

International Relations Theories & COVID19- Pandemic (A Comparative Study)

Hakem Ghasemi ¹ , Aram Hassanazad ² 

1. Associate Professor, Department of Social Science, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran

2. M.A, Department of Social Science, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran

(* - Corresponding Author Email: aaramhasanazad@gmail.com)

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Abstract

COVID-19 has brought about a more nuanced view in which natural phenomena, such as disease, influence international relations. International relations theories tend to analyze current events worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic, as one of these events that has affected the political dimension of countries, is analyzed within four main international relations theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, and world system theory). In these theories we argue that international relations theories are offer informed predictions as to how states (what realists focus on it), organizations (what liberalism focus on it), structure and agent (what constructivism focus on it) and world system (what world system theory focus on it) would respond to the pandemic and what is their solution to this problem in these problem-solving theories.

Keywords

COVID-19, International Relations theory, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, World system theory.

Introduction

The world population is facing an unprecedented challenge brought about by the outbreak of the virus known as 'Coronavirus' (COVID-19). It is believed to have first emerged in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, on January 12, 2020, before spreading worldwide (Idris, 2021, p. 23). The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest in the globalized world. As the coronavirus spreads globally and disrupts the world's political, economic, and social fabric, several forces that have gained momentum and strength during

the last decade are now converging as a formidable force during the pandemic. Focusing on resolving international conflicts and problems and on achieving cooperation and lasting peace in International Relations through interdependence is essential. In the discipline of international relations, there are contending general theories or theoretical perspectives.

COVID-19 has brought about a more nuanced view in which natural phenomena, such as disease, influence international relations. Unlike conventional warfare, coronavirus is a unique, faceless, non-discriminatory war; its movement is not governed by conventions or protocol, except maybe WHO regulations, nor does it seek to take over government or to consolidate any mineral wealth. In fact, it is ruthless, fleet-footed, and metaphorically a ruthlessly effective army.

IR theory cannot help solve any of the current problems related to the global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). What IR theory can do, however, is offer informed predictions about how states will react to crises, and it can help us understand why states react the way they do – principally, in this case, via realism. As realists would expect, when crises hit, it is not international organizations, not even the World Health Organization (WHO) or NGOs, that citizens turn to first. It is their own respective governments that citizens ask to take the necessary actions to protect them from the threat and to provide for relief efforts. In the absence of a global authority governing international relations, the nation-state is proving once more to be the leading actor in global politics (Kliem, 2020, p. 1).

While Liberals in international relations theory follow an optimistic ‘glass-half-full’ perspective on the world stage, humanity is believed to believe in cooperation. Moreover, states when the fates of states are bound together, liberals claim, they must cooperate or pay a very high price. Moreover, constructivist theory sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed. This view concerns the nature of reality and knowledge, also called ontology and epistemology in research language. World-systems theory has influenced many areas of contemporary social science. The times when epidemic diseases disrupt or interrupt the social order are also when the search for new political beginnings intensifies (Aydemir, 2021, p. 109). It was elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein, based on a wide study of contemporary history and a detailed critique of global capitalism. The research method in this paper is qualitative, and the approach is descriptive-analytical, with a comparative study of the COVID-19 pandemic across international relations theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, world-system theory).

1. IR theories

Studies in International Relations (IR) are organized into two or three schools. For example, it can be divided into three categories: “traditional theories, global society theories, and neo-Marxist theories”. Barry Buzan identified the theories of international relations as “conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism”. Indeed, realism, liberalism, and Marxism are the fundamental divisions common across different studies. On the other hand, Shimko used the basic division of realism and liberalism and further elaborated it into Machiavellianism, Grotianism, and Kantianism. As understood from the classifications and conceptualizations, they all set forth the different aspects of similar approaches. For example, the concepts of traditional classic theories, realism, and conservatism are used to explain the realist approach’s basic arguments. Similarly, the theories of global society, pluralism, and liberalism can be named under pluralism or liberalism. They can also be named under Kantianism, Grotianism, communitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and functionalism. The third group, which is clas-

sified as neo-Marxist, globalist, and radical, can be grouped with the concepts of Third World theories, Neo-Marxist theories, structuralist theories, and dependency theories (Ari, 2018, p. 3).

IR scholars are often criticized for engaging in what seems a purely academic exercise, centered on an obsession with theory and abstract debates. Furthermore, true enough, IR theory is ill-suited to providing pre-packaged solutions to current problems, but many scholars will argue that that is not their business. IR theory can provide insights into international behavior. It may provide informed predictions about how international affairs may evolve and how states may react to shocks, but it cannot prescribe a course of action. Moreover, IR theory is not, in fact, a homogeneous, coherent 'theory', but a diverse set of theories and approaches that examine different problems and phenomena in world affairs from different ontological and epistemological positions. No one theory can provide a comprehensive interpretation or predictions of world politics. However, taken together, these theories can help decision makers and the public fill the gaps in the puzzle we call 'International Relations' (Ghincea, 2020)

2. COVID-19 and Its International Impacts

The emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, marked one of the most consequential events of the early twenty-first century. It profoundly reshaped modern life, affecting global trade, economic systems, and international relations. COVID-19 rapidly escalated into a global public health crisis, resulting in approximately 400 million confirmed infections and more than five million deaths worldwide. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially designated the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). In an effort to contain the spread, governments around the world adopted non-pharmaceutical interventions such as lockdowns and travel restrictions, which, in turn, led to massive unemployment and economic downturns. From China's initial reluctance to cooperate with WHO experts to the former U.S. administration's decision to suspend WHO funding, the overall global response was often fragmented and insufficiently coordinated (Pattanshetty, 2022, p. 21). The emergence of COVID-19 had a profound impact on international relations, exposing both the strengths and weaknesses of global cooperation. The early stages of the pandemic revealed tensions among major powers, as China initially hesitated to share critical information and collaborate with World Health Organization (WHO) experts. This lack of transparency contributed to growing mistrust between nations. Additionally, the former U.S. administration's decision to suspend funding to the WHO further deepened divisions within the international community, highlighting the politicization of global health governance. The fragmented and poorly coordinated global response to the pandemic demonstrated how fragile international solidarity could be when confronted with a crisis of this magnitude. COVID-19 ultimately reshaped diplomatic priorities, underscoring the urgent need for stronger global health diplomacy and more resilient international cooperation mechanisms (Mngomezulu, 2020, p. 124). COVID-19 has significantly affected human life and global systems, leading to severe economic disruptions, mass displacement, and a rise in poverty levels worldwide. The pandemic also caused labor and essential raw material shortages, limiting vaccine production and distribution. COVID-19 can enter the human body through various pathways, such as the respiratory system, eyes, and even through droplets that can travel considerable distances. Despite clear preventive measures, many individuals neglected safety protocols or refused vaccination, decisions that cost millions of lives. Preventive actions such as regular handwashing for at least 20 seconds, wearing masks, and maintaining hygiene

remain crucial. Although vaccines are not entirely effective against every variant, they have proven to be highly safe and substantially reduce severe illness and death. The virus continues to mutate, with specific variants, such as Delta, being far more infectious and dangerous. Ensuring strict safety standards during vaccine development and maintaining personal protective practices are essential for global health protection (Valmiki, 2022, p. 803).

2-1. Realism & COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a substantive crisis for world politics and an epistemological crisis for international relations theory, particularly the dominant tradition of international realism. Realism – stripped to its minimalist, modernist, structural essentials in the form of what Max Weber called an ideal type – implies that states are exclusively important in world politics. Other actors may exist, but they represent little beyond noise or an error in the equation. States guide their behavior by national interest defined in terms of power, particularly military power. These are the structural requirements for survival in an anarchic, hostile world and the epistemological foundations of the national security state. Realism claims that states can either follow the rules, become failed states, or cease to exist (Hariman, 2020, p. 1).

2-1-1. Realism Principles

Among mainstream theories of international relations, Realism, or political realism, is a view of international politics that emphasizes its competitive and conflictual aspects. It is usually contrasted with idealism or liberalism, which tends to emphasize cooperation. Realists consider the principal actors in the international arena to be states, which are concerned with their own security, pursue their own national interests, and struggle for power. The downside of the realists' emphasis on power and self-interest is often their skepticism about the relevance of ethical norms to relations among states. National politics is the realm of authority and law, whereas international politics, they sometimes claim, is a sphere without justice, characterized by active or potential conflict among states (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017, p. 1).

Several core realist assumptions inform the forecast's assessment. The most significant of these are that 'great powers', in particular the U.S. and China, but also Russia, shape the international order and that the interactions between them determine the prospects for global peace and stability. The world of the forecast is one in which the balance of power—understood as the Waltzian conception of a system-determined distribution of power among dominant states (Ruth, 2020, p. 1)—is central.

This current crisis reinforces several key aspects of realist theory. Firstly, that nation-states are by far the largest actors when it comes to responding to global emergencies. The opposite viewpoint is often expressed by experts and commentators on globalization who say that non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, international terrorists, global markets, and others are undermining the sovereignty of states and pushing the state toward decreasing relevance (Nicholson, 2020)

2-1-2. Realism and International Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge calling for a global response. However, the actual responses of states, while exhibiting considerable international cooperation, are predominantly competitive and self-centered. Realism is generally pessimistic about the prospects for cooperation and

mutual support among states. It would immediately predict the national self-help and “us first” mentality that characterizes the global management of COVID-19 and its consequences. Travel and entry bans, international scapegoating, great power competition, and pharmaceutical protectionism are ubiquitous (Basrur, 2020, 1, 3).

The realist approach to international politics and foreign policy devotes little, if any, systematic attention to the problem of potential pandemics such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Like all theoretical frameworks, realism is inherently limited in scope: it focuses primarily on the constraining effects of international anarchy, the reasons great powers compete for advantage, and the enduring obstacles to effective cooperation among states. As a result, it has relatively little to say about interspecies viral transmission, epidemiology, or public health best practices, and it does not provide guidance on practical questions such as whether individuals should begin working from home. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, realism can still offer valuable insights into some of the political and strategic issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic (Walt, 2020).

Stephan Walt, as a realist scholar of international relations, states that: “The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism. Governments of all types will adopt emergency measures to manage the crisis, and many will be loath to relinquish these new powers when the crisis is over. What will not change is the fundamentally conflictive nature of world politics. Previous plagues—including the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919—did not end great-power rivalry nor usher in a new era of global cooperation. Neither will COVID-19. We will see a further retreat from hyper-globalization, as citizens look to national governments to protect them and as states and firms seek to reduce future vulnerabilities. In short, COVID-19 will create a world that is less open, less prosperous, and less free. It did not have to be this way, but the combination of a deadly virus, inadequate planning, and incompetent leadership has placed humanity on a new and worrisome path. Stephen M Walt, ‘A World Less Open, Prosperous, and Free’ in ‘How the World Will Look after the Coronavirus Pandemic’ (Allen: 2020).

2-1-3. States and The COVID-19 Pandemic

Across the world, states have shifted their international activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. For instance, many governments have offered international aid, closed their borders, and given assistance to key export industries. For sub-state regions, the crisis has also affected their international relations (Ulises, 2020, p. 1). The coronavirus crisis is rattling 19 highly indebted European nations and exposing a potentially fatal lack of communitarian spirit within the EU. European countries have applied a “me-first” response, imposed export bans on vital medical equipment, and put up border controls that have left European citizens stranded. EU members failed to give desperately needed medical assistance and supplies to Italy during the outbreak. The UN, meanwhile, has performed no genuinely helpful service whatsoever during the global crisis (Musmar, 2020, p. 31).

Realists also point out that international institutions do not enable states to concentrate on greater long-term gains for everyone. Instead, international anarchy forces states to treat international organizations and institutions essentially like the international system itself: as an arena for zero-sum competition. Indeed, as realism predicts, the World Health Organization (WHO) has become highly politicized. (Basrur, 2020, 4). For instance, rather than cooperate on a joint plan to share expertise and increase the global availability of medical equipment, states have imposed export bans, engaged in equipment poaching, and engaged in beggar-thy-neighbor bidding wars. Rather than cooperate to develop a vac-

cine together, 'vaccine nationalism' has taken place, with countries unilaterally pursuing independent research programs, even attempting to capture research teams from other countries (Owen, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 is expected to be very severe and drastic, as the world still awaits an Anti-Virus. There was a worldwide lockdown when this virus began spreading at an alarming rate. Many governments have initiated nationwide lockdowns in order to prevent its spread; however, it is still spreading rapidly, even though China, where it initially emerged, has been far more successful in preventing its further spread and has contained it very well. More than 100 countries had closed their borders. The world economy had surely taken a big hit, and some of the most affected sectors were the service sector, food and hospitality sectors, import and export, and the aviation industry. (Muzaffer, 2020, p. 793).

3. Liberalism & COVID-19 Pandemic

Liberals state that, as the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, the need for international cooperation to address the twin health and economic crises has been highlighted. While much is made of the World Health Organization's failings, other international bodies have fared no better. In particular, the G20 – which styles itself as the "premier forum for international economic cooperation" – has been largely absent. Comprising the world's 20 largest economies, the G20 should be the natural forum for devising and steering the global response to the twin crises (Chodor, 2020).

3-1. Liberalism Principles

Liberalism, as it emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, was driven by the belief that wars and commerce were incompatible. The devastation of World War I and its aftermath set the stage for liberal idealism to become the forefront paradigm in rethinking how the world ought to be rearranged. The current liberal international order rests upon at least three crucial foundations: (1) the liberal ideology that emphasizes democratic values and norms; (2) the principle of multilateralism, which emphasizes international cooperation and management of international affairs through multilateral institutions; and (3) a group of defenders with common goals and shared commitment to preserve liberal values, norms, principles, and institutions (Huang, 2020, p. 2). The global interconnectivity among states is the key feature of the liberal viewpoint. Liberal theorists opposed Realism's 'zero-sum' perspective with a rigid assertion of a 'non-zero-sum' view of global politics and the international sphere. These have effectively recognized operating standards and endorse a consistent approach to the rule of law amongst contributing states (Aybet, 2020, p. 500).

Liberalism is characterized by the progressive growth of international institutions, regimes, and rules designed to collectively manage, regulate, and govern multiple aspects of world affairs, from security to economics to cultural heritage to the environment. Second, the liberal order is marked by the spread of capitalist modes of production and accelerating processes of economic globalization. These are mostly organized around neo-liberal logics, which require a scaling back of the state and thrive on the (relatively) free movement of resources, goods, finance, and people worldwide (Bettiza, 2020).

3-1-1. Liberalism and International Issues

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease (WHO, 2010). Because of poor natural immunity, a newly emerging disease may cause rapid spread across communities and countries (Azmi, 2020, p. 91). Undoubtedly, COVID-19, as an international issue first and foremost, constitutes a ferocious pandem-

ic and a human tragedy that swept across the globe, resulting in a massive health crisis, disproportionate social order, and colossal economic loss. It has created a substantial negative impact on the global economy, prompting governments, firms, and individuals to scramble for adjustments. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has distorted the world's operating assumptions, revealing the absolute lack of resilience of the dominant economic model to respond to unplanned shocks and crises. It has exposed the weakness of the over-centralization of complex global supply and production chains and the fragility of global economies, whilst highlighting weak links across industry (Mohammad, 2020, p. 3). States are strategically interdependent; as a result, the actions of any one actor can affect the strategic calculations of another (Noori, 2020, p. 160).

COVID-19 is often seen as yet another nail in the coffin of the liberal international order. The current Covid-19 crisis presents a clear test case to take stock of the current state of the liberal international order (Debre, 2020, p. 15). The United States has sought to corner scarce medical supplies, European states have failed to coordinate policy, and China and the United States are squabbling over responsibility (Jiangtao, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for multilateralism. Trying to cope with the immediate, devastating effects of the virus, nations have turned to imposing unprecedented executive measures, including border closures. However, a virus knows no borders. All countries are affected. We must remain united in our shared humanity. The fight against this global pandemic, which is taking so many lives and challenging our societies, requires greater international cooperation and worldwide solidarity (Drian, 2020).

3-1-2. Cooperation In the Pandemic Era

The global economy, for instance, is a complex network of trade, finance, and manufacturing that places a premium on cooperation. From this perspective, states must cooperate to stem pandemics that flow seamlessly across the world and impose high costs on all societies. They must share knowledge and material resources to counter a scourge that harms them all. They certainly do so, for example, in US-led efforts to ensure the reliable availability of equipment to combat pandemics. However, they do not cooperate consistently. There has been insufficient cooperation in providing support to countries with weaker states that are unable to control the spread of the disease on their own effectively. The \$8 billion raised by the EU-led global health pledging conference on May 4, 2020, has—credit some countries prepared to act cooperatively—gone some way to rectifying this, as has the replenishment of GAVI (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization). However, while the principle of supporting each other was accepted, the financing raised is only a fraction of what is needed.² And rather than strengthen the World Health Organization (WHO), the international institution responsible for coordinating the global response to the virus, there have been systematic attempts to undermine and delegitimize it (Brown, 2020, p. 67).

The countries pledged to coordinate research efforts, increase the availability of medical equipment; mobilize “the full range” of policy instruments, including monetary and fiscal measures as well as targeted actions, to support workers, companies, and sectors most affected by the spread of COVID-19; task the finance ministers to coordinate weekly, and direct the IMF and the World Bank Group, as well as other international organizations, to support countries worldwide as part of a coordinated global response. G-7 coordination has not been unproblematic; however, there have been disagreements among G-7

foreign affairs ministers about how to refer to the virus (coronavirus or the “Wuhan virus”) and concerns about collaboration on vaccine research (Congressional Research Service, 2020, pp. 85-86).

The scale of the threat is such that it requires medical, social, and economic responses that both exceed the boundaries of individual state action and require consent at the individual level to be effective. It is thus a threat that needs to be addressed at individual, transnational, and trans governmental levels, utilizing state resources and requiring cooperation between states, of the kind achieved by the EU in July 2020 with the agreement on a Coronavirus recovery fund. It does not state that acting as self-interested actors in realist theory can be successfully addressed (Deyermund, 2020, p. 4).

At the end, cooperation would also have to be strengthened, because it is not enough to produce a vaccine: it has to be mass-manufactured and, if the disease is to be eradicated in every country, distributed equitably. This relates to a second reason that countries must cooperate—to address the substantial international inequalities in ability to respond to the pandemic, countries must cooperate to help the ‘poor and developing countries in the global community that are unable to control the virus on their own.

3.1.3. International Organizations and Pandemic

International organizations reflect the tendency of self-interested states to cooperate in order to minimize costs and maximize benefits. Organizations such as the World Health Organisation facilitate coordination among national health authorities, serve as channels for knowledge exchange, and provide forums for deliberation (Ghincea, 2020).

What sort of long-term institutional response can we expect? At the G20 meeting in April 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for strengthening the WHO. However, we know the organization has had its problems and will likely continue to do so. From past and recent experience with responses to global crises or potential crises, there is little room for optimism about governments’ willingness to devote attention and resources beyond a limited point in time to longer-term preparedness. It may be time for a global push for a bigger public-private approach of the kind already in existence in a small way (Basrur, 2020).

While the recent meeting of G20 finance ministers produced more concrete outcomes – namely a suspension of bilateral debt repayments for low-income countries – there were no new actions on the health crisis, and no response to International Monetary Fund pleas to bolster its resources. As former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers put it afterwards: “I had modest expectations, which were significantly disappointed.” The roots of this failure to rise to the challenge of COVID-19 stem from both the nature of the G20 itself and the broader international context in which it operates (Chodor, 2020).

Among most developed and major developing economies, economic growth at the beginning of 2020 was tepid but still estimated to be positive. Countries highly dependent on trade—Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and South Korea—and commodity exporters are now projected to be the most negatively affected by the pandemic-driven slowdown in economic activity. In addition, travel bans and quarantines continue to take a heavy economic toll on a broad range of countries. The OECD notes that production declines in China have spillover effects worldwide, given China’s role in producing computers, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and transport equipment, and as a primary source of demand for many commodities. Across Asia, some forecasters argue that recent data indicate Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam could experience an economic recession in 2020 (Weiss, 2020, p. 86).

Initial efforts at coordinating the economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic across countries have been uneven. Governments are divided over the appropriate response and, in some cases, have acted unilaterally, particularly when closing borders and imposing export restrictions on medical equipment and medicine. An emergency meeting of G-7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) finance ministers on March 3, 2020, fell short of the aggressive and concrete coordinated action that investors and economists had been hoping for, and U.S. and European stock markets fell sharply after the meeting. However, on March 16, 2020, the leaders of the G-7 countries held an emergency teleconference to coordinate policy responses to the economic fallout from the global spread of COVID-19. In the joint statement released by the G-7 leaders after the emergency teleconference summit, the leaders stressed they are committed to doing “whatever is necessary to ensure a strong global response through closer cooperation and enhanced cooperation of efforts.” (Congressional Research Service, 2020, 85, 86).

4. Constructivism & COVID-19 Pandemic

In constructivism, there is an interaction between the agents and structures, constructivists say. There is a pandemic that affects not only one country but the whole world, and poses a global risk. The important thing here is the presence of actors who can control the risk and what kind of discourse and language they use. While trust is one of the most important and effective factors in inter-state relations, trust has been replaced by risks due to its safety risks, and risks have become global (Nazli, 2020).

The structure of the international system and the interests of states are not objective facts but – to use Alexander Wendt’s famous words – “what states make of it.” They lie in the eye of the beholder who constructs them (hence the name of the theory) in the light of his understandings and beliefs. As a result, a state’s identity and political culture play an important role in making sense of a given international situation (Rausch, 2020).

Constructivism focuses on the power of norms and on how norms are challenged and replaced with new ones. Constructivists contributed to the process of norm diffusion. Policy, practice, and theory were once again walking hand in hand. Social norms are also central to constructivism. These are generally defined as ‘a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity. Constructivism is often regarded as stating the obvious, namely that actions, interactions, and perceptions shape social reality. Indeed, this core assumption is the source of the theory family’s name. According to constructivist scholars, international relations are not pre-given or fixed; instead, they are continuously constructed and reconstructed through the ideas, practices, and interactions of actors (Theys, 2018).

4-1. Constructivism Basis

Constructivists are interested in understanding the actor’s preferences. Usually, mothers fall into this category, as they apply a cognitive approach to studying the entire room’s culture, including individuals’ preferences and health records. The topic of history is frequently addressed, as well as the moral norms of the family or even of the partner. In a constructivist setting, the actors and systems co-develop. In this respect, constructivists do not fear long periods of lockdown, as they can adapt to changes in accordance with the factors at stake. In specific contexts, skepticism is tolerated. However, too much of it might be unhealthy under such ambiguous conditions. Skeptics might encourage individuals or the whole group to break the rules of social distancing due to their distrust in knowledge

and scientific judgments (Asmar, 2020)

However, the ideational side of debate, like norms, regional identities, and shared values, has been paid little attention, which should also be taken into account while shaping the decisions of the country. This concept has given rise to another theoretical perspective called 'constructivism'. Constructivism holds that human consciousness plays a key role in the international political system, as ideational factors determine states' interactions. Constructivists present an ideational view parallel to the materialist view of the world. Their primary focus is human consciousness and its role in world affairs. Constructivists hold that ideas rather than material forces create the global system. In other words, they believe that people make society and society makes people (Farooq, 2020, p. 241).

Constructivism holds that human consciousness plays a key role in the international political system, as states' interactions are determined by ideational factors. Constructivists are not the opposite of realists and liberals; they supplement the ongoing debate by adding a social dimension that realists and liberals ignore. It does not entirely rule out the presence of material factors in global affairs. However, they introduce a mind-over-matter perspective. They present an ideational view parallel to the materialist view of the world. Their primary focus is human consciousness and its role in world affairs. Constructivists hold that ideas rather than material forces create the global system. In other words, they believe that people make society and society makes people (Farooq, 2020, p. 242).

4-1-1. Constructivism In the Pandemic Era

One of the most important reasons for the importance of a constructive approach in international relations is its relevance to the question of states' identity (Haghi, 2020, p. 241). Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, meaning that structures influence agency and agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure refers to the international system that consists of material and ideational elements. Therefore, from a constructivist perspective, the COVID-19 crisis and its responses depend on our views and beliefs about it. The central dictum of the constructivist—"anarchy is what states make of it" (Theys, 2018, p. 1).

Therefore, a constructivist would ask: how does the pandemic change shared beliefs and identities, and what effect would these changes have on world affairs? If the pandemic produces new ideas and identities that promote competition and conflict, then international relations will be defined by conflict. Conversely, if the pandemic produces solidaristic and cooperative ideas and identities, then world affairs will be characterised by increased cooperation and harmony. The world is what we make of it; it is constructed by us according to our beliefs about what is appropriate (Ghincea, 2020)

Thus, it sees the lack of collective action in the face of the pandemic not as an inevitable product of the material reality of the world as it actually is, but as arising from a realist thought structure. To wit, states fail to cooperate despite the urgency of the Covid-19 crisis because they are weighed down by the unquestioned notion that, even amid a pandemic, self-help must come first and that the exercise of power must shape action. This worldview, for the constructivist, is an ideational construct that needs to be overridden if cooperation is to be achieved.

However, while the concept of ideational structure is helpful in challenging established modes of thinking (and consequent habits of action) over time, it is not particularly helpful in offering insights into the short-to-medium-term responses of states to crises like the pandemic or to anticipating what, in fashioning states' responses, might actually be doable and what probably will not. In short,

constructivism is not a predictive theory and tends to be non-falsifiable and, more pragmatically, lacking in much utility other than urging new thinking. How to get from the present ideational structure to a more desirable one when a crisis breaks out remains a knotty problem (Basrur, 2020, pp. 5-6).

5. World-systems theory and COVID-19

Developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, the theory of World-Systems maintains that the world economy has been divided into three categories: the “core,” the “semi-periphery,” and the “periphery,” in which the economically powerful states are in the core and the labor in the other two groups. The core countries, on which the semi-periphery and the periphery nations depend, are industrially active and economically and politically developed, as a result of which surplus-value “flows from the weaker countries (the periphery) to the core” (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 12).

The coronavirus crisis has led to widespread criticism of capitalism from various sources, with most calling for reform and more radical voices arguing for a new world system. To understand the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and capitalism, we should explore the mechanisms of the capitalist world-system.

5-1. World-Systems Theory Principles

World-systems theory, first formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, offers a new perspective on social and economic reality. The basic framework of world-systems theory is that the world can be divided into three stages of domestic economic development within the current world system and the global political economy. The different stages are: the core (highly developed economies), the semi-periphery (economies between the core and the periphery), and the periphery (developing economies). Countries are placed into one of the categories by determining the state's or geographic area's political and economic roles within the overall world system and world economy (van der Meer, 2017, p. 9). Wallerstein elaborates on the intricacies of those zones' relations: “The semiperipheral states which have a relatively even mix of production processes find themselves in the most challenging situation. Under pressure from core states and from peripheral states, their primary concern is to avoid slipping into the periphery and to do what they can to advance toward the core. Neither is easy, and both require considerable state interference with the world market. These semiperipheral states are the ones that put forward the most aggressive, publicly stated, so-called protectionist policies (Izovekov, 2020, p. 277).

Wallerstein was one of those refreshing types in an increasingly restrictive academy, the big picture sort rich with colour, engaged in splashing out portraits of historical development. Dreary minutiae and specialism were not for him, even if he could play the game when needed, and his quest in sociology and history was a bold commitment to seek “a more egalitarian world and a more libertarian one.” (Kampmark, 2019)

5-1-2. Core, peripheral, and semi-peripheral relations in the pandemic era

According to world-systems theory, the COVID-19 pandemic and the threat of increasing and more deadly pandemics are a product of this same late-imperialist development. Chains of global exploitation and expropriation have destabilized not only ecologies but the relations between species, creating a toxic brew of pathogens (Suwand, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic is also a by-product of capitalism. The COVID-19 virus is generally traced

back to Wuhan, China, where large luxury markets sell animals for human consumption that, in Western cultures, we label as wild animals. It is believed that the virus infected a human through the consumption of a bat that had been infected by a pangolin, possibly the original carrier of the virus. While China is not traditionally the perfect example of capitalism, its authoritarian state does function with a capitalist economy, and so it aspires to constantly expand its territory and find new products to capitalize on, in this case, wild animals. Furthermore, because these markets are popular among more exclusive circles, the coronavirus spreads among the upper classes with the capital to travel abroad, and, thanks to our interconnected world, it quickly became a global pandemic.

Wallerstein states that: "a world-system is a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces that hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage. It has the characteristics of an organism, in that it has a lifespan over which its characteristics change in some respects and remain stable in others...Life within it is largely self-contained, and the dynamics of its development are largely internal" (Coccia, 2018, p. 460).

It is not only about China, however. Apart from the fact that diseases are common among Western pig herds, the core countries have played a significant role in expanding the capitalist system into (semi-) periphery regions. The burning down of the Amazon rainforest to make place for livestock consumed primarily by Western countries, or Small Island Developing States (SIDS), being on the verge of disappearance because historically Western countries have contributed to climate change in such a significant amount that the rise of sea level threatens SIDS' existence, are both caused by the principles of capitalism. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis clearly indicates the limits of capitalism. While it has brought an average growth in the wealth of the world population and we have a higher standard of living than the previous generations, capitalism has also increased inequalities between both individuals and regions, and it has eroded our ecological and climate systems by the endless extraction of finite resources to an extent that cannot be reversed anymore and we can only hope to halt it by exceeding a system that tells us that always having more is the key to happiness (Simon, 2020).

6. Comparison of COVID-19 in international relations theories

Realism emphasizes the state's role in responding to the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, as we illustrated, liberals focused on government cooperation and organizational support in developing the coronavirus vaccine. In contrast, constructivist thinking views both cooperation and conflict in terms of thought structures, which explains very little about responses to the current crisis. The interaction between states changes their interests and identities. World System Theory by Wallerstein suggests that the traditional division of the world into two parts, a center and a periphery, made place for a new sort of tripolar division, with the addition of a middle category, which Wallerstein calls the "semiperiphery". The rise of the so-called semi-periphery is driving a growing hierarchization of the global South, one of the most significant phenomena of the modern world economy.

Theory	Leading actor in problem-solving	Respond to Covid-19
Realism	states	States that rely on self-help have been seeking a vaccine against the pandemic.
Liberalism	Organizations/non-governmental organizations(NGO)	Organizations such as the G20 and other non-governmental organizations have developed vaccines against the coronavirus pandemic.
Constructivism	usually powerful ones, like leaders and influential citizens... agent-structure	agent-structure formula, and leaders would be placed in a problem-solving situation
World system	structure (core, semi-periphery, and periphery), core countries are characteristic of the world system	Doing Reform in the world economic capital system, a system that produced the coronavirus (capitalism)

Conclusion

International relations theory will not give us a vaccine against COVID-19. Neither generates the sources for reconstruction during and after the pandemic. International relations theory provides the conceptual tools and categories to understand where and why we have underperformed, and where and how we can do better. IR theory cannot help solve any of the current problems regarding the global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). What IR theory can do, however, is offer informed predictions about how states will react to crises, and it can help us understand why states react the way they do – principally, in this case, via realism. As realists would expect, when crises hit, it is not international organizations, not even the World Health Organization (WHO) or NGOs that citizens and states turn to first. However, we know the organization has had its problems and will likely continue to do so. At the end, cooperation would also need to be strengthened, as producing a vaccine is not enough. As liberals identified that: countries must cooperate to help the 'poor and developing countries in the global community that are unable to control the virus on their own and Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures and World system theory maintains that the world economy has been divided into three categories: the "core," the "semi-periphery," and the "periphery," where the economically powerful states are in the core, and the labor in the other two groups. As we imply, IR theories can offer a theoretical perspective on problem-solving and can guide and shed light on world crises, such as COVID-19.

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