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COVID-19: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MODERN PANDEMIC

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Covid-19: The Consequences of a Modern Pandemic

During the first months of 2020, the worldwide spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and the disease it causes (covid-19) triggered what could be a new era in history.¹ Although not the first in human history²—the Spanish flu, SARS and influenza A (H1N1)—the covid-19 pandemic has monopolized government speeches, media information, social network dialogues and everyday conversations, as its magnitude and effects are unprecedented. From now on, we can be sure that covid-19 will leave its legacy and consequences on this generation. What is relevant is to understand how we arrived at this exact point at a time in history with the greatest scientific and technological developments, as well as the greatest developments in communication; what the causes were that led to the situation we currently face and what are the observable trends to date. To do this, it is essential to take into account

various social actors (the State, transnational groups and networks, civil society and the individual), various systemic variables (modernity, international politics, capitalism and globalization) and various social spheres (the economy, politics and the interaction of identities).

With this note of analysis, the Instituto Matías Romero (IMR) wishes to join the efforts to explain, from an analytical framework, the effects that the covid-19 pandemic has had in the world and the tensions that have risen to the surface and been accentuated by such an event. We are aware of the difficulty of trying to explain present events; however, our proposal seeks to analyze three aspects of social experience that have been affected by the spread of this virus, through three different but, at the same time, complementary theoretical approaches—the international politics of realism, Ulrich Beck’s risk societies and the consequences of Bertrand Badie’s globalized world. Thus, this note has been prepared according to these three points of view of the study of social phenomena.

Covid-19 and its international status

The global pandemic has made the competition evident among great powers to demonstrate strength and capacities of coercion, resistance

[1] On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that, due to the number of cases of contagion and its practically worldwide presence, the new coronavirus has become a pandemic.

[2] The term *pandemic* is used when “an epidemic occurring worldwide or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and usually affecting a large number of people”. See “Pandemic”, in John M. Last, Robert A. Spasoff & Susan Harris, *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 4th ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.

and also cooperation. The image of strength that great powers seek to demonstrate and reinforce has repercussions on their relations with rivals and allies—while, in the face of the former, status strengthens deterrence capabilities, in the face of the latter, it fuels perceptions of the benefits of alliances. The international system of the 21st century has seen the contest between the United States and China intensify, and the new coronavirus pandemic has made it more evident and open.

China, which has used its economic boom since the 1990s to present itself as an alternative to American influence in the international economy and also in the political structures of the liberal world, has tried to appear to the world in crisis as a source of political and economic stability and as a unique option for health care. Based on two axes, China has sought to show the world the effects that the new coronavirus has had on its society and, with the help of Chinese business groups,³ has launched a colorful campaign of humanitarian aid in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, through which it has sold and donated shipments of medical material and respiration assistance equipment to countries that have requested it; this has been announced by the Chinese government's information agencies and news sites—Xinhua, *The People's Daily*, the *China Daily* and the *Global Times*. Some interpret this as an effort to “distract attention from

accusations that its initial cover-up [of China] is responsible for the rest of the world's plight, in particular the looming economic catastrophe.”⁴ and also to show itself as an ally or at least a desirable partner that one would like to have when facing both health and economic related difficulties that are expected in the near future.⁵

For its part, the United States, despite the destructive consequences that the pandemic has had at home in many sectors and among its population,⁶ has implemented humanitarian aid campaigns that, in contrast to China's strategy, do not seek to strengthen its status or bring new countries closer into its sphere of influence, but rather to maintain the U.S. image of the world power, the absolute leader of the free and democratic world. The State Department has sent medical support to the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) equivalent

[3] Hangwei Li & Jacqueline Musiitwa, ““Coronavirus Diplomacy’: China's Opportune Time to Aid Africa”, *The Africa Report*, April 24, 2020, at <https://www.theafricareport.com/26750/coronavirus-diplomacy-chinas-opportune-time-to-aid-africa/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).; Celia Hatton, “Jack Ma: The Billionaire Trying to Stop Coronavirus (and Fix China's Reputation)”, in BBC News, April 26, 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52325269> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[4] Louisa Lim, “China Is Trying to Rewrite the Present”, in *Foreign Policy*, March 23, 2020, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/23/china-is-trying-to-rewrite-the-present/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[5] In Italy, for example, it was identified that, at the end of March, a propaganda campaign was deployed on Twitter to disseminate and promote the medical aid sent by the Chinese government; 47821 accounts on that social network replicated the hashtags #forzaCinaeItalia (Chinese and Italian force), invented by the Chinese embassy account in that country, and #grazieCina (thanks, China), of which 46.3% were identified as bots, those profiles published between 50 and 91 tweets a day, without rest, all in favor of Chinese actions in Italian territory. Alkemy Lab, *Data Intelligence: Comunicazione cinese in Italia*, Formiche, Roma, Formiche, March 2020, at <https://formiche.net/files/2017/07/Social-Data-Intelligence-Comunicazione-cinese-ricerca-per-Formiche-1.pdf> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[6] When this note of analysis closed, in the United States 111194 people have died and 20985000 have become unemployed according to data from the Coronavirus Resource Center-Johns Hopkins University and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (June 9, 2020).

to \$18.3 million U.S. Dollars⁷ and on the website of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it has announced the offer to governments, multilateral organizations and civil society groups of \$500 million in aid for the combating of covid-19.⁸ However, the policies of the U.S. government have been overshadowed by its own actions. On the one hand, at the beginning of April, France and Germany, historic allies of the United States, denounced Washington's efforts to hoard and divert shipments of medical equipment;⁹ on the other hand, as weeks went by, the announcement of April 8, 2020, on the decrease of its contributions to the World Health Organization,¹⁰ has led to the announcement on May 29, of the suspension of U.S. relations with this



organization because it considers it “sino-centric”.¹¹ These acts, in the face of public opinion, have accentuated the U.S. Government's differences with China; indeed, it has already stated that by means of a set of measures the United States will obligate China to accept its responsibility for not having prevented the pandemic;¹² the U.S. Government has also contemplated imposing more economic tariffs on China.

Russia, another relevant actor, bases its international status strategy on presenting

[7] U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Support for ASEAN in Fighting COVID-19”, March 31, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-asean-in-fighting-covid-19/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[8] USAID, “Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)”, June 01, 2020, at <https://www.usaid.gov/coronavirus> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[9] Ania Nussbaum & Patrick Donahue, “Germany and France Blame Americans for Playing Dirty over Masks”, in Bloomberg, April 03, 2020, at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-03/germany-and-france-blame-americans-for-playing-dirty-over-masks> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); Kim Willser, Julian Borger & Oliver Holmes, “US Accused of ‘Modern Piracy’ after Diversion of Masks Meant for Europe”, *The Guardian*, April 04, 2020.

[10] The main source of funding for WHO is the United States government (US\$ 122.6 million per year), followed by contributions from China (US\$ 28.6 million per year) and Japan (US\$ 20.5 million per year). Total government and private contributions to WHO in 2020 will reach US\$ 246.8 million. Niall McCarthy, “Which Countries Are the Biggest Financial Contributors to the World Health Organization?”, in *Forbes*, April 08, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2020/04/08/which-countries-are-the-biggest-financial-contributors-to-the-world-health-organization-infographic/#24c07253494c> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[11] The White House, “Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing”, April 08, 2020, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-22/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020). Jason Hoffman & Maegan Vazquez, “Trump Announces End of US Relationship with World Health Organization”, CNN, May 29, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/29/politics/donald-trump-world-health-organization/index.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[12] The White House, “Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing”, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-33/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).



itself, at the same time, as a power of the international status quo and as a counterweight and source of resistance against the liberal order of “the West”.¹³ On the one hand, it seeks to draw closer to the nations of the liberal world, as expressed in its official documents, Russia has sought to project to European countries and U.S. allies “an ‘objective’ and a ‘trustworthy’ image”;¹⁴ on the other hand, it seeks to strengthen its image as an alternative option to the influence of the United States and the European Union

in order to maintain the closeness of its allies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,¹⁵ and also to strengthen ties with countries in Asia and America that seek to distance themselves from the weight of the U.S. bloc.¹⁶ These two aspects of Russia’s strategy have been reflected in its cooperative tactics in sending humanitarian aid to Italy and the United States.¹⁷ Moscow is disseminating in its media—Russia Today and

[13] Yulia Kiseleva, “Russia’s Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status, and the Attraction of Power”, in *Politics*, vol. 35, nos. 3-4, November 2015, pp. 320-325.

[14] Marina Ozerova, «Rossiya primenit na Ukraine myagkuyu silu. Konstantin Kosachev — o russkom yazyke, nasledstve SSSR i zhestkom sopernichestve», in MKRU, May 27, 2014, at <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/05/27/rossiya-primenit-na-ukraine-myagkuyu-silu.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); and Vladimir Soloviev, “[K. Kosachev:] ‘Protiv Rossii Deistvuyut Osoznanno I Tselenapravlenno, No Na Eto Nelzya Obizhatsya’”, in *Kommersant*, April 07, 2012, at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1911330> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020), cited in Y. Kiseleva, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

[15] Alexander Sergunin & Leonid Karabeshkin, “Understanding Russia’s Soft Power Strategy”, in *Politics*, vol. 35, nos. 3-4, November 2015, p. 349.

[16] Stephen Blank & Younkyyo Kim, “Russia and Latin America: The New Frontier for Geopolitics, Arms Sales and Energy”, in *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2015, pp. 159-166 y 398-402.

[17] Italy received shipments of medical instruments in March that were accompanied by the deployment of Russian military personnel and vehicles to Italian cities. “Coronavirus, Mosca manda in Italia virologi e medici militari e attrezzature sanitarie”, *La Stampa*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2020/03/22/news/coronavirus-mosca-manda-in-italia-virologi-militari-e-attrezzature-1.38623730> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).



Sputnik—grateful opinions of Italian politicians, as well as photographs and videos of the humanitarian operation,¹⁸ and questions the role that the European Union has played in the emergency.¹⁹ Russian aid reached the United States, although limited to medical shipments only.²⁰ In

line with the other side of its strategy, Russia has also launched medical status campaigns with its allies in Asia and with those who do not share the values of the U.S.-led world.²¹

The status campaigns implemented by China and Russia during the covid-19 pandemic have found the European Union to be a divided group, whose heterogeneous interests and liberal democratic systems have contributed to evidence of the unexpected and catastrophic

[18] Emanuele Rossi, “Dalla Russia con amore, Putin invia gli aiuti in Italia. Con un mistero...”, in *Formiche*, March 22, 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/03/russia-putin-aiuti-mistero/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); “Russian Military Support ‘Much Needed’ in Italy’s ‘Critical’ Battle against Covid-19–Lombardy VP”, in RT, March 28 2020, <https://www.rt.com/news/484299-italy-russian-medics-bergamo-coronavirus/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[19] Danielle Ryan, “Russian Aid to Italy, Dubbed an ‘Influence Operation’ by the EU-Partnered Media Outfit, Is Indeed Shameful—for Europe”, in RT, April 03, 2020, at <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/484921-russian-aid-italy-influence/> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[20] Anton Troianovski, “Turning the Tables, Russia Sends Virus Aid to U.S.”, *The New York Times*, April 02, 2020.

[21] Countries in the Russian sphere of influence have also received humanitarian aid from the Moscow government. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have accepted thousands of screening tests for covid-19 and tons of medical materials. In addition, the Russian state has sent shipments of medical aid to China, North Korea, Iran and Venezuela. See “Where Has Russia Sent Coronavirus Aid around the World?”, *The Moscow Times*, April 01, 2020, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/01/where-has-russia-sent-coronavirus-aid-around-the-world-a69825> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

consequences resulting from the encounter between the spread of the coronavirus and the shortcomings in national and regional forms of organization.

Although the Union's bodies have launched measures for humanitarian and economic aid—such as the “Team Europe” plan, which distributes 3 billion euros among the Member States,²² or the “rescEU” initiative to send shipments of medical equipment and teams of medical personnel to countries most in need of aid²³—, the ideals of European cooperation and supra-nationality have been damaged by the shortage of health instruments and economic resources. On May 18, the leaders of Germany and France presented a proposal to request a loan of 545 billion euros to create a recovery fund for the European Union countries that have suffered most from the pandemic. This loan will be paid by all E.U. members, for the benefit of the poorest. On May 27, the “Next Generation EU” economic recovery programme was announced whereby

1.85 billion euros will be invested to stimulate employment and growth.²⁴

Modern societies facing the risks of covid-19

The pandemic has also accelerated trends in modern societies. The dangers brought about by the social interactions of the 21st century, the different interpretations of the effects of adverse global events on human populations, the contradictions of the productive and economic systems of capitalism, the social inequalities and the different consequences that disruptive events have in different countries and sectors of society, or even disregard their own denial, have not only become more noticeable with this current health phenomenon, but have also been accentuated. Ulrich Beck proposes a way of understanding this complex network of factors that shape the world of modernity with the theory of *risk societies*,²⁵ which are, in general terms, systematic ways of dealing with dangers and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself,²⁶ which are characterized by

[22] European Commission, “Coronavirus: E.U. Global Response to Fight the Pandemic”, press release, Brussels, April 08, 2020, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_604 (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); Jutta Urpilainen, “Team Europe with Our Partners against covid-19”, March 28, 2020, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/urpilainen/announcements/commissioner-urpilainen-team-europe-our-partners-against-covid-19_en (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[23] European Commission, “Overview of the Commission's Response”, May 15, 2020, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/overview-commissions-response_en (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); European Commission, “Covid-19: Commission Creates First ever RescEU Stockpile of Medical Equipment”, press release, Brussels, March 19, 2020, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_476 (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[24] Steven Erlanger, “Merkel, Breaking German ‘Taboo,’ Backs Shaerd E.U. Debt to Tackle Virus”, *The New York Times*, May 18, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/world/europe/coronavirus-european-union-fund.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); European Commission, “Europe's Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation”, press release, Brussels, May 27, 2020, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940 (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[25] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage Publications, 1992.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 21. In general, modernity can be understood from different spheres: in politics, it represents the change from a religious order to an organization formed by the nation-state; in economics, it represents the emergence of

the impossibility of attributing the damages of modern activities to factors external to society (nature, divine will, etc.),²⁷ and, consequently, the presence of risks and their mitigation seem to depend on the decisions that individuals make in the context of modernity.

According to Beck, the fundamental characteristics of these risks are their global nature and their “modern” causes; the dangers are the result of economic-technological and political developments,²⁸ which led to uncertainty in the risk society, since people must deal with the unexpected consequences of their actions, such as the increase in the planet’s temperature due to industrialization and mass production. To this scenario of multiple and continuous risks, one more must be added: the current pandemic, producing consequences which have been, like all risks in the societies identified by Beck, global in scope.

The main properties of the modern phenomenon of risk societies identified by Beck²⁹

capitalism and the process of industrialization; in society, it is the replacement of “traditional” loyalties to modern ones such as class, gender, ethnicity, etc. Another fundamental element is the advance of science and the reliance on human “reason” to understand and control the world.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[29] First, these human groups understand that the risks they face produce irreversible damage and are based on interpretations - that is, they are open to social definitions and constructions, which does not mean that they do not “exist”, but that they can be understood in different ways. Second, although the risks they face are global, their effects are different in each society. Thirdly, the dangers faced by these populations are not opposed to the logic of capitalism in which risk societies operate, but rather, through their propagation and commercialization, they modify it. Fourth, in these social interactions, issues such



are present in the covid-19 pandemic. An isolated event in a market in a province in China had effects, still not fully known, in virtually every country in just a couple of months.³⁰ With this in mind, any country is vulnerable. Images of large protests from Chile to Hong Kong were

as science become politicized and, in this way, political spaces are opened up. Fifth, although the dangers and damages that are sought to be mitigated (pollution, new diseases, destruction of the environment) have consequences in the present, their risk lies in the effects that they could have in the future. Sixth, by virtue of the individualistic tendencies that result from modernity, even though the risks faced by the societies identified by Beck are “universal” (such as climate change), the individual rules his or her behavior to cope with them (people recycle, turn off lights and use public transport, for example, to help mitigate the dangers that are coming). Seventh, the risks these populations face become scientific - they become “scientified”; the boundaries between the natural and the social become blurred. Just as science is one of the causes of risk, it is also the means to define it and the source of solutions to deal with it. Eighth, in this way, although science becomes increasingly relevant and necessary in risk societies, it is at the same time insufficient for the construction of a social “truth”.

[30] According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an outbreak can travel from a nearby town to the largest cities in every country in the world in 36 hours. CDC, “Why It Matters: The Pandemic Threat”, 2020, at <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/field-updates/winter-2017/why-it-matters.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

replaced by images of empty streets in major cities around the world. The world economy will go into recession (dropping to 3%) and about 170 countries will be in economic decline.³¹ Hundreds of millions of people remain isolated in an unprecedentedly widespread quarantine, with information on covid-19 but without a vaccine and treatment against it; as long as it remains present in the world, outbreaks seem inevitable. Several countries have chosen to close their borders and suspend “non-essential” travel. Paradoxically, the mobility of people and goods associated with globalization has been the main factor in the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, its emergence has been the result of modern society’s modes of production and consumption; environmental degradation, the destruction of wild species ecosystems and the invasion of these wild biological environments by urban projects create situations conducive to accelerated virus mutation, as was the case with the current pandemic.³² Additionally, this health crisis highlights the present contradiction between individualism and community in modern societies. Firstly, it is a global problem that can only be solved through mutual action. Secondly, various measures that must be taken to mitigate the consequences and risks of the spread of covid-19 are based on actions that have to be taken by individuals—voluntary

restraint, hygienic measures and social distancing. Furthermore, the covid-19 pandemic highlights the relevance of science, its inadequacy and its limits. Today, scientific discourse is not the dominant force and, as will be explained, “various truths” dispute the understanding of this disease and its biological and social consequences.

Another visible trend, which is incorporated into the analysis of the covid-19 pandemic through the analytical approach of risk societies, is the criticism of the system of neoliberal capitalism, as it highlights the tensions between a global phenomenon that has different consequences due to the hierarchical and unequal structure of the modern and capitalist world. The coronavirus has exposed existing inequalities in a more profound way than other crises.³³ While it is true that covid-19 has spread simultaneously in all countries, regardless of social class, nationality or culture,³⁴ it would be wrong to think that it has the same effects on all peo-

[31] International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook, April 2020: The Great Lockdown*, Washington, D.C., IMF, April 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/World-Economic-Outlook-April-2020-The-Great-Lockdown-49306> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[32] Ignacio Ramonet, “La pandemia y el sistema-mundo”, *La Jornada*, April 25, 2020.

[33] Chema Vera, “COVID-19 Thrives on Inequality”, in Project Syndicate, April 13, 2020, at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/rich-countries-must-tackle-covid19-inequality-crisis-by-chema-vera-2020-04> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020). Differences between people happen through many intertwined categories - race, social class, gender, nationality, among others - that have an influence on the exposure to the covid-19 virus, the propensity of developing the disease, and access to healthcare systems, while also having visible effects during treatment.

[34] In fact, the world’s largest economies, such as the United States, China, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, have been at the epicenter of the crisis. Based on the number of people infected (at June 9, 2020), the main countries affected are the United States (1962982), Brazil (707412), Russia (484630), the United Kingdom (288834) and India (270876). These figures are updated daily, please see <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>



ple.³⁵ We are biological beings, but we are also social beings. And, in Beck's terms, although the risks affect all societies, the consequences occur and are dealt with differently. The virus itself does not spread in a discriminatory way; however, individuals are immersed in power relations in which social factors such as national identity, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, social classes or capitalism are intertwined.³⁶ During pandemics, people with fewer resources are more vulnerable due to three main factors — increased exposure to the virus, increased susceptibility to disease from weakened immune systems, and reduced access to healthcare sys-

tems.³⁷ At the same time, as with the current case, strategies of social distancing and voluntary isolation cannot be followed by those who, because of their type of work, have difficulty respecting it and maintaining an income; factors such as productive characteristics, the formality and stability of employment, services and housing characteristics, and the infrastructure of populations expose sectors of society to the dangers of the virus that has spread worldwide. People with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, obesity and malnutrition, which are exacerbated by lack of access to medical services and difficulty in maintaining an adequate diet, are more vulnerable to the risks of covid-19. Finally, the lack of access to healthcare services and medical insurance also contributes, as Beck would say, to the differentiated mitigation by social stratum of the present and future dangers of this pandemic. Even those who do not contract the disease will suffer the ravages of inequality, as they will hardly be able to mitigate the economic consequences of mass confinement. Based on this reality, the United Nations adopted a resolution (A/RES/74/274), —promoted by Mexico— calling on countries to avoid speculation and undue hoarding that could hinder access to essential drugs, vaccines, personal protective equipment and medical equipment to deal with covid-19.³⁸ In sum, the pandemic demonstrates

[35] See Max Fisher & Emma Bubola, "As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread", *The New York Times*, March 15, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[36] Judith Butler, "El capitalismo tiene sus límites", in *Sopa de Wuhan, Aislamiento Social Preventivo y Obligatorio (ASPO)*, 2020, p. 62.

[37] Quinn, Sandra Crouse & Supriya Kumar. "Health inequalities and infectious disease epidemics: a challenge for global health security", in *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science*, vol. 12, no.5, September-October 2014, p. 264.

[38] This resolution can be checked at <https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/74/274>

that a biological problem can be transformed into an economic, political and social one, and that risk mitigation and management occurs in a differentiated manner.

The paradoxes of covid-19 and the effect on the individual

In the third and final aspect of social experience presented in this note, we analyze the consequences that the acceleration in international policy trends and risk societies, caused by the covid-19 pandemic, has on individuals, who are involved parties on edge due to their conflicting identities and conflicting loyalties to the State, the transnational productive networks of capitalism and social identity groups (identity entrepreneurs). Bertrand Badie suggests thinking of the effects that globalization has on individuals as a triangle, in which each vertex represents a different type of actor—State, transnational networks and actors with identity rationality—which, by opposing interests and actions, exerts pressure on people.

Globalization plays a fundamental role in this type of interaction, since it facilitates the connectivity of the world as well as the flow of information and places the individual in a situation of unprecedented importance, with greater possibilities of agency in all social areas. The State, despite being a current and historically important figure in the international arena, is currently facing actors who present alternatives to its form of organization and interaction with individuals and communities. Transnational networks and actors with identity rationality—representing companies, international agencies and civil organizations, respectively—constitute two types of collective organization that offer



the individual two different options for interacting with other people and the social experience that surrounds him. This gives rise to the tensions that have been previously discussed, since the behavior of each aspect of globalization demands actions and loyalties on the part of the individual, who is forced to decide, in an often contradictory manner, through opposing demands and aspects. Depending on the role he or she decides to play, each person becomes capable of multiplying his or her identities, of belonging to one or another community and thus of influencing the configuration of the international environment.

With regard to the first force, one of the visible effects of the pandemic has been precisely the strengthening of the State. Despite the importance of global governance and international cooperation, each country had initially opted to respond differently, adopting measures ranging from suspending work and school activities, closing borders, imposing curfews and imposing a quarantine, to strict surveillance of the population, with the aim of preventing an increase in contagion. Let us remember that this is one of the powers of the State to deal with serious circumstances that may put the population at risk, the limits of which are the



justification, exceptionality and temporality of the measures. It should be noted that these trends are not new; they have simply become stronger and more visible.

Despite the fact that globalization and neoliberalism promote the idea of free movement of people, goods, services and ideas, for some years now there has been a return to the idea of physical borders as a condition for the restoration of national identity and political sovereignty.^[39] With the management of covid-19 being carried out by governments, the border is no longer only territorial, but reaches the level of the individual body; biopolitical control is exercised down to the household level—due to measures of home confinement—and is achieved through the use of technology. Because the coronavirus is spreading rapidly, and most of those who carry it are symptomless,

a decision has been taken to establish devices using mobile phones that identify which people have been infected and where they are located. These forms of surveillance are not new, but covid-19 “has legitimized and extended these state practices of bio-surveillance and digital monitoring by standardizing them and making them necessary”.^[40] Examples of the use of these measures can be found in South Korea, China and Singapore, countries where the population, instead of opposing and questioning them as restrictive, has sought protection in the state and its control measures, and has left the market and the structures of international order on a subordinate level.

Likewise, the message transmitted by the States on the covid-19 pandemic permeates in a differentiated manner among the individuals who make up societies. The massive and immediate communication that has resulted from the process of globalization provides individuals

[39] Paul B. Preciado, “Aprendiendo del virus”, *El País*, March 28, 2020, at https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/03/27/opinion/1585316952_026489.html (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[40] *Idem.*

with access to coarse and diverse information, although not always accurate or true, on which they base part of their decisions, both socially and personally. During the current health emergency caused by the new coronavirus, people have been immersed in a situation of uncertainty, caused by the propagation of contradictory information and false news by States and other political and social groups;⁴¹ thus, when confronted with arguments opposed to the recommendations of the scientific consensus (which, for example, mention home remedies to combat the virus and call into question the existence of the pathogen or even speak of “herd immunity”⁴² as a prevention strategy), part of the responsibility for containing the covid-19 pandemic seems to have fallen on the individual, whose actions have become essential not only to ensure their physical well-being, but even to protect the well-being of his entire community.

The political tactics that seek to direct the interpretations of this world health event and the information with which scientific groups try

to warn the world’s population are two factors that are found to prey on peoples’ minds in a discordant and pressing manner. At the same time, the forces that contend in the emergence of coronaviruses influence international political trends and the social structures of globalization, and therefore, also, pressure and shape the thoughts and actions of individuals in the globalized world.

Transnational economic networks also put pressure on individuals, as, during the covid-19 pandemic, they have been urged to help maintain the functioning of economic structures, through individual actions that protect consumption and production.⁴³ However, this happens in a differentiated way for individuals; the conditions of inequality previously mentioned make the most vulnerable members of societies yield to the interests of transnational networks, exposing their well-being and that of their communities, as economic necessity is imposed in the face of well-being and scientific recommendations.

Following Badie’s description of the forces of globalization, during the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, individuals have also been subjected to the pressure exerted by various “actors with identity rationality”, such as workers’ movements, which call for resistance to the economic interests of capitalist structures, or libertarian groups, which in the United States have demonstrated against the health distancing measures established in states such as California and

[41] Long before the outbreak of the virus, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) warned of the impact that political, technological, economic and social transformation has had on the way we exchange information in recent years and especially of the consequences of some disinformation campaigns. UN News, “Noticias falsas y desinformación, otra pandemia del coronavirus”, in ONU Noticias, April 16, 2020, at <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/04/1472922> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[42] A term used to refer to a critical mass of infection in low-risk populations, which would ultimately frustrate the transmission of the virus. Ian Bremmer, Cliff Kupchan & Scott Rosenstein, “Coronavirus and the Sweden Myth”, *The New York Times*, May 04, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/opinion/coronavirus-sweden-herd-immunity.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[43] This premise ties in with Beck’s arguments, in terms of the presence of risks and their mitigation depending on the decisions that individuals make.



Michigan.⁴⁴ Faced with the discordant messages and tensions of the main actors of globalization, people must weigh up the strength of the pressures they receive, decide upon their actions and try to mitigate the risks to which they are exposed.

Finally, during the pandemic, there has been a substantial increase in anxiety and depression;

drug and alcohol use appears to have increased, and loneliness and domestic violence have been unveiled. The world is suffering from the covid-19 pandemic, while people are facing the scourge of the virus and the plague of mental illness and psychological disorders.⁴⁵ Covid-19 has accelerated the critical trends that the globalized world has unleashed in the psyche of individuals; the tensions that people perceive and face did not surface when the disease spread—already burdening the minds of members of modern societies—increased and precipitated.

[44] Alexei Koseff & Trisha Thadani, “CHP Arrests Protesters in Sacramento Who Defy Shelter-in-Place Order to Demand California Reopen”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 01, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/politics/article/Protesters-in-Sacramento-and-San-Francisco-defy-15240894.php> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020); Ivan Pereira, “Protesters, Some Armed, Spill into Michigan Capitol Building Demanding End to Stay-at-Home Order”, *ABC News*, April 30, 2020, at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/michigan-rally-shelter-place-order-spills-capitol-building/story?id=70432928> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[45] Sandro Galea, Raina M. Merchant, Nicole Lurie, “The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing, The Need for Prevention and Early Intervention”, in *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, April 10, 2020, doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2020.1562 (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

Final considerations

After prolonging their quarantine periods longer than expected, several countries announced the beginning of the lifting of restrictions in early May, implementing the first attempts to return to daily activities, through the application of policies based on a growing—though perfectible—understanding of the disease. This gives rise to a process of social recalibration which, through trial and error,⁴⁶ will seek to find the balance between the well-being of the population and the consequences triggered by the pandemic, as continuing with the confinement and suspension of activities would further aggravate the tense economic situation that many countries are experiencing.⁴⁷

De-escalation is happening in a differentiated way and without any certainties. The knowledge that we have so far of the disease does not allow us to know whether or not its behavior will provoke a new crisis in the medical services of the countries that favor the return to the “new normality”. In the absence of more effective preventative measures than isolation and physical distancing, effective vaccines are urgently needed to reduce the enormous mortality rate associated with SARS-CoV-2 infection.

There are more than 100 candidate vaccines in development worldwide; at least eight have begun, or will soon begin, clinical trials.⁴⁸

A Phase 1 trial conducted in Wuhan, China evaluated the safety, tolerability and immunogenicity of a covid-19 vaccine vectored with recombinant adenovirus type 5 (Ad5). The trial was conducted in 108 participants—healthy adults aged 18 to 60—divided into three groups according to dose intensity for receiving an intramuscular injection of the vaccine. No serious adverse reactions were observed within 28 days after vaccination, so the vaccine was considered tolerable.⁴⁹ While these results paint a promising picture and suggest further research into the active ingredient Ad5-nCoV, the study leaders advise caution in interpreting the findings.⁵⁰

This analysis note showed—through an analytical framework built on the international politics of realism, Ulrich Beck’s risk societies and the consequences of Bertrand Badie’s globalized world—that the covid-19 pandemic has had economic, political and social effects worldwide. These are the result of tensions and trends which, although not caused by this event, have become more visible, accentuated and, above all, accelerated. It would be premature

[46] Max Fisher, “Reopenings Mark a New Phase: Global ‘Trial-and-Error’ Played Out in Lives”, *The New York Times*, May 07, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/world/europe/coronavirus-reopening-costs.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[47] Jason Horowitz, “Hope and Worry Mingle as Countries Relax Coronavirus Lockdowns”, *The New York Times*, May 04, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/world/europe/coronavirus-restrictions.html> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[48] Feng-Cai Zhu, Yu-Hua Li, Xu-Hua Guan *et al.*, “Safety, Tolerability, and Immunogenicity of a Recombinant Adenovirus Type-5 Vectored COVID-19 Vaccine: A Dose-escalation, Open-label, Non-randomized, First-in-human Trial”, *The Lancet*, May 22, 2020, at [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31208-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31208-3) (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

[49] *Idem*. The vectorized Ad5 COVID-19 vaccine was developed by the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology (Beijing, China) and CanSino Biologics (Tianjin, China).

[50] “Coronavirus Vaccine Human Tests Show Initial Promise”, in DW, May 22, 2020, at <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-vaccine-human-tests-show-initial-promise/a-53539067> (Consultation date: June 02, 2020).

to determine what all the effects of the covid-19 pandemic will be, as well as their depth; however, it is possible to predict that it will be a turning point that, in addition to all the challenges it brings with it, may offer scenarios that have not been considered until now.

In its next note of analysis on covid-19, the International Research Centre will offer an analysis of how these scenarios are shaped in international relations in search of different social, economic and political effects and outcomes.

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