

The 'Battle' Against COVID-19 in a Fragmented World, Has Ruined Billions of Lives

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Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

We are bombarded by briefings and numbers. We are scared into submission by horrifying medical stories, by shocking images, and then, simultaneously, by predictions of economic and social downfall. Day and night, day and night.

But somehow, so often during this so-called coronavirus emergency, we tend to forget that people are people, not numbers, and that bare survival is far from everything.

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For decades we were told: "You are living in a globalized world. Borders have become redundant". Some reluctantly, others happily, accepted.

Rich Westerners invaded all corners of the world with their yachts, villas and third and fourth homes.

Poor Philippine and Indonesian maids and hotel employees have migrated to the Gulf, in search of decently paid jobs.

Interracial, intercontinental marriages and relationships became the norm.

By the end of 2019, hundreds of millions were living in several parts of the world, simultaneously. For different reasons, both rich and poor individuals. For some it became a lifestyle, for others bare necessity.

For better or worse, cultures were increasingly becoming intertwined. To many, the color of skin was increasingly irrelevant. At least to those few hundreds of millions, who have been living on this planet Earth, not just in Asia or Europe, Oceania, the Middle East, South or North America.

I have written a lot about this trend. Some of it was clearly positive, while I have been criticizing, decisively, many elements.

But it was the reality, and as many of us believed, an irreversible, permanent one.

Human beings were breaking up the chains of their past. Suddenly, they felt free to step out of their traditional cultures, religions, habits. They formed relations with human beings coming from other parts of the world. They were marrying people with thoroughly different cultures and backgrounds. They were moving to far away places. And not only young people. Often their parents, seduced by wanderlust, were deciding to retire thousands of miles away.

Men and women were doing research, in deep rainforests, some of them deciding to stay there, forever. Others were ruining these forests, becoming rich on shameless plunder.

So many stories, good and bad. So many reasons, wonderful and horrible, of globalized or internationalized life.

Then suddenly, the end. Full stop!

COVID-19, or call it novel coronavirus, has arrived.

It came from nowhere, its mortality rate low, that of the common flu, but remarkably contagious.

Abruptly, our world stopped.

Almost all proverbial liberties have been taken away from the people. So fast, and without plebiscites, referendums, debates. Police, drones, surveillance, have rapidly been employed against the citizens, virtually everywhere.

And then, almost from the start of the pandemic, the borders began closing down. Borders, which we used to be told, were there to stay open, forever.

And the international, or for some of us internationalist life, was suddenly arrested.

The changes were implemented so rapidly, that most of us had no time to react. We watched, helplessly, as frontiers were closed, airlines cancelled flights, and the movement of people came to an abrupt stop.

Across the border lines, disappearing beyond the horizon, were our families, or loved ones, our colleagues and comrades, as well as countries and cities for which we longed for.

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There was nothing much we could do, because this brutal global lockdown was performed "for our own good". We found ourselves sheltered in prison, 'so we, and others, could survive'. Or that's what we were told.

We have not been allowed to take risks, nor to dare. Our loved ones have not been allowed to dare, either.

We have all become soft, and so easy to manipulate. All that talk about freedom and democracy has quickly been forgotten.

In just one or two months, our planet has become fragmented, as never before. Borders have been closed, even between the countries of Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East.

Europeans, for instance, who were forced into great sacrifices in exchange for a borderless continent, were suddenly stuck with those existing sacrifices, but also with the re-erected frontiers.

With shocking speed, all the gains made by humanity - gains towards an open world - were annulled, liquidated.

I have to repeat: people were not asked. Nobody consulted them.

While several airlines began receiving billions of dollars in government subsidies, there has been no compensation for those hundreds of millions of people whose lives have been virtually ruined, reduced to near nothing by the travel bans, which have amounted to imprisoning multitudes in their current locations.

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Right now, almost the entire South America is “out of reach”, and so is Asia. Foreigners cannot enter the United States. Actually, most of the countries have turned themselves into fortresses.

Imagine that you have relatives living in a different part of the world. Imagine that your spouse is there, somewhere, or your house, or important work which you love, passionately. Imagine that some neoliberal government is using COVID-19 lockdown to cover up the speeding-up of the destruction of its rainforests, as is happening right now in places such as Brazil and Indonesia. Imagine that such governments are dispossessing indigenous people, and you cannot continue your work, which is to expose crimes against humanity and nature.

Millions of people depend on your investigative work, but you cannot go. The borders are closed, planes are not flying. “It is all for your own good”. “It is all for the sake others”.

You may want to ask: “What about the good of those millions who are being robbed, impoverished, even killed by events unrelated, or just partially-related to the COVID-19? Do they have the right to live? Do they have the right to be protected, defended?”

But, not many are asking those questions! And if they do, the mass media is not paying attention.

The novel coronavirus, it appears, is now all that matters, at least to some, or to the majority. Or to the regime.

It is like those proverbial hospitals, which are letting people die from cancer and strokes, because their emergency rooms and beds are being used exclusively to treat COVID-19 patients.

There is something essentially and morally wrong with this approach. Something deeply wrong, philosophically and logically, too.

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Do governments in, say, Europe, have the right to tell a husband whose wife is dying in Japan or Korea, that he cannot jump on a plane and go, in order to be with her?

Can a scientist be prevented from flying to a lab, on the other side of the world, if he or she is working on some urgent project that could improve life on our planet?

Can I be prevented from flying to Venezuela, where U.S. and Colombian mercenaries have just attempted yet another coup against a legitimate government?

Apparently, the answer is “Yes!”

It is the “new normal” yes.

Four or five months ago, it would all have been considered insane, unacceptable, even criminal.

But now, a flu pandemic, has suddenly created a new ‘morality’, as well as thoroughly new rules and norms for humanity.

And we do not have to look for important missions, or life and death situations, only.

There are hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of people, who are simply living on this beautiful planet of ours, not in just one particular country, and who cannot exist in any other way. Their culture is multiculturalism. I do not say that it is good or bad. It is simply a fact. Their health, even medical supplies, depend on this ‘lifestyle’, as well as their emotional wellbeing, and their work.

Without being able to travel, their personal relationships are falling apart, their houses and apartments are literally collapsing, and their life is losing its meaning.

Is anyone compiling statistics on how many human lives are being affected, or even ruined in this manner? The number is definitely staggering.

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Caution, of course! Caution is essential. The coronavirus should not be taken lightly. But not the extreme approaches, which could, for decades to come, set back those countless positive gains that have been made by our civilization.

To travel, to explore; getting to know “the Other”, trying to understand, to live with each other as one humanity: this is one of the great advances made by humankind. Imperfect, sometimes hypocritical or half-hearted, but a great advance, nevertheless. Not globalization, but internationalism, when things are at their best.

We thought that we could take these advances for granted. We strongly believed that they couldn’t be removed from us.

We fought for the others, for the people of all nationalities and races, to be able to enjoy them, soon, too. We thought that we could win.

And now, all of a sudden, we have realized that everything was just a mirage.

One strike of a pen by some government official, and all our liberties can disappear, get cancelled. We get pushed into the corner, as if we were cattle, or kindergarten children.

True rights are only those rights that can never, under any circumstances, be taken away from us.

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The most frightening is the absolutism, extremism with which the regulations have been introduced.

A state of siege, perhaps, but not outright incarceration.

Travel could have been made difficult, but still possible.

I will say it as an anecdote, but there is some truth in it: I have a combat gas mask, which I use when covering riots, uprisings and revolutions. It has a huge filter. There is no way that if I was wearing it, I could get infected, or infect other people on an airplane. If that is not enough, I would be willing to wear some plastic disposable suit, all the way from, say, South America to Asia, with transit points in Europe. It would be an extremely uncomfortable, but safe (for me and everybody) way of travel. And when in Asia, say Japan, I'd be happy to undergo a 14-day self-quarantine. And even pay some reasonable fee, for 'causing bother'.

But if I really need to go, if it is a matter of life and death for me, there should be some draconic option for me and for millions like me.

But there isn't! The borders of the entire Asia and of South America are closed, hermetically. Even the borders of the United States are sealed, despite the fact that it has the highest rate of infected people. Only citizens and green card holders can board the inbound planes.

And so, human lives continue being ruined, on a just recently unimaginable scale.

Nothing, absolutely nothing can be done, it appears. All of us are at the mercy of our regimes.

We had no idea, but now we know.

Even when these restrictions are lifted, nothing will ever be "normal". People will be well aware of the fact that their lives can be shattered again, on any pretext, at any time.

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If a cure, or prevention, are ten times, or even hundred times deadlier than the disease, then it is immoral to be applying them.

Also, it is essential to remember, that there are many different ways in which human beings can die. Some people could easily perish even if their lungs are intact, and hearts are beating. They could die from sorrow, from the absence of loved ones, or from the meaninglessness of life in confinement.

Today's struggle, and combat should not be exclusively against COVID-19. The battle should be simply for life, for each and every human life, no matter what viruses, conditions or circumstances are endangering it.

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