

What Challenges Have Pandemics Posed For International Relations And How Have States Responded To These Challenges

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Abstract— The quick, global spread of COVID-19 in the first half of 2020 has constituted a major destabilising event in international affairs. The virus is not the first of its kind; it follows smaller outbreaks of the swine flu in 2009, and avian influenza in 2013 and, historically, is paralleled by the rate of fatality of the Spanish flu, the plague or cholera. With millions of fatalities, the intensity and scale of the phenomenon makes these outbreaks a risk for global populations. However, the effects of these events go well beyond the death of millions of people. What challenges have pandemics posed for international relations and how have states responded to these challenges? This dissertation is about the ways in which the unique nature of pandemics – as a global issue affecting multiple dimensions – have posed challenges to the international system and forced it to respond in different ways, with very practical effects on both daily life and the ways in which governance and international relations are reproduced. As such, studying governments' responses to them can provide novel insights about global governance, power, and inequality. In particular, by employing Marxists and realist IR theories, this paper argues that the diffusion of pandemics and the governments' responses to them emphasise and reproduce global inequality

Index Terms— AIDS Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 19, ECFR European Council on Foreign Relations, EID Emerging infectious diseases, EPRS European Parliamentary Research Service, EUROMIL European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions, IHR International Health Regulations, ILO International Labour Organization, IR International Relations, JTAC Britain's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, NSC US National Security Council, SARS Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development WHO World Health.

1 INTRODUCTION

THE quick, global spread of COVID-19 in the first half of 2020 has constituted a major destabilising event in international affairs. It has infected millions of people all over the world and paralysed economic activity as well as shifting social relations. The virus is not the first of its kind; in the last decade alone, it has followed smaller outbreaks of a diverse range of viruses such as the swine flu in 2009, and avian influenza in 2013. Historically, its destructive nature is paralleled by the rate of fatality of the Spanish flu, the plague or cholera. With millions of casualties, the intensity and scale of the phenomenon makes these outbreaks a risk for the global population. However, the effects of these events go well beyond the death of millions of people. In fact, in the centuries, pandemics have created fear as much as innovation, they have torn states apart and made economies collapse. Investigations have proven the significant impact that pandemics have had in history (cf. Mair 2020). From a political point of view, pandemics have affected international relations, among other aspects of current affairs, by causing diplomatic tensions over the (mis)management of the crisis (cf. Watts 2020), the effectiveness of the containment (cf. Yuan 2020), and the unequal distribution of resources (cf. Bradley 2020).

However, not many scholars or journalists focus on how disparate this impact has been. Just a few numbers show how these deaths have been largely concentrated in less developed countries and even in the most vulnerable sectors of the population (cf. Adams-Prassl et al. 2020; Bhambra 2020). Rather, most research and investigations into the topic have largely concentrated on the economic and health-related consequences of such viruses and have neglected the wider repercussions

on the social and political system of international relations. In fact, the political and economic instability caused by a crisis constitutes a challenge for governments and provokes a series of emergency responses with practical effects on both daily life and international relations among states, in terms of collaboration and diplomacy. Moreover, these challenges add to existing global patterns of inequalities among states and people in terms of access to health, gender equality, and economic wealth. How does this emergency context affect such patterns? Within this context, multiple questions can be raised around the challenges that pandemics have posed for international relations and how states have responded to these challenges. In particular, this work asks how pandemics – and governments' responses to them – have affected global patterns of inequality. The paper investigates the consequences of the pandemics and governments' responses in terms of issues of global inequality between countries as well as people. These patterns include economic disparity among classes and nations, social and political rights, including the right to health or education and the equality of genders. This dissertation is about the ways in which the unique nature of pandemics – as a global, socio-political issue affecting multiple dimensions – have posed challenges to the international system and forced it to respond in different ways, with very practical effects on both daily life and the ways in which governance and international relations are reproduced. As will be highlighted in the empirical background section, pandemics are distinct from many other issues which nation-states and international institutions have to deal with, both for the risk they pose to global health and the economic and socio-political consequences this

has. As such, studying the international system's response to them can provide novel insights about global governance, power, and inequality.

In particular, both recent and historical studies on the topic have highlighted how pandemics have severely affected the world economically, socially and politically. From an economic perspective, pandemics have provoked the loss of millions of dollars and the collapse of institutions and entire national economies. At a social and demographic level, the mortality rate of these viruses has also caused massive blows on the health systems of already weak nation-states and disruptions on the life of entire countries. Politically, these events have forced governments to issue emergency measures and set in place new plans for the safety and security of their citizens, prioritising security over other aspects of governance. These dynamics have also meant that the emergence of these pandemics has pushed a major moral shift by encouraging people and governments to question the existence of alternative ways of structuring their own economic and political realities.

Despite the availability of many investigative studies on the consequences of such events, most of these have focused on specific areas of economic and medical interest. However, fewer scholars question the wider impact of pandemics onto the international system as a whole and, by neglecting this aspect, fail to acknowledge the visible patterns of global inequality that are emphasised and reproduced by the diffusion of pandemics and the governments' responses to them. Therefore, this dissertation will argue that a study of pandemics can reveal such patterns and show that although pandemics have required an increased level of international cooperation, which in some cases has highlighted the negative impacts of global inequality that need to be addressed; on the other hand, they have also fostered contradictory pressures towards nationalism and isolationism and a drive away from global justice.

These arguments will be made in light of international responses to the Spanish influenza pandemic, alongside historical and contemporary examples such as the AIDS crisis, coronavirus, and avian flu. The dissertation will draw on a variety of empirical and theoretical literature in order to answer the research question. Engaging with academic work in epidemiology, IR theory, history, political economy, and geography will all be necessary in order to carry out this research, since it addresses the complex intersection between natural phenomena (i.e. pandemics) and human society. The way this will be approached will be illustrated in the next sections, which will present pandemics as simultaneously natural and social events, which are driven by and reshape social relations. The research is based on secondary, qualitative and quantitative data, which is drawn primarily from academic books and articles in scientific and sociological journals. Given their relevance in the IR tradition, the dissertation will be rooted in Marxist and realist theory, providing a clear theoretical framework in which empirical evidence can be assessed and used to answer the main research question.

To do so, this paper engages with terms such as 'pandemics', 'international relations', and 'global inequality', which need to be further clarified before delving into their examination. Pandemics, as defined by the World Health Organization

(WHO), is "the worldwide spread of a new disease", which "occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and spreads around the world, and most people do not have immunity" (WHO 2010: para 1). In particular, pandemics differ from epidemics for the global scale they reach. This global diffusion makes it a significant factor affecting international relations among other global issues and, therefore, a relevant point of inquiry. On the other hand, international relations refer to the relationships between a variety of interlocking actors and institutions, which make up global politics. These include supranational bodies like the EU and UN as well as national states. Some sub-national and non-state actors also form part of the international system; for instance, multinational corporations play a major role in interstate relations. Nonetheless, this dissertation focuses primarily on relationships of states with each other and with supranational institutions, rather than smaller actors that are also undoubtedly interlinked in the 'system'. Although talking about a 'system' of international relations, this research is also wary of falling into extreme structuralist perspectives that neglect the power of human interaction and social agency in the construction of larger patterns. Having said this, questioning the relevance and/or adequacy of addressing international relations as a system remains outside the scope of this dissertation and is a topic for additional theoretical and empirical endeavours.

Moreover, this work often refers to the post-pandemic situation as a 'crisis'. This is not to negate the minimal impact it has had in some countries or to inflate its impact in others but is because pandemics have put in crisis a whole system of political, economic and social stakes all over the world. Finally, global inequality is defined as a factor that "involves the concentration of resources in certain nations, significantly affecting the opportunities of individuals in poorer and less powerful countries" (Little 2014: para 3.). Although some authors view it in purely economic terms based on the gap of income among people and/or countries (cf. Milanović 2016: 3), this paper takes a broader view of global inequality as incorporating social and political factors. In fact, apart from income, some measures of global inequality also assess the quality of living conditions, access and level of education, health and mortality (Roser 2013) and even power disparities (Held and Kaya 2007: 15).

The paper is organised into four chapters. Chapter 2 will review the academic literature on pandemics and the key theoretical approaches in international relations that can be used to understand the impact of pandemics. In particular, this dissertation will seek to combine insights from realist and Marxist IR theory. Chapter 3 will focus on the socio-political dimension of pandemics, including the securitised response of affected countries, to highlight how these can be seen as reinforcing existing global inequalities. This section will analyse and reflect upon the available data and the methodological concerns of conducting research on such a topic. Finally, chapter 4 will focus specifically on the case of the Spanish flu of 1918 as compared to the current case of COVID-19. It will draw some lessons for IR that can be used for the analysis of the consequences of pandemics around the world and the governments' responses to them. With an estimated 40-50 mil-

lion deaths around the world (Enemark 2009: 193) and 500 million people infected (WHO 2010: para 23), this is a timely example that can shed light on more recent pandemics' outbreaks and how these have been dealt with by governments as well as supranational organisations. With COVID-19 and even reports of the bubonic plague returning to China (cf. Ward 2020), the case of pandemics resonates with as much urgency as curiosity and gains, therefore, a timely and special relevance in the study of international relations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The recent rise of yet another form of pandemics, COVID-19, with global, social, political and economic effects makes the topic particularly interesting for social theory. However, given the recent nature of this phenomenon, in-depth work on this subject mainly focuses on medical and scientific experiments with vaccines or on the social repercussions on health. Although constructive and crucial for their need in applied sciences, these studies are insufficient for gaining a wider insight into the effects that pandemics have on the totality of the international system and all its different facets. This section will review some of the literature that has identified the main consequences of pandemics and the international responses to it. It will analyse the common frameworks utilised to analyse these events and the main ideas that stem from it. In particular, it will focus on key Marxist and realist IR theory and what these can contribute to the topic of pandemics.

In fact, it will be argued that these two approaches can help the discipline of international relations to engage with and gain an insight into the securitised nature of the governments' responses to viruses like COVID-19 and the impact not just on economic but on socio-political systems. Social and political research, focused on a comparative approach, can help the academia to understand how previous pandemics have been dealt with and improve crisis management techniques as well as outbreak prevention. Therefore, this chapter will first provide an overview of the key theoretical debates that have been exposed by social and political studies on the subject of pandemics. It will then delve in more detail into the relevance of Marxist and realist theories for the study of the intersection between pandemics as a natural, epidemiological occurrence and the socio-political consequences it entails.

2.1 An overview of key theoretical literature on pandemics

The theoretical literature on pandemics is rich and varied. From historical accounts of pandemics and the ways these were lived by survivors (cf. Arnold 2018) to epidemiological experiments into the rate of transmission of such viruses (cf. Saunders-Hastings and Krewski 2016), these studies mostly recognise the unique nature of these viruses once they hit the human population. The variety of perspectives also highlight an important point about pandemics: they stem at the intersection between epidemiological phenomena that affect human beings in biological terms as living organisms and the social and political context of global health that infected people take

part in through their newly acquired capacity as patients. Work that discusses the consequences of pandemics for the world predominantly focuses on the economic downfall that health crises indirectly provoke. They look at the ways in which pandemics have impacted different labour markets (Adams-Prassl et al. 2020) as well as the economic costs – or benefits – of government interventions against pandemics (cf. Correia et al. 2020). Although the economic impact falls outside the scope of this paper, such studies gather significant data that will be employed in chapters 3.2 and 4.2 to assess the unequal impact of the spread of COVID-19 and the Spanish flu around the world. These works provide some of the indicators used to assess the degree of economic impact – from unemployment and the loss of jobs to a general decline in GDP (cf. Delivorias and Scholz). Few studies, like that by Qiu et al. (2020), draw linkages between the economic sphere and the social behaviours connected to it or the rate of contagion of the virus. However, most of these works have a policy orientation in that they attempt to draw lessons for best government practice in managing the crisis and its wide repercussions as well as suggest measures for implementation. Although this has a useful approach, it also denies a deeper theoretical engagement and fails to challenge the structural foundations of inequality arisen from an unequal system of power relations.

Although most theoretical work on pandemics has come from economic and medical fields, their findings have often been employed by social and political subjects to address the gap in understanding pandemics from a wider lens. Authors like Bavel et al. (2020) for example, employ a wide range of epidemiological and medical statistics to investigate the social and cultural behaviours associated with the spread of the disease. Overall, the academic research on the subject has prevalently employed an analytical and empirical lens to gain practical lessons that could be of use for the drafting and implementation of policy measures by governments. Studies in the social and political disciplines have in fact covered issues of crisis preparedness, risk and organisation (cf. Kamradt-Scott 2020).

The focus of multiple works on risk is of particular interest because it shows that a central feature of recent literature on COVID-19 and previous pandemics is the extensive focus on the security aspect of the international response to the crisis. Securitised theories of pandemics see them as 'threats' to the national system and their interests. The World Health Organization itself defined pandemics as "the most feared security threat" (WHO 2007: 45). This highlights that the existing framework envisions pandemics in securitised terms and therefore, there is an interest in the IR to measure its impact in terms of security. One of the reasons for this linkage is the fact that global health crises are seen to provide a risk of changing the dynamics between nation-states and, by unequally addressing the situation, shifting the balance of power among them causing conflict and fuelling instability (cf. Peterson 2002: 45).

This securitised framework is both useful and restrictive. It is useful in the analysis of international relations because it helps to identify additional, non-traditional elements – apart from inter-state conflicts, that can be considered as threats to states. Seeing pandemics as 'threats' could, at least theoretically, give

way to more effective planning for governmental and intra-state strategies of prevention and response to global pandemics. However, on the other hand, although this can be a useful paradigm for preparing a policy response to pandemics, the equation also warns about its narrowness. Enemark suggests that the paradigm can be counterproductive for governments' responses as it tends to stimulate a strategic, national and military approach at the expense of wider international cooperation and collaboration (2009: 192). This approach promotes a nationalistic and short-sighted attitude not only in national politics but also in international relations. This is based on an offensive realist perspective that, in order for states to be best prepared for any possible outcomes, they should envision the threat as a critical one (Mearsheimer 2014: 33).

A lot of these studies have focused on the measures that governments have taken in response to the spread of the virus, linking epidemiological data with a certain political outcome. For example, Jewell and Jewell (2020) explain how 90% of virus-induced deaths in the USA with the recent coronavirus could have been prevented through an earlier implementation of social distancing regulations. Although important for future planning and crisis management, these sorts of statements stop short of investigating how these provisions affect – and are conditioned by – different social strata of the population. Similarly, some studies have attempted to link democracies with a more effective response to the crisis and, by reverse, authoritarian regimes with higher mortality (cf. *The Economist* 2020; Kleinfeld 2020).

This direction of examination opens an interesting area for debate: does the type of political system under analysis affect the diameter of diffusion of a pandemic? Does the political ideology of a state determine the effectiveness of the pandemics' response or, rather, is fear being used, as Mölder suggests, to conceal instrumental and strategic gains while spreading populism (2011: 241)? In fact, Kleinfeld reveals that such questions have not provided hard evidence that the regime type affects the efficacy of a country in responding to a pandemic (2020). On the other hand, IR theory has confirmed the central place held by fear and emotions in driving states' actions and behaviours within international relations. Mölder, who grounds his theory on Lebow's realist IR theory (2008), offers a picture of the role of fear and security not only for international relations but also more specifically for the prevention and response to pandemics. He writes that, "the culture of fear is closely related to the Hobbesian political culture, emphasizing interstate conflict as a natural paradigm in international politics" (ibid.: 243). The presence of conflict – whether a military or symbolic war – raises questions about the dynamics incited by pandemics.

These questions open up the existing gap in IR studies on the social and political consequences of pandemics. Saideman reviews studies on pandemics and reveals that the term appears in few – and not all – IR academic journals showing that the discipline of international relations lacks substantial engagement with the term (2020). Although his literature review is superficial and focuses exclusively on North American journals, his point highlights that there are many areas of study related to pandemics that are largely ignored by scholars and

that IR can contribute a unique perspective to the subject that might integrate existing epidemiological and political research. Accepting the fact that pandemics are not purely biological phenomena but are both social and political occurrences that are, inextricably, socially constructed naturally leads to a few considerations about their analysis. The first is that given their complex context, an analysis of their consequences needs to take into consideration multiple, interdisciplinary perspectives. Secondly, although broad, realist and Marxist approaches can offer theoretical insights into the themes that constitute this issue.

2.2 Realist and Marxist approaches to IR

Key theoretical approaches in international relations (IR) can be used to understand the impact of pandemics, although pandemics have not been a central concern of any of the major IR theories. The dissertation will seek to combine insights from realist and Marxist IR theory. The former is useful in explaining the securitised and nationalistic responses of some states, while the latter provides a critical understanding of how economic processes and inequalities relate to global public health. Pandemics have challenged international cooperation and economic integration. In contrast with realist and Marxist perspectives, liberal theory is too optimistic about the prospects of, and motives for, international cooperation in the face of global challenges. This is the basis on which the former two have been selected in this study to provide the theoretical framework for an analysis of the role and challenges presented by pandemics for international relations, both directly and indirectly.

Realist IR theory initially appears somewhat ill-equipped to engage with the problem of global pandemics. Realism tends to centre on war and conflict over territory and resources, seeing security in terms of power and violence (Fidler 1997: 37). For this reason, many view it as being less able to engage with concepts such as human security, more relevant to a global public health problem. As Fidler notes (1997: 20-4), these theoretical problems have become increasingly challenging as globalisation drives the emergence, re-emergence and spread of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs). The globalisation of public health problems, like the rise of issues such as climate change, challenges the central role of 'sovereign' nation-states in the international system. Some realists have therefore argued that public health can be understood as a national security concern and should be addressed as such. The health of populations is a relevant concern for realists, because it can impact both the economic and the military strength of a nation-state; because pandemic diseases can render states less powerful and less secure if not dealt with effectively. For instance, Dinnen (2012: 1-23) has argued at length for the relevance of Morgenthau's classical realism in analysing states' responses to pandemics. For Morgenthau, like for Lebow (2008), national power becomes the principal and most important element driving states' actions (Dinnen 2012: 1). This means that self-survival is a core component of governments' responses to pandemics and these might be conveyed as characteristics through their policies.

Therefore, by analysing and breaking down states' responses to pandemics, these would inherently show states' self-interest

in their actions. Karčić (2020: 3-6, 11-2) agrees that the coronavirus pandemic has forced states to act in a way more in line with realist theory. For instance, undermining the pretensions of the EU to borderlessness as member states have re-imposed border controls to safeguard their own interests. He writes that “the pandemic only reaffirmed Politics 101: only strong and effective states are able to cope with crises” (Karčić 2020: 14). Such approaches fail to recognise the impossibility of managing global pandemics entirely at the national level, especially since the failure to control disease in one country can allow it to spread to others (Fidler 1997: 37-8). Nonetheless, states’ responses to the recent pandemic have so far been mostly self-interested, with even seeming acts of solidarity – like Chinese medical aid – being fairly transparent expressions of soft power and propaganda, intended to enhance states’ prestige and indicate the humiliating failures of geopolitical rivals. Indeed, some have seen China’s effective response to coronavirus and the Western countries’ failures as indications of an emerging Chinese hegemony (Lopez 2020: 8-9).

Further, despite the importance of bodies such as the WHO, pandemics do not really challenge the realist assumption about states as the primary units of international politics; in practice, most public health measures taken to control pandemics are carried out by states. This is especially the case where quarantine and other such measures are required; the unique coercive authority of the state allows them to enforce social restrictions in ways that transnational bodies or NGOs cannot. The unique role of states can be seen in the way the Spanish influenza pandemic was treated by many countries as a military issue, with influenza described as a ‘war disease’ (Kamradt-Scott 2020: 532). As previously discussed, this indicates the relevance of national security discourse in states’ responses to pandemics, which will be explored further in the case study.

On the other hand, Marxist approaches to international relations centre on two key issues, which are taken to be inherently interrelated: class relations and imperialism. For Marxists, social life is shaped by the existence of classes with contradictory interests which engage in class struggle; all ‘class societies’ – i.e. all societies bar egalitarian hunter-gatherer communities and proposed future ‘communist’ society – have ruling classes which take a dominant role in the state (Marx 1977: 221-47). Thus, contrary to the realist view of states as ‘black boxes’, state policy is deeply impacted by domestic class struggle. Relatedly, international relations are characterised by imperialism – unequal economic and political relations between states in which some states, and their capitalist class, exploit other states and subject them to underdevelopment (Smith 2016: 224-51). This view has been expounded by Marxists such as V.I. Lenin (2010), Samir Amin (1989, 1990), and John Smith (2016) and further developed by theorists of neo-colonialism and underdevelopment.

The Marxist approach is relevant for assessing the impact of pandemics. Health issues are highly stratified by class and global inequalities, as will be discussed in the empirical background section, below. Pandemics have exacerbated global inequalities, as can be seen in the impact of the AIDS crisis, especially in Africa. Further, Marxism can help explain why

the international system has failed to respond to pandemics by addressing the underlying political economy of emerging infectious diseases. An approach to pandemics rooted in global economic justice would address the ways poverty and slum conditions make people vulnerable to disease, as well as the connections between economic reforms, extractive industries, and industrial agriculture in the emergence of zoonotic pandemics. Marxist IR theory incisively highlights the class relations and ideologies which prevent such an approach

2.3 The unequal consequences of pandemics: a theory?

Marxist theories on imperialism and unequal class relations can be linked to other work on pandemics and inequality, including on global health specifically

Kapiriri and Ross (2020) offer one of the few comparative analyses of the political repercussions of pandemics like the SARS, Zika or Ebola on marginalised communities. Through an empirical study, they found that pandemics affect populations in different ways and highlight that these viruses put vulnerable sectors of the population specifically at risk. These include societal groups that are already in unequal power relations, whether these be women in a patriarchal society, ethnic minorities in a foreign country, or people living below the poverty line (ibid.). Moreover, processes of globalisation, traditional community practices, and racialised social attitudes further exacerbated the negative impact of pandemics onto these vulnerable groups (ibid.). As will be seen in chapter 4.2, the institutionalisation of some of these racist attitudes in health systems and governmental policies reinforces divisions and renders them ‘structural’. These structural conditions and power disparities “in turn create or sustain inequalities” (Held and Kaye 2007: 15), making it an important dynamic in international relations and global affairs that is often overlooked. What we can gain from their studies is that pandemics do not simply impact countries and people unequally, but they also tend to reinforce these structures of inequality, stressing societal divisions on a political, as well as social and economic levels, on an international scale. This constitutes a key argument of this research, which will be further developed in the next chapters.

Overall, the theories presented in this chapter paint an overview of the themes that arise in the study of the impact of pandemics on the social and political system of international relations. This work builds upon these themes to argue that pandemics – as socio-political phenomena – and the governments’ responses to them reinforce global patterns of inequality. As previously mentioned, Marxist and realist approaches to international relations confirm this hypothesis from a theoretical perspective. The framework they build views states as bound, political entities that prioritise self-preservation as a main goal in the face of constant adversities that threaten their survival. Moreover, they see states’ power and dominance as inherently creating unequal relations, not just within national systems themselves, but also within global politics.

Peckham provides an interesting observation: that pan-

demics spur what he calls “economies of contagion”, that is, an interconnected discussion of pandemics in economic terms and, conversely, an epidemiological vocabulary for the spread of financial crises as viruses (2013: 226). His work highlights that the perception and terminology itself of ‘risk’ comes from an economic mind frame which, as will be further explored through Marxist theories, is constitutive of modern, capitalist societies and which helps to explain shifting power relations of inequality through and thanks to political responses to pandemics. The intersection of security risk with financial and epidemiological risk similarly transposes images of the mortality of a disease – and therefore of survival, into the political and economic issues arisen during the related crisis, transforming the latter into a matter of survival of the state and national interest of the population as a cohesive and congruent identity. That means that biological concerns become intertwined with global, political and economic factors and drive both global perceptions of risk and the politics of fear that results from their heightening. This will be further addressed in chapter 3.3.

However, a few questions arise in terms of both the theoretical foundations of this argument and the wider originality of this framework. Firstly, do pandemics inevitably reinforce unequal power dynamics? Or is there scope for different outcomes to play out? This will be further explored in chapter 4, which compares a historical case of flu with the more recent case of coronavirus. The second question is related to the contributions of this work. What is new in this theoretical approach? How is this analysis useful for future IR studies on pandemics? Although employing both classical and more recent theories in the social and political sciences, this work focuses on their relevance for IR theory and points to several areas that need to receive further attention within the discipline. In fact, this research contributes to the international relations literature in several ways. Firstly, it takes the discussion beyond epidemiological and medical studies, which only highlight the biological and physiological aspects of a disease without looking at the wider, social, political and economic consequences they produce. Rather, the analysis undertaken in this research highlights that socio-economic and political conditions have an important, and often overlooked, role to play in determining the challenges and consequences that a pandemic and other health crisis may have on a political – and not only demographic or economic – level.

Secondly, this work emerges at the intersection of several

ple theoretical traditions to explain the challenges faced by pandemics as a whole. This work gives ground to an interdisciplinary approach, which is needed to gain a valuable insight into the topic through multiple perspectives. Thirdly, this framework allows scholars to go beyond the immediate consequences of a crisis like the one stimulated by COVID-19. It questions the very basis of the inequality that arises as a result by looking at both the structural conditions and everyday behaviours of states in their struggle to minimise the impact of the pandemic

3 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSION OF PANDEMICS: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Pandemics are a recurring feature of human history; at their most fundamental level they result from pathogens that interact with the human body. On one level, scientific description of these pathogens and their effects could be viewed as the most relevant empirical aspect of pandemics. In reality, of course, pandemics are inherently social phenomena; hence, the discipline of epidemiology, which concerns itself with how diseases are transmitted, seems more relevant to explaining what factors make some people more at-risk than others, and so on. At the same time, the findings of these disciplines help governments design and implement adequate provisions for reducing the impact of the virus on the population in any way. For example, in the recent COVID-19 pandemic there has been a focus on social distancing. The need for social distancing means that social practices central to economic, political, and religious life have all been impacted, with businesses, churches, and schools closed in many countries and local elections postponed in the UK. The repercussions of the virus are all-encompassing and analysing their social and political dimensions help to view pandemics not only as biological entities but also socio-political agents of change. Therefore, this section will provide empirical background on pandemics and their impacts on the international system. Empirical findings can reveal what challenges pandemics present for international relations, the response that states have implemented and with what consequences – whether reinforcing inequality, reducing it, or leaving it untouched. This chapter will firstly draw upon some methodological reflections to understand some of the challenges and limitations of conducting second-hand research on a contemporary – and historical – as well as risky topic. It will then address some of the empirical findings that link pandemics to the reestablishment of inequality and, finally, focus specifically on the international response to pandemics in general and how this has become securitised in recent times.

3.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This research gathers secondary, qualitative and quantitative data on pandemics that can highlight not just the scale of their impact in demographical and numerical terms, but also with respect to the practical and more large-scale reper-

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disciplines in the social and political sciences and, therefore, connects them by employing varied data and multi-

cussions they have on social and political systems. Although limited because of the lack of primary sources, this research has analysed existing epidemiological, social and economic studies in search for the social and political elements that have affected the international response to the pandemics. This provides a unique methodological framework in that it brings together results from multiple disciplines to give a rounded overview and varied perspectives on the impact of pandemics. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that epidemiology is a highly specialised field and, even within that field the causes of, and proper responses to, pandemics are subject to debate and contestation. This dissertation will necessarily engage with existing scientific research on the subject, while avoiding the technicalities of the medical terminology and epidemiological discussions. Questions such as the role of neoliberal globalisation in the emergence of pandemics will be addressed, drawing on the work of experts such as Wallace and Davis, but it will be important to recognise that such claims may be contested by other experts and scientists.

A comparative and historical approach has been used in order to analyse the impact that pandemics have had on the international system. Since pandemics vary in nature and diffusion, and governments' preparedness relies on the available resources as much as risk perception, comparing the responses to different pandemics can highlight similarities and differences and provide lessons for future emergency responses. However, the sheer scope of the topic presents however a challenge, as there have been large numbers of pandemics throughout history with many complex impacts on world politics. Some, but not all, include primarily post-World War II pandemics such as AIDS, SARS, avian flu, and coronavirus, aside from the case study of the early 20th century Spanish influenza pandemic. As such it is important to restrict the discussion mainly to a few pandemics and, specifically, to those which took place in the context of the modern interstate system. Moreover, as the research on the current pandemic is still being processed and assessed, a comparative analysis of COVID-19 with another, historical case of the Spanish influenza can address these gaps. The case of the Spanish flu has been selected rather than its counterparts - the 1957 Asian flu, the 1968 Hong Kong flu, or the 2009 swine flu - as a target of this comparative analysis for its large-scale impact and infamy as the most fatal form of pandemics in the 20th century.

One of the challenges of conducting secondary research on the subject is the lack of data on specific aspects of the crisis as well as the fact that available work employs very different methodologies to test their hypotheses, with very different conclusions (cf. Bavel et al. 2020: 461). Given the scope of the research, this work does not focus on how the crisis has been managed in specific countries. The lack of a localised focus is both a consequence of a general lack of ethnographic data not only on specific countries, but also on developing regions such as African or South American states, which have received relatively little attention. It also constitutes a major limitation of this paper and an area that would need to be addressed by future studies on the topic. At the same time, the scope of this research is focused upon the international system as a whole by looking for the wider, global patterns that have affected the

world while being informed by the available sources on the situation in national contexts. This work does not address people's perceptions of the crisis. However, it is important to note the significant effect that risk perception has on people's behaviours in response to pandemics, which has the power to affect wider social shifts on the matter.

Investigating the impact of pandemics - and international responses to them - onto the specific issue of global inequality raises the question of how changes in inequality can be measured methodologically. In fact, apart from income, some measures of global inequality also assess the quality of living conditions, access and level of education, health and mortality (Roser 2013) and even power disparities (Held and Kaya 2007: 15). In particular, the Gini coefficient has been introduced to measure global inequality by deriving a number that describes the convergence or divergence of national - or even household - wealth across many countries (Yates 2016: para. 8). However, these figures are updated only up to the year 2019, which means that they do not assess any changes throughout the first half of 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic. However, countries' responses to pandemics can say much about inequality even without a coefficient. Therefore, measures from the previous year's results are compared to current data about the places where COVID-19 hit the hardest, with what responses and consequences. This analysis provides a series of indicators that can be used to assess the level of inequality from a qualitative perspective. In fact, section 3.2 shows several variables that play a determining role in reproducing inequality, ranging from economic income to a social and political attitude of fear. Indicators of economic decline, such as GDP income, loss of jobs and business activities, together with demographic data such as infection and mortality rate, and the social and political attitudes towards others, visible through practices like blaming migrants or authoritarian countries, will be employed in this analysis. These alone put into question the states' responses, the availability of resources and infrastructure, including the functioning of different health systems, and the attitudes of people towards the given policies.

This dissertation will provide a theoretical and historical foundation for analysing the impact of pandemics on the international system. Its relevance is therefore clear in the present moment, in which the unfolding coronavirus pandemic is providing an extreme shock to world politics and the global economy. However, the ongoing and rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic poses challenges for any research on the topic; this is why Spanish influenza has been chosen as a comparative case study, in order to provide a rich historical example which can inform more contemporary debates. Given the centrality of the topic in current affairs and the constantly evolving situation as a response to COVID-19, this research has suffered - while at the same time gaining - from exploring a phenomenon that is unfolding while this paper is being written. This conjunction creates both opportunities and risks: although growing amounts of research and data are being published every day, informing the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of this work, a risk remains that these findings will be quickly challenged and surpassed by more detailed investigations on the matter. Therefore, the conclusions drawn

by this paper are tentative and remain linked to the availability of research up to the first half of 2020. How the virus and global health crisis will evolve will constitute subjects for future endeavours in analysing how pandemics challenge international relations and global inequality.

4 CONCLUSION

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has analysed the international response of governments to the crises that broke out due to the outbreak of pandemics such as the Spanish flu in 1918 and the current case of coronavirus in the first half of 2020. The literature and case studies presented in this paper demonstrate that these viruses are not only biological phenomena and epidemiological concerns; rather, they clearly constitute social and political agents of change due to the direct effects they stimulate on international relations, political governance and social attitudes. In particular, an analytical approach based on empirical data demonstrates that global patterns of inequality are reaffirmed and reproduced by the instability caused by such pandemics as well as the governments' responses to them. Although under many aspects, pandemics have required an increased level of international cooperation and have highlighted situations of global inequality that can and need to be addressed by the international community; on the other hand, they have also fostered contradictory pressures towards nationalism and isolationism and a drive away from global justice. This is evident through the governmental policies focused on protecting national interests driven by survival instincts and fear. It has been observed from the academic literature and empirical data available is that pandemics do not simply impact countries and people unequally, but they also tend to reinforce existing structures of inequality, stressing societal divisions on a political, as well as social and economic levels, on an international scale.

The limitations of state-centric approaches to disease-control are clear and international bodies of scientific and medical collaboration are more significant than ever in the light of the emerging coronavirus pandemic. However, this does not mean that states will act on these considerations, as made abundantly clear by Trump's attempt to defund the WHO. Thus, realism can still provide valuable insights, despite its deficiencies as a normative theory and guide for rational foreign policy. On the other hand, Marxism provides a critical lens to explore the connections between the impact of pandemics and global inequality, through a deeper engagement with colonial and imperialist histories and the origins of oppression and inequality among social groups as well as entire national populations. The radical impacts of the coronavirus pandemic are only just beginning to make themselves felt, with some predicting an economic contraction more significant than the Great Depression and potentially years of lockdowns and social distancing measures. IR theory will need to be flexible in order to assess the impact of such a major shock; this will require creatively combining the insights of multiple theoretical traditions. Within this context, studying the international system's response to pandemics can provide novel insights about strategies and challenges of global governance,

power, and inequality. They can also hint to interactions between international relations and economic activity, social attitudes and diplomatic tensions in light of geopolitical interests.

Having looked at the effects and response to pandemics and the challenges these pose to international relations, a few questions arise. Most importantly, why is it important to pinpoint and address inequality in the international response to pandemics? Shouldn't crisis preparedness be the priority not only for states' policies but also for the academic literature supporting them with their findings? This paper has implicitly argued that analysing the effects of pandemics and governments' policies in terms of the effect they have on global inequality is an important theme for international relations for several reasons. On the one hand, inequality among countries affects world economic, political, and social relations and development, making it timely that scholars look at both direct and indirect implications of this issue. The need for cooperation in particular is a key lesson not just for a response to pandemics but for general crisis preparedness in a world of multilateralism and globalisation. Academically, this stimulates further questions on the ways in which the sense of global solidarity and drive to cooperation develop and can be triggered. Secondly, the discipline of international relations should develop a greater awareness of its ethical role and repercussions which it stimulates and, as such, become more reflective incorporating lessons from other social sciences and research methodologies.

Although the issue of global inequality has been side tracked in the face of more urgent policy matters such as the quick management of the pandemic crisis, one of the key lessons from this analysis is that inequality and pandemics mutually reinforce one another. That means that existing patterns of global inequality can worsen the scale and intensity of the crisis caused by a pandemic. Therefore, tackling inequality should be – together with medical approaches and scientific experiments – a key priority for governments investing in the prevention of pandemics and state preparedness in the face of one. Among these themes, there is a gap in the literature looking to identify the challenges faced by specific, marginalised or vulnerable groups in the face of pandemics and how governments and supra-national organisations like the UN can minimise the negative impact. Issues of migration, international or civil conflicts and differing ideological systems have not been analysed in this paper but constitute further variables that should be looked at to see the ways in which they further affect and are affected by the spread of pandemics and the rise of inequality.

Debates within international relations on the impact of pandemics are likely to become much more prominent with this, until now somewhat overlooked aspect of world politics coming to the forefront of scholars' minds. It will be necessary for research on the topic to be responsive to these evolving debates as well as current events in relation to the coronavirus or other future pandemics. Social and political research, focused on a comparative approach, can help academia to understand how previous pandemics have been dealt with and improve crisis management techniques as well as outbreak prevention.

Therefore, it is a critically important area of study for both academic insights and empirical application. However, more research is needed into the actions that shape governments' policies

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