



Global Empire? The Concept of a New World Order and the Power of the Liberal System

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Abstract

Increasingly, there are more and more discussions about the crisis of so-called liberal system or liberal democracy. At the same time, the threat posed by populism to democratic institutions is pointed out. There appear also questions about how to regain control over reality and who has the real power in the system of global capitalism. In the paper, I would like to refer to the concept of the “new world order” (most often understood as ordinary conspiracy theory), which is based on the conviction of a great change in global politics. This concept also applies to speculation about the real power, which is supposed to lie in the hands of unelected and unofficial bodies or institutions (such as the Bilderberg group). The paper puts forward the thesis that the concept of “new world order”, on the ground of political theory, should be confronted with the question of the impersonal power – the power of the system, which today is a liberal system, understood both as a set of economic or political solutions, as well as values underlying the dominance of the West. This “theoretical experiment” would let us to expand the field of view of political theory in conceptual as well as methodological, empirical and normative dimensions.

Keywords: the global, empire, new world order, power, liberalism, capitalist system

Introduction

Politics and Power in the Global Era

One of the changes that are recognized as distinctive for so-called “postmodernity” is the gradual getting away of politics – or rather what we perceive as politics – from power, as well as power (the actual one) from politics. Zygmunt Bauman described

this process as a separation and final divorce of power and politics – “a pair from which (from the birth of a modern state until quite recent times) it was expected that they will share their lives in a common home, which was to be the nation-state” (Bauman, 2007, p. 8). However, in the so-called “global era” of economization and deregulation and constant change, “traditional”, hard politics is seen as being replaced by policy and management. In line with that, the processes of rising the unelected bodies as well as progressing separation of powers are getting stronger, even if their subjects are more and more connected (Vilbert, 2007). With the separation of politics and power, the question of political order itself appears. Next, we have to face the crisis of mediation structures that subscribes not only to the crisis of democracy and representation, but to the logic of power in general. In this paper, I would like to refer to the concept of the “new world order” (most often understood as an ordinary conspiracy theory), which is based on the conviction of a great change in global politics. This concept also applies to speculations about the real (actual) power, which is supposed to lie in the hands of unelected and unofficial bodies or institutions, like e.g. central banks or financial agencies (Tucker, 2018) or informal networks and meetings of the “global elite”, such as in the case of the Bilderberg group. The paper puts forward the thesis that the concept of the “new world order” on the ground of political theory should be confronted with the question of the impersonal power – the power of the system, which today is the liberal system, understood both as a set of economic or political solutions, as well as values underlying the dominance of the West. This “theoretical experiment” would let us to expand the field of view of political theory in conceptual as well as methodological, empirical and normative dimensions.

On the ground of political theory, these all social changes are seen as coming in line with fading away of the “traditional” hierarchies of the modern era and previous times as well. That is often associated with the disappearance of modern approach to power (“modern” in terms of the modern era). This approach determined the construction of e.g. the nation-state. As one of scholars indicates, for the last one decisive was “the transcendental and constitutional concept *potere* or *pouvoir*” (Colas, 2008, p. 214) as in the political theory of Hobbes; this concept in the 17th century displaced Spinoza’s views “of power as immanent and constitutive: *potentia* or *puissance* (Ibidem). Today, the latter are coming back, although it is not sure yet; uncertainty in context of relations between politics and power as well as of internal logic of each of them makes us feel that we live in the times of the *Interregnum*, and, hence, the period of transition. This feeling can accompany everyone because mentioned changes concern the status of an individual, which can be a source of both opportunities and threats. This is because they strongly apply to the process of acquiring, shaping and enforcing power; shaping political order as immanent means e.g. that control is direct and that all people are subjects to the global system with no mediators who would represent their interest and protect them; in this context, there arises a question about possible ways of democratizing the existing system, as well as about the new concepts of citizenship.

The status of non-state actors and their impact on the architecture of the entire system is also important as they actions and interest often put the nation-state's sovereignty into question. Inevitable to consider is the future of Western dominance and its impact on global system and ideas of how to manage it. In this context, there appears issue of possibility of political globalization understood as an efficient political structure that would have a global scope and that would be able to control globalization processes in order to use the opportunities that they create and (at the same time eliminate) threats. In the case of reflection on this subject, there are often questions about the possibility of establishing one "world-state", global leadership and competition for it (between USA and China) or even "planetary awareness" (Rifkin, 2010), that would create a global society caring for its planet. Nevertheless, at now we have to face another challenge – the *Interregnum*, and politics and power within it. It is especially important because "Historians have debated for centuries who rules in periods of interregnum and how the bases of new institutions are constructed, but one thing that is clear is that there is never a vacuum of power" (Hardt, Negri, 2004, p. 162). Therefore, it is inevitable to look at this picture of politics and power that in fact has no framework; and that creates a "global empire" of politics and power during the times of transition, both in political practice and in theoretical considerations.

The Global Empire and its Faces

Alejandro Colas notes that "the Romans took over the term *oikumene* (the known world) from the Greeks to express the universalist ambition of their government" (Colas, 2008, p. 15). What is important, the very same "imperial organization of the political space always assumes the absence of permanent excluding borders" (Ibidem, p. 16), in contrast to the nation-state. Can the modern world, as a subject to the processes of globalization, be called a "global *oikumene*"? Most often, *oikumene* is defined as a sphere (or space) of ">>communication of its inhabitants<<" (Ibidem, p. 46). *Oikumene* can be expanded, broadening the reach of the "known world" of the chosen civilization; such "enlargement" was made both by the Roman Empire and the medieval *Respublica Christiana* (Ibidem). Today, in fact, *oikumene* is created by the entire world, not only because of the growing populations and contacts between them, but also because of the recognition of all humans as people in political and cultural contexts (of course, it concerns such recognition from the side of the West), as it is defined in adopted principles of human rights.

Ideas of the "global *oikumene*" can be associated with the concept of "Empire" created by Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri. This approach describes the contemporary political and social world as "boundless and universal" and the power within it as decentralized and ubiquitous (Ibidem, p. 199). This concept is rooted in the conviction that "old-fashioned imperialism, territorial [...] has disappeared and has been replaced by a new form of global rule: Empire, which in its work of subordinating the entire population of the capital's power universe is boundless and universal"

(Ibidem). The Empire is global by definition; even if we get used to think of empire in terms of a specific territorial organization, we have to acknowledge the (in fact) trans-border as well as “above-borders” nature of the Empire that makes its power so overwhelming (the control concerns not territories but directly people; the decisions, taking by governments or democratic elections are omitted) and abstract (who is thinking about the “global level” of power in day-to-day activities?) at same time.

According to the authors themselves, “In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt, Negri, 2000, XII). In their recognition in the 1970’s – at the very moment in which Immanuel Wallerstein places the beginning of the global crisis of capitalism – a process of “transition from modern imperialism to the postmodern world of the Empire” (Colas, 2008, p. 214) has started. Distinctive features of this structure are supranational, post-imperialist “figures of power”, inscribed into the “imperial concept of law” (Ibidem); the never-ending global state of emergency (as in the works of Carl Schmitt); and the transition from norm of absolute sovereignty to the right of intervention (Hardt, Negri, 2000, pp. 34-38), which results from the supranational codification of law. In this concept, the boundary between the public and the private has been irreversibly exceeded and annihilated, as well as the divisions between the national and the international, between “friends” and “foes”.

The shift of human activity “upwards” and “aside” towards the Empire, is cutting through and destroying hierarchies and divisions that has existed before the rise of the Empire (Colas, 2008, p. 215) so strongly that “there is no outside” (Hardt, Negri, 2000, p. 194, pp. 188-189) anymore, and that the actual existing exclusion takes the form of “differential inclusion” (Ibidem, p. 194). These transformations make the space of the sovereignty of empire smooth – on this smooth space of Empire there is no precise center of power. It is everywhere and nowhere at the same time; “Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a non-place” (Ibidem, p. 190). All spheres of human and social life are being interconnected; capital system of economy affects even the human body. The real tool of subordinating humans by “power of capitalism” have become the “increasing use (and abuse) of information and communication technologies, the more flexible production chains and the growing shares of >>the third sector<< in the operation of labor” (Colas, 2008, p. 215). This perfectly serves the biopower which means the subordination of human nature under the control of the Empire; its mechanisms “penetrate more and more numerous dimensions of our lives” (just like in the concept of Michel Foucault) (Ibidem, s. 216). Can anyone or anything defy such power? The authors argue that yes – the side effect of “post-modern globalization” is not only the domination and reproduction of the capital, but also “the emergence of a new global subjectivity, consonant with the immanent and decentralized forms of imperial power” (Ibidem, p. 217). This subjectivity is created by the “multitude”, which replaced “the people” as a notion of the previous age (Ibidem). However, it is

also the concept of the class in terms of social struggle and division of labor (Hardt, Negri, 2004, p. 103). Like the Empire, the Multitude is omnipresent; it acts directly and antagonistic (Colas, 2008, p. 217). The fight with the Empire continues uninterrupted and spontaneously, without a plan; there is no an organized movement or a specific strategy. However, the Multitude, does not need it, because the Empire cannot be defeated in the “traditional” way; “it is the Empire that seems to rule the world, but the multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude – as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labor that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living” (Hardt, Negri, 2000, p. 62). The Empire is powerful and omnipresent like the “new Leviathan”, but indeed serves only to satisfy the Multitude needs; it is located above the Multitude, but, in fact, it is also used (and abused) by it (Ibidem, pp. 61-62). The Empire in the concept of Hardt and Negri seems to be the mechanism of power of the global system (Ibidem, p. 14); a system that was not only created due to the processes of globalization, but which develops and expands its rule due to its paradoxes.

This concept of the global Empire of capitalism is worth clashing with the definition of empire as a political organization in general. As A. Colas points out, “the imperial organization of the political space always implies the absence of permanent exempting borders” (Colas, 2008, p. 16) as opposed to the nation-state. What is more, various forms of government can appear both within the empire and the nation-state. But, on the other hand, “Empire means the articulation of power, which sets a goal – even if it does not always achieve it – control over its effects. In contrast to hegemony or global supremacy, empire is a form of power that implies the possibility of imposing desirable socio-economic or political consequences, in the end – by means of force” (Ibidem). The practical goal is to control and regulate the behavior of subordinated subjects; deliberate actions and decision making in favor of the empire without consulting or discussing are its routine. Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, describing the differences between the nation-state and the empire, indicate that the state is a “permanent political relationship which is based directly on the formal authority of issuing orders to subjects under its rule. The empire, on the other hand, is understood as a dominance, the essence of which is that it constantly strives to subjugate the unsubordinated” (Beck, Grande, 2009, p. 106). Moreover, in contrast to the rules enforced within the state, the subjects of the empire can formally maintain partial independence. Thus, according to Colas, empires are based and rely mostly on expansion and conquest. In turn, they offer a third quality – the order (Colas, 2008, p. 18) that have its own sense and meaning like the sense of beauty (Ibidem).

Globalization and the Rise of the New World Order

Does the “power of globalization” fulfill such conditions? Or maybe we should consider here famous (or infamous) mechanisms of global governance? Or even something else? It’s not easy to answer such questions as this is not fully clear what

the globalization is indeed. It can be conceptualized and understood in various ways and contexts, depending on the chosen sphere of human activity. For instance, David Held sees globalization as a growing interdependence, both in economic and social issues. In this case, globalization makes the interdependence between the states narrowing; the mechanism to coordinate it is the global governance (Held, McGrew, 2002). Another concept, on the other hand, emphasizes the “compression of time and space”. In this approach we can find research and considerations of how the globalization is changing the role of geographical space (and geography as discipline itself), for the issues of economy, management and development (like in the works by David Harvey) (Harvey, 2001) as well as observations and reflections about the changes of identity and condition of the individual due to acceleration of life (Giddens, 2001). In this context, it is important also that even the most personal and private spheres of human life are subject to “internal” globalization, mainly due to digital revolution (that is connected to the next approach which considers globalization in terms of new technologies, especially Internet; Manuel Castells devoted his works to this issue) (Castells 2011) (Castells, 2013).

On the other hand, Ulrich Beck chooses the standpoint that globalization has become the source of “historical transformation”, which means that the “difference between the national and the international” should be abolished (Beck, 2005, p. 11). This transformation, of course, affects the sovereignty as a concept of (formal) power, enabling the actual power to “shift” from states to non-state and supranational actors (like the European Union, but also e.g. international financial institutions) as well as between states themselves (what puts into question the principle of equality of states within the international system) (Ruszkowski, 2018, p. 83-110). However, this “shift of power” is related not only to the “globalization” of policy and politics, resulting in losing the control over the decision-making processes, but also to the crisis of the nation-state itself, which indicates the necessity to look for new sources of politics and, at same time, to discover (in terms of scientific research) the actual stages of politics as we have it today. This is especially important because – as U. Beck put it – these all shifts and crises are the result of changing the rules of the global game itself; the political game that is going on at now is not an “ordinary” game for power, but is the game for the meta-power, so for the power of establishing the rules that will determine all the games in future when the new world order will be clear (Beck, 2005, p. 86).

However, what if the current chaos is not a period of transition, but in fact a new order, only not yet fully established and acknowledged? As it was mentioned, the main thing is now that the logic of power is changing; it should be noted that this concerns also its construction. In this context order is seen rather as the “state of affairs” than “hard frames” that determine the range of possible actions of political actors (of course, “state of affairs” can produce “hard frames” for future as well as convert into them). This problem is often associated with the concept of projected so-called “new world order” (NWO) that raises questions about the mechanisms of the real power in

the world, its legitimacy and actors who hold it (Slaughter, 2004). In fact, this phrase became a catchword, identified with conspiracy theories that try to explain the backstage and modes of power not only at the beginning of 21st century, but also in previous decades (Epperson, 1990) (Redfern, 2017). This concerns e.g. the conviction that we are ruled by freemasonry (mainly – the association of *Illuminati*) or (and) by a closed group of so-called “global elite” (this is often identified with Bilderberg group) (Rivera, 1997) that is trying to subordinate all the people by the means of surveillance, media influence and illusion of comfortable life (Redfern, 2017). In context of conspiracy theories, such endeavor seems possible to accomplish because the “global elite” is like the embodiment of the Empire in practice – it willingly uses the biopower to control the people through their lifestyles, habits and addictions (of course, this concerns almost only the West – especially people who live in big cities) or secret agreements (mainly in the field of international trade and finance), established by and between governments with no social legitimacy or even public debate. The last issue is often associate with mechanism of global governance which gather the interests of governments with activity of international institutions, agencies and other bodies as well as other non-state actors (private sector and NGOs) (Slaughter 2004); in context of the NWO theories, global governance can be interpreted as a “mask” for the real competition for power, far away from the eyes of citizens. What is interesting, some scholars see also the international law as a mask for real interests of states (Goldsmith, Posner, 2005, p. 3). If the actual (not formal) actors of global politics would gain the whole power over the world, the New World Order would be fulfilled.

Of course, the thing is not so easy to consider as the individual – paradoxically – in some cases get benefits from such a state of affairs. It is because of e.g. the role of the Internet; as we participate in the outcomes of digital revolution, we can also – even if the Internet is a mode of surveillance – try to gain some power to affect the world order. The best example are here the hackers groups, non-governmental organizations and social (grassroots) movements. For instance, the role of *Anonymous* group certainly should be taken into account as well as other networks, emerging through the Internet platforms and forums (Williams, 2008). What is important, that also can be seen as predicted by some authors – as Hardt and Negri put it, “The development of communications networks has an organic relationship to the emergence of the new world order – it is, in other words, effect and cause, product and producer” (Hardt, Negri, 2000, p. 32). Also, the individual can make an impact on world order, contesting its rules – e.g. like in the case of Edward Snowden. Therefore, the power of the global system is not so impersonal (“subjectless”) as it may seem – even from the perspective of an ordinary citizen.

However, if we take the NWO concepts and scenarios seriously, the thing of “novelty” of this project is not so obvious. Would such an order be really new? To find an answer to this question, it will be helpful to sketch another queries. Who is a member of “global elite” in terms of nationality, race and cultural affiliation? Where the leading

institutions are located, where the crucial meetings are taking place? It is not difficult to notice that even conspiracy theories are concerning mainly the role of the West and position of Western (mainly American) people in structures of global institutions. And, indeed, the point is here (although it is changing due to increasing influence of China, both in emerging markets and countries of the “old” West, especially in Australia) (Hamilton, 2018). The non-ending impact of Western people is often called “global apartheid” (Alexander, 1996). It is due to the dominance of the West in the structures of global governance, establishing them by the Western states and their geographical location within the West; the “global apartheid” itself means that taking the most important decisions on a global scale is dominated by a certain group that can be distinguished on the basis of specific criteria. In context of global political, economic or social matters and controversies, such group are the richest Western states (and non-state actors and institutions established in the West as well). “Global apartheid” also manifests itself in social inequalities on a global scale. This concept is also connected with the issue of “minority government” (minoritarianism), not only within one society, but at the global level, despite existing countries and cultural differences (Robinson, 2010). But is it really surprising? The “global apartheid” is, in fact is an internal social and economic system that lets the Empire live. Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri indicate that at the beginning of 21st century, “we can see emerging a new topography of exploitation and economic hierarchies the lines of which run above and below national boundaries. We are living in a system of global apartheid. We should be clear, however, that apartheid is not simply a system of exclusion, as if subordinated populations were simply cut off, worthless, and disposable. In the global Empire today, as it was before in South Africa, apartheid is a productive system of hierarchical inclusion that perpetuates the wealth of the few through the labor and poverty of the many” (Hardt, Negri, 2004, pp. 166-167). The scarcity and misery are also the subjects of globalization (Chossudovsky, 2003). The Empire clashes with the Multitude as the power clashes with labor and poverty. As we can see, the New World Order, if it was, it would not be indeed so new.

Conclusions

Theoretical and Empirical Research on Global System, and its Conditions

But can the (neo)liberal capitalist system have really such a status as in the concept of Hardt and Negri? And – what is connected to this matter on a theoretical level – can we find any other definition or concept of power that would describe it without indicating the actor (actors) to whom this power would be attached? Can the notion of empire be used to research on impersonal power, even though we most often associate the empire with the person of the emperor? The ideas of Hardt and Negri as well as of e.g. M. Foucault, U. Beck or other authors indicate that we are aware of what is changing in the world and what the consequences it can produce, but also that we are still looking for the answer that would be precise enough to be applied in research as a theoretic approach or a theory itself. Of course, such a theory needs to be able to

cover a really wide scope issues, taking into account complexity of global integration and disintegration processes. Moreover, it will be required to transcend the “traditional” boundaries of scientific disciplines as the global changes are proceeding in various spheres; this, of course, creates a strong challenge to epistemology. The next is the matter of ontology – such a theory should respond creatively to the challenge of so-called “level of analysis” that in such case certainly cannot be only “global”. It is because we need to consider not only more things that are “global” together on the global level as it is (so issues like migrations, sustainability, human rights, etc.) but also to think of them in a cross-level manner that would make it possible to check and examine how the processes of “global transformation” (so not only of globalization but also of fragmentation in regions that had been well integrated before) changed these all spheres of human activity as well as – in more general context – the structures of politics and power. Of course, this also includes question on how these new structures are affecting human existence and actions from the level of the individual to the level of the global. Last but not least is the problem of methodology that binds together the challenges of epistemology and ontology. Which methods we can use to conduct research in such a framework? Should we examine each issue or each level separately or make a research in a holistic manner? In terms of more general, rather meta-theoretical or philosophical than empirical considerations there appears a question how to think of these transformative changes in a cross-paradigmatic and cross-level way.

Of course, all the concepts that I mentioned above are important steps, taken be their authors to understand and to name phenomenas and processes that are taking place around. Therefore, as I think, they are inevitable to be referred to and to be recognized as the base for further reflection. For example, they are sensitizing us not only to the issue of economic subordination and coercion of “living in the system”, but also to the risk of violence – the “systemic power” (or, maybe, “systemic authority” one day) in practice is being exercised not only by supranational institutions or organizations, but also by governments and private actors. The development of modern technologies facilitated the surveillance and deprivation of privacy of citizens and, therefore, the logic of the “impersonal power” started to be favored. What is important, at the same time new technologies can be used by specific networks, groups or individuals for specific purposes, even for strictly personal purposes. The observed dispersion of political and economic power does not protect us from increasing control. Moreover, the power over society in practice manifests itself in controlling each individual by him/herself. This is the result of widespread consumerism (in the West) that makes us addicted to material goods of low quality as well as to our habits and comforts. It concerns also rising debts that become a mechanism of disciplining both individuals and entire societies. Could the power of the global Empire – and, hence, the empire of neoliberal capitalism – resemble a totalitarian system? The considerations of Hardt and Negri, prompt that we live in a globalized and permanent state of emergency – or even the “global state of war” (Hardt, Negri, 2004, pp. 12-18) that seems to be a never-

ending framework for our activities and endeavors. The supranational codification of law as well as the reformulation of the role of space (so, also, territory in political terms) and the way we perceive it are serving to the maintenance of the state of emergency even in our heads.

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