on dialogue, partnership, and reciprocity. This group also defends the idea of a nation-state as the main building block of the world order and resists the hijacking of the state by global corporations. It also advocates inter-state (civilizational) alliances based on the historical, cultural, religious, and ideological metanarrative of its members. Thus, nation-states congregate around their natural poles of historical-cultural gravity and form economic and political alliances. These ideas also reflect the existing economic reality in that global industrial production zones largely overlap with these regions. These zones are territorially anchored in the existing technological poles such as China, the United States, Europe, India, partially Russia, and South and Latin America.

The successful launch of the new economic cycle hinges upon productive cooperation between these zones, respecting their differences on the principles of realism and a pragmatic division of economic interests. Ironically, industrialist, or conservative, elites have become the advocate of the 'old' modernist world, because its forms of economic activity enabled people to work and consume in an old-fashioned manner, defend the traditional values: an interconnected, but not homogenous, world, face-to-face communication, original humanism, and civilizational dialogue. This group fights for the original patterns of globalization, which evolved within the

conceptual and institutional framework of modernity [Bromley 1999: 282-283]. Industrial groups recognize the existing popular demands towards effective resolution of domestic problems by national governments and argue that those states that are the most capable of resolving these challenges are likely to emerge as new world leaders. Having said that, these actors still advocate globalization as a realist dialogue between the existing political-economic poles and criticize neo-liberals for their attempts to introduce the 'new normal'.

Representatives of financial elites have a different approach, which is targeted at redistributing economic resources in their favour. As we mentioned, this global financial elite has been dominant for the past fifty years, and it fights to sustain and expand its supremacy as the foundation of the new world order. Because this group is represented by the service, high-technology, banking, and financial sectors, it supports the US dollar as an anchor of the global financial system. A global pandemic provided a perfect fertile ground for developing such reasoning, while the global lockdown demonstrates the political might of this faction. At the popular level, this group argues for a consolidated world government that could provide an effective unified response to global challenges. International institutions are used as the crisis-resolution vehicles for as long as they are dominated by representatives of financial capital.

Given that this economic model has endured multiple socio-political setbacks, its advocates will seek new arguments to clinch control. These elites treat as a political hindrance the emergence of the new global industrial centres that are anchored in distinct cultural and national patterns. Financial elites understand that, sooner or later, industrial groups will try to wrest power and redirect financial flows to their advantage. Along with that, the world might change at the metaphysical level to reflect regional traditionalist patterns, bringing an additional ideological defeat to the financial-capital group. Hence, this elite faction will do everything in its power to prevent these developments. Cultural, political, and economic instruments, which are available to this group in abundance, will be deployed. From this point of view, the post-coronavirus world will not bring a drastic conceptual change. It will merely amplify the debates that have been evolving globally during the past five or six decades. This struggle may be ferocious, and its sparks could blight and derail many ordinary lives.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we have made some observations in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. We argued that this crisis is a reflection of objective global trends that have been evolving in the world's economic and political system during the past decades. One general argument is that crisis represents a permanent feature of the contemporary capitalist socio-economic system, because that system is consistently legitimized via socially constructed fears, panic, and media manipulation. From this point of view, the crisis represents a rational response to economic and political stagnation and the logical exhaustion of economic cycles. From this point of view, crisis allows the society to eliminate ineffective economic agents, wipe out some debts, and rekindle the economy in a way that will mobilize and motivate businesses with further profits. This process usually results in the redistribution of power towards various groups of political and economic players. In the case of the Covid-19 crisis, medical bureaucracy, information technology, artificial intelligence, and the moguls of finance will make strenuous attempts to consolidate their political and economic positions.

Another point of importance is that the magnitude of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis stems from the fact that the spiritual foundations of contemporary society have been depleted, making the public gullible in the face of the new form of civil humanitarian 'religion' advanced through the media and academic institutions. At the same time, we have argued that the crisis is unlikely to change the world drastically at the socio-cultural level, because the ideology of 'new normal' has an antihuman character that will be resisted by the majority of the world's population. Nevertheless, the crisis will reveal the critically tenuous nature of contemporary democracy and human rights. The robustness of those values will be questioned by people for some time to come.

Finally, and probably most importantly, the Covid-19 crisis evolved against the backdrop of a ferocious struggle between the two global elite factions represented by global financial capital and industrialists. Therefore, the crisis will amplify the ongoing debates on the future architecture of international relations. It will give credence to those promoting the arguments in favour of the unipolar world order as well as exonerate the positions of their opponents, who are pressing for the global multipolar architecture. From this point of view, this crisis has given us a prime position from which to spectate on this open-ended and perilous play.

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ПАНДЕМИЯ COVID-19 И МИРОВОЙ ПОРЯДОК

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются истоки, характер и потенциальные результаты глобального кризиса, вызванного пандемией Covid-19. Авторы утверждают, что кризис порожден двумя наиболее важными группами факторов, которые вызревали в мировой экономической и политической системе в течение последних шести десятилетий и были форсированы пандемией. Во-первых, динамика кризиса Covid-19 высветила вызовы современной капиталистической системы, которая, как правило, легитимизируется с помощью инструментов моральной паники и манипулирования средствами массовой информации. Каждый последовательный кризис капитализма заканчивается перераспределением властных ресурсов к новым группам участников. Во-вторых, кризис Covid-19 проходит в условиях системной и идеологической борьбы между двумя глобальными элитными фракциями, которые имеют совершенно разные подходы к меняющемся мировому порядку и имеют различные политико-экономические цели и намерения. Авторы утверждают, что кризис не изменит мир кардинально, но усилит эту сохраняющуюся напряженность, выявит ее и углубит уже имеющуюся системную нестабильность.

Ключевые слова: Covid-19, глобализация, системная нестабильность, капитализм, кризис, новая нормальность.

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