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IMPERIAL AND HEGEMONIC INTERREGNUM

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the crisis of the domination of the political "West" with the rest of the world, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Using the tradition of Ancient Rome, this paper will label the mentioned period as interregnum. Period when the unipolar world shifts towards a multipolar world, in which there is a need of new coexistence as a product of dialog against confrontation. The aim is to draw a historical parallel in order to determine the genesis of previous and current phenomena during the period of interregnum. Determination of the existence of cycles of interregnum in different civilizations and the exit strategy from such periods, with a special emphasis on modern phenomena in the era of globalization. This is a time of multiple crises and uncertainties which mark the end of the world as we know it, and the original need to go back to normalcy in an entirely new context of human existence. The paper, while analyzing the challenges of Western civilization, will also observe if the West, as a civilization, will have the courage for making bold and new decisions, or will it let another civilization do this; the paper deals with the view of West on the West itself. It was necessary to decipher the structural crisis of what we call the West, in order to*

* <https://doi.org/10.54842/ustich.1327010>

respond to the dilemma of whether we are living in the end of the 5 centuries domination of the West over the entire humanity.

Keywords: *west; interregnum; empires; neo-liberalism, hegemony, globalization*

İMPARATORLUK VE BASKIN FETRET DÖNEMLERİ

Öz: *Bu makale, 20. yüzyılın sonu ve 21. yüzyılın başında siyasi “Batı”nın dünyanın geri kalanı üzerindeki tahakkümünün/hegemonyasının yarattığı krizini ele almaktadır. Makalede, antik Roma geleneği kullanılarak, söz konusu dönem fetret (interregnum) dönemi olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Tek kutuplu dünyanın çok kutuplu bir dünyaya doğru kaydığı, çatışmanın yerini diyalogun aldığı ve bunun sonucu olarak yeni bir birlikte yaşama ihtiyacının ortaya çıktığı dönemdir. Amaç, fetret döneminde önceki ve halen mevcut olguların oluşumunu belirlemek için tarihsel bir paralellik çizmek; küreselleşme çağındaki modern olgular üzerinde durularak, farklı medeniyetlerde fetret döngülerinin varlığının ve bu tür dönemlerden çıkış stratejisinin belirlenmesidir.*

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Bu dönem, insanın varoluşunun tamamen yeni bir bağlamında ele alındığı, normale dönme ihtiyacının ortaya çıktığı, bildiğimiz dünyanın sonunu işaret eden çoklu krizlerin ve belirsizliklerin yaşandığı bir dönemdir. Makalede, Batı medeniyetinin karşı karşıya olduğu zorluklar analiz edilirken, Batı'nın bir medeniyet olarak cesur ve yeni kararlar alma cesaretine sahip olup olmayacağını ya da bunu başka bir medeniyetin yapmasına izin verip vermeyeceği de incelenmekte; Batı'nın Batı'ya bakışı ele alınmaktadır. Batı'nın tüm insanlık üzerindeki 5 asırlık tahakkümünün sonuna gelinip gelinmediği ikilemine cevap verebilmek için, Batı'daki yapısal krizini deşifre etmek gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *batı, fetret, imparatorluklar, neo-liberalizm, hegemonya, tahakküm, küreselleşme*

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous definitions of the term interregnum and, at the same time, numerous interpretations that have been the product of various historical contexts. Depending on the needs, the term itself and its application offered explanations of current, temporary and irregular events, caused by a variety of symptoms, trends, historical ordeals, personalities, and so on. In general, the interregnum is a time interval indicating the interruption of a certain continuity. This time interval between two periods (what was and what is coming) is most often used in defining the temporal space from the end of the reign of one sovereign ruler until the coming to power of another, that is, his successor. It is in this time gap that there is a suspension or interruption of executive control or control by one governor. The etymology of the term itself, which is a coinage of two separate words, originates in the Latin language: *inter* (between) and *regnum* (government/authority, power, empire), i.e. inter-governance. In fact, this term was most commonly used when there was interruption of the rule of kings and emperors, that is, the time when the empire, the monarchy, or the state was left without a ruler, most often because of death or coup d'état.

However, the original use of the term is found in the Roman law in which the term is a legal concept, in its institutionalized form and application. According to Zygmunt Bauman, it appears for the first time in Titto Livio history of Rome. As Livio cited, legendary King Romulus, “ruled Rome for 38 years, and 38 years represented an average length of life of an average person, which means that when Romulus died, or as Titto Livio suggests, was raised to heaven, there were very few people in Rome who remembered a world in which Romulus was not present. It was the first interregnum, a time of panic, of a complete decomposition of life, of total uncertainty. People were used to the idea that whatever needs to be done, and how people need to live comes from Romulus. He will tell you.”¹

In the period of the Roman Republic there was a time of political imbalances, caused by a period of no-governance, that is, an inter-governance in which the Senate found itself without a sovereign king who possessed the actual power to command the Republic, or the holder of the highest authority (*imperium*). During the interregnum, that

¹ Transcript by the Executive Committee of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations”, Bauman, Zygmunt, *Living in Times of Interregnum*, p. 2

temporary suspension of law occurred were until the proclamation of a new sovereign, where the Senate independently assumed power over the need for legitimate authority and its re-activation.²

In addition to the original Roman interregnum, there were numerous interregnums throughout history. Among the better known are Ottoman, Chinese, and Vatican. But there were interregnums even when the time periods themselves were not named so, and yet were followed by temporary, short-term trends, symptoms and diagnoses. In Europe during the 16th century, the term interregnum itself gained wider meaning than the then known, as “a breach of continuity in the normal executive reign of a sovereign power: the paradigm of the empty throne. It is commonly used, for example, to designate the period between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II in England.”³

The debate on the “end of history”⁴ is already a hackneyed rhetoric that proved to be an idealistic utopia, which has never achieved its ultimate goal: peace. But in some ways, the period between the welcoming of the triumphalism of the liberal democracy and the beginning of the real 21st century, through the terrorist attack of the World Trade Centre in New York, was nothing but a temporary state: interregnum. This condition was an opportunity, a period of thought about what would be born as a new paradigm that would show the direction to which the new order would strive. Instead of creating values and ideals based on respect for human rights, the rule of law and mutual respect, the interregnum of liberal democracy went in a different vague direction that brought to the surface the symptoms arising from its failure to achieve its ultimate goal. Among the symptoms that undermine the current international order are undoubtedly the economic crises in the United States and the EU, the undermining of the middle class, a young generation that for the first time lives worse than their parents due to the

2 “The interregnum enabled (the Senate) to take over in an emergency, such as when both consuls died or were to be absent for a lengthy time. The interregnum lasted until the end of the emergency and order was restored to normality. On such occasions, the Senate elected an interrex for a period limited to five days, until a new king was found and normal constitutional order was restored. Should the Senate fail to designate a king during this brief period, the *interrex* was to name a successor for the next five days and so on... the interregnum is devoid of republican association and is not obligated by a tribute to the people; it depends solely on sacred right, as a self-sufficient, auspicatory investiture. It is the most archaic element of political life during the Republican era, in which it shines like a royal ornament.

3 Theophanidis Philippe, *Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept: A Brief Contextual Survey*, Synthesis 9, Fall 2016, p. 110

4 Fukuyama, Francis, *End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, 1992

enormous unemployment rate, as well as the dysfunction of international institutions, The United Nations Security Council above all, which is reflected through the hot spots and monsters of the war that carry countless casualties on a daily basis. As this *Runaway World*⁵ and its failures in some way show, the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism seemed to represent an interregnum in order to accomplish another purpose, rather than an end in itself.

The interregnum reflects the time interval, that is, the form of this vacuum in international politics. But the very essence and all that fills this space could be defined as *ad interim*, which is a state of “temporariness” or “interim”. A period filled with the failures of the old order and the sparkle of hope brought by the new, still unborn order. *Ad interim* is a dangerous condition. Dangerous in the sense that it constitutes a threat to itself if it fails to get rid of the constraints that lead it to a state of fear, uncertainty and alternatives that will only change their form, but not the content.

One of the key authors who portray this situation is the Marxist Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. In defining the interregnum, he does not refer to the Roman law, according to which in the time of the republic the existence of authority that is in charge is present, even though the executive power is suspended. He goes beyond the limited definition of the Roman Republic and the 16 centuries-long inter-periods from one king to another. The Gramsci’s interregnum does not reflect any transition and a normal period of its implementation. On the contrary, dwells on a state of crisis in which authority is interrupted, but there is still a continuation of the rule. In that case, the question of legitimacy arises as well as to what extent the ruling class has a support of its rule.

The time in which Gramsci writes his “prison notes” is a product of the Great Depression with the Wall Street collapse in 1929, which stroke an unprecedented blow to capitalism, unprecedented until then, and to this day. This crisis was an occasion and an incentive for the rise of the far-right parties, which in Italy had already had their own pace with the Fascist takeover of power, six years before the Great Depression. On the other hand, the far left through the Communist Movement in the period of 1928 intensified its presence through the Comintern, which represented the third period of the Communist International. At that

5 Giddens, Anthony, *Runaway World*, Profile Books, 2002

time in the Soviet Union, more precisely at the end of 1929, the rural collectivization began after the termination of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). The Italian Communist Party in 1930 adopted an extremely left-wing stance, due to the pressure from the Comintern, rejecting democratic perspectives as unacceptable in order to crush Mussolini's power. This extreme left-wing trajectory did not have Gramsci's approval, on the contrary, he vehemently opposed it.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci will depict a period that is characteristic for each interim period, torn between two realities: "If the ruling class loses consensus, that is, does not "lead" but is only "dominant", demonstrates force through coercion, which exactly points out the fact that large masses are moving away from their traditional ideologies and do not believe anymore what they previously believed in. This crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."⁶

In some interpretations, like that of Slavoj Žižek, the phrase morbid symptoms is replaced with monsters.⁷ According to Gramsci, the morbid symptoms manifest themselves in a variety of ways: "physically (depression), epistemologically (scepticism with regard to all theories), economically (poverty), and politically (cynicism)... there is no easy solution to this crisis. It does not seem possible to return to a former state that is not trusted anymore, nor is it possible to come up with new and promising alternatives. In other words, general disbelief makes it impossible to reactivate the old ideologies, while cynicism and scepticism makes it harder to believe in any new propositions.⁸ It is precisely the appearance of morbid symptoms that suggests the arrival of a new, uncertain world, which until it is born will be stuck in its own ad interim.

One of the most important sociologists and philosophers of the 21st century, Zygmunt Bauman, will make the parallel of the time in which we live with the interregnum of the old Rome, which Gramsci calls ad interim. In one interview, Bauman concludes that it is not possible to

6 Gramsci, Antonio, Hoare, Quintin, Smith, Nowell, Geoffrey, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers Co, 1971

7 Žižek Slavoj, *Living in the End Times*, New York, Verso, 2011

8 Theophanidis Philippe, *Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept: A Brief Contextual Survey*, Synthesis 9, Fall 2016

endure for a long time in this state, because this is the time in which the old ways of doing things are no longer functional or are ineffective, while the new instruments are still not invented, let alone tested. Bauman disagrees with the fact that the period of change in which we live is characterized by a transition. In order for a transition to take place, a transition from “here” to “there” is needed, but although we know very well the place from which we want to escape: “here”, we have no clue about what “there” is where we want to get. Bauman fears that we could be taken to the desired place without our will, as well as because of wrong actions or the lack of them. Bowman’s conclusion is that we are “not getting anywhere”.⁹

In his lecture at the forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” in Italy, Bauman will warn about three aspects that mirror living in the world of interregnum. According to Bauman, we are first of all haunted by ignorance, that is, the lack of it, which simply manifest our lack of belief, lack of self-confidence and lack of trust in the knowledge we already possess how to do things, and we need to change things. According to Bauman, the other aspect very closely lettered to ignorance is the feeling of impotence, that we do not know how to do it, how to go about it, who is going to do it. These two aspects are accompanied, as he says, with the most painful aspect, and that is the loss of self-confidence and the feeling of humiliation, we are inadequate, whatever we do does not have much consequence, nothing happens, we are trying this and that, sometimes we are coming close to very great self-sacrifice, but nothing really happens. “Once you believe that, than you stop acting, you stop thinking, which means that we are in sort of a vicious circle in a time of interregnum, we exacerbate all the things which make us ineffective in shaping our joint future.”¹⁰ According to Bauman, the crisis today does not consist of what should be done, but who will do the job, because, as he concludes, this is a crisis of ages and does not represent a pre-crisis of ideas because ideas are abandoned, and the real ideas are very prolific.

But what is necessary to note is the reason why today’s world is again in a state of interregnum and what are the symptoms that occur because of the existence of that temporary vacuum. One of the reasons is exactly globalization, which appeared as the dominant megatrend of the

9 <http://mattkennard.tumblr.com/post/63075191723/zygmunt-bauman-transcript>

10 Transcript by the Executive Committee of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” Living in Times of Interregnum, Bauman, Zygmunt

transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. But it is precisely the globalization that created a discrepancy between the economy and politics. The world has united economically¹¹, creating a market that thanks to advanced technology is available in every home. On the other hand, politics remained in “Westphalia”. Namely, the world of nation states remained trapped in retrograde policies and the leaders who remained within their borders. If in the world of economics, globalization united the world, in politics it should have been cosmopolitanism, which unfortunately seems to go to the other extreme. Globalization has created consumer societies that are a means rather than an end in themselves. Bauman talks about “Liquid Life”, which is realized through the conditions of constant uncertainty, and thus the life itself is erratic. This Liquid Life is intertwined with consumerism and the “consumer syndrome”, which is a prerequisite for assessing individuals in society, measuring their consumer capacity. In such a society, according to Bauman, there is no desire for improvement, but only for the abundance through which *marketization* is carried out, which fills the living space.

The second reason would be the need to revise the “social contract” and the debate about freedom and security. There is a perception that we are in an unstoppable and irrevocable progress, together with our post-modern society, which in fact is in an uncertain and dangerous momentum due to the incorrect redistribution of freedom and security. These two constants, which are in an eternal mutual relationship, are the two postulates of the social contract that has been valid since Hobbes until now. But what if the same agreement is violated, when security is used as an excuse for the deficiency of freedom, and the price paid is too high and leads to dependence on fear and to the apparent stability of neoliberalism? It is also one of the crucial reasons for the dysfunction of democracy, above all the neo-liberal paradigm, which in turn leads to the emergence of post-concepts. According to Bauman, the neoliberal revolution resulted in a prominent discrepancy and with the possible “divorce between power (meaning the capacity to complete things) and politics (meaning the ability to decide what things are needed and need to be done).”

The transformation that reshaped the international into a world order, at this point is in a state of interregnum. It is precisely this time period

11 Process known as economical globalization that is referring to a certain integration and conversion of the national economies and markets into one common world market

between the changes of power, that is, the change of the centres of gravity in the world international order, whose certainty is not yet clearly established, creates a state of vacuum. Ian Bremmer, using the so-called “G-Zero” phenomenon, describes the state of vacuum in international politics, primarily caused by the decline in Western influence on international relations and the lack of global leadership without a vision of major political and economic issues. The very notion “G-Zero” means a world order in which no country, or a permanent alliance of countries, can meet the challenges of global leadership.¹² Specifically for the United States, Bremmer says that although its role in the G-Zero world is diminished, it finds its advantages in the multilateral approach, contrary to the challenges of foreign policy, through Washington’s attempt to create security ties with other countries and a single massive trade deal with China, which aims at deepening economic integration in Asia... this whole crisis, according to Bremmer, will result in regional leaders, not with a single global leader, whose goal is to maintain peace.¹³ According to him, the situation through which we are passing is not a new world order that everyone is waiting for but an interregnum. This situation is stuck between the world system led by the United States and something new that we do not know yet.¹⁴

It can be concluded that the interregnum as a cycle that is constantly going backwards through history, this time is prompted by rapid technological development, the displacement of the centre of gravity and world domination, globalization, *desovereignization*, and post-capitalism, which are key symptoms of the twilight of the existing world and the rise of the new world that comes. To fully perceive the current interregnum, emphasis should be placed on the eroded neo-liberal world order, which led by the West, that is, primarily by the United States, is just one of the “morbid symptoms”.

IMPERIAL INTERREGNUM

The 20th century is interpreted as a short century that started in 1914 and ended in 1989, or 1991.¹⁵ The beginning of the century was marked by

12 Bremmer, Ian, *Every Nation for Itself – Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, Penguin, 2012

13 Ibid.

14 Magazine *Corporate Risk Canada*

15 This interpretation is mostly due to Eric Hobsbawm - *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–199*

a wave of collapse of empires and kingdoms. The Austrian – Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian empires collapsed almost simultaneously. Through the realization of the right to national self-determination, the territories of empires were soon taken over by the order of national states. Eric Hobsbawn will describe this as the “ill fate of European politics in the 20th century. “National self-determination will generate a series of wars, because imperial areas until then were unable to distinguish new national states without generating new minorities, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, migration and displacement of population, assimilations etc.

The founders of the League of Nations in Geneva were convinced that it would stabilize post-imperial space. Their expectations failed and post-imperial areas would be left on their own with all their challenges, new situations, confrontations and conflicts. This is why many events between the two world wars will be seen as post-imperial constellations, which will in turn be a reason for the beginning of the Second World War. This can be seen also as an imperial interregnum, because of the existence of a political vacuum of power following the collapse of empires. Namely, the established order of nation states in the area of former empires will contribute to the establishment of Hitler and Stalin foreign policy as a sort of a return towards a new imperial order.

Hitler’s imperial project will fail in the conflict with the coalition of great powers. In 1945, Japan’s attempt to establish their own empire will also fail. Also, after the Second World War, Western European colonial kingdoms will see their demise. Stalin’s imperial project will not fall until 1991, due to the overstretching of its resources, as Paul Kennedy would say.¹⁶

Post-imperial areas after World War II will ask for external support to establish a stable internal order. Post-colonial elites will prove themselves incapable of achieving the same. Such areas showed a need of time to establish and develop their own political structures. This is exactly why they were in need of a “neutral power” able to fulfill the imperial role of establishing order and a system, without taking over the role of previous empires in the process.

This post-imperial and post-colonial period following World War II can also be qualified as imperial interregnum. It is the time when the USA

16 Kennedy, Paul, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Unwin Hyman, 1989

and the USSR had great influence on the internal situation in these areas, above all through economic and military support. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union uncovered the fragility of states established in the Fifties and Sixties of the 20th century in the post-colonial areas - also known as Third world countries.

The end of the Cold War, i.e. the end of the 20th century, was interpreted by many authors as a possibility to build a new world order, and not going back to empires. The UN were expected to finally realize the tasks it was established for after the Second World War – tasks it was unable to perform because of the blockades within the Security Council. Such great expectations on the predominant role of the UN in the 21st century were based on the fact that globalization would entail the decline and erosion of power of states, with sovereignty increasingly transferred to transnational institutions. According to this understanding, this is a process resulting from post-imperial experiences in Europe that started with the OSCE and the EU and should be a model for the new world order.¹⁷

Contrary to this model of a community of states, there was also and understanding that nation states, or the Westphalian model, would gradually disappear. The 21st century state will lose more and more of its power also due to self-regulation of market regimes and political action of non-governmental organizations.¹⁸ The so-called global metropolis network was offered as an alternative to the community of states.¹⁹ Liberal intellectuals offered, as the best solution, the model of Pax Americana.

The events of 9/11 showed that new forms of warfare and global terrorism destroyed many of the visions and concepts for post-imperial order. The UN proved themselves as powerless and without control over wars between dictators, religious and ethnic conflicts. The New York attacks also showed that the metropolis network is vulnerable and non-resilient to transnational terrorism. The infrastructure of big cities can easily be used for logistics in terrorist attacks that are very difficult to be uncovered and prevented. Also, it appeared that connected metropolises are not interested in the areas outside of their network.

17 Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, London: Atlantic Books, 2004

18 Hardt, Michael, Negri, Antonio, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000

19 Benjamin Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* Hardcover – Yale University Press, 2013

In the first decades of the 21st century, it was proven that neither the model of the UN, nor that of the OSCE or the EU, or the metropolis network, are able to react when faced with disorder, terrorism, bloody ethnic or religious conflicts, genocides or deportation of population. It can be said that the so-called humanitarian military interventions and the fight against terrorism brought the issue of empires back as a subject of debate at the beginning of the 21st century.²⁰

Thus for example, it is stated that USA during the time of President Bill Clinton have led a hegemonic politics that will turn into an imperialist politics at the time of George Bush. In his book *Incoherent Empire*, Michael Mann claims that the hegemonic politics brought about more of a disorder than order. Herfried Munkler sets the dilemma of whether the USA would lead a devastating unilateral politics of power if George Bush had not been elected as US President and if neo-conservative political circles had not gained political influence. According to these authors, American politics gained its imperialistic character because of the personal decisions of its President, made under the influence of his advisers and their ideological determination.

Michael Ignatieff in *Empire Lite* discusses liberal or democratic imperialism, a “new form of imperial governance in the post-imperial period” that features advocacy for human rights and democracy, as well as establishment and maintenance of a free market.²¹

The debates on the USA as a new empire also raise another dilemma: Can there be a democratic empire?²² The doubt in this dilemma stems from historical experience. Namely, imperial has always been associated with authoritarian, or autocratic management in the center. Therefore, democratization and fall of empires have always meant one and the same.²³

20 Gore Vidal, *Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of Amnesia*, Clairview, 2004
- Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires*, Harvard University Press, 2006
- Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire*, Verso, 2005
- Herfried Munkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States*, Polity Press, 2007

21 Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite*, Penguin Canada, 2006

22 Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

23 Herfried Munkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States*, Polity Press, 2007

Joseph S. Nye claims that Rome's military expansion in the Mediterranean area destroyed Republican order and led to a century of internal disorder and civil wars. When Octavian August was in power, republican institutions were reduced to a mere facade, behind which there was a management structure in which people and the patricians had no decisive political influence. A similar thing happened to Napoleon's empire.²⁴ Namely, Napoleon Bonaparte was much more inspired by the Roman Empire than the Roman Republic when he decided to expand French power in South and Central Europe and when he became Emperor after being the first consul.

Unlike the French Revolution and Napoleon, American Revolution and the founding fathers were inspired by the Roman Republic and transposed the institutions that had the task to prevent fractions, limiting the power of charismatic leaders and most importantly, rejecting everything that could possibly destroy the Republic. This is exactly why the Federalist Paper²⁵ develops the project of a federal state, funded anti-imperially and distanced from world political aspirations, a feature of American politics in the 19th and part of the 20th century.

Critics of American imperialist ambitions that appeared in the 21st century, start from the incompatibility of republican institutions and imperialist politics. They claim that empire and democracy never go together and therefore, of the USA continue their imperialist aspirations, democracy in the US will disappear.²⁶

Among the first authors to seriously deal with this topic was French historian Emmanuel Todd.²⁷ He claims that empire is a generally known term that should not be elaborated further, and that the USA are a

24 Most likely this was described most comprehensively by Georges Lefebvre in his work *Napoleon*, originally published in 1935 by Presse Universitaires de Frances. Routledge, 2011

25 <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>

26 Chomsky, Noam, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003

- Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, Harvard University Press, 2004

- Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, Macmillan, USA, 2008

- As most mentioned and most obvious example of the continuing danger to democracy in the United States is the plan Operation Northwood and everything related to such scenarios, which are an inspiration for many conspiratorial theories.

27 Todd, Emmanuel: *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*, Columbia University Press, 2006

modern day empire. In his book, *After Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*, he deals with the phenomenon of “decline” by foreseeing the end of American global power. According to him, American imperialism until 1990 used to cover the neo-Communist world, and with the fall of Communism, the US became an empire. The predominance of liberal economic principles promoted by the USA led to the transformation of the entire world. This is what globalization actually is. He explains his thesis on the end of empire with a double inversion. First, the inversion of economic dependence between the world as a whole and the USA; and second, the inversion of democratic dynamics whereby the USA is given more of a negative connotation, whereas Eurasia gains positive interpretations. With globalization, new technologies and the Internet, the world is becoming more educated, informed and democratic. Todd believes that due to the abovementioned, the USA are unable to fulfill their strategic aim which is to control world resources. He elaborates a highly paradoxical thesis, according to which it is still unclear whether the universalization of liberal democracy and peace is an inevitable historical process, but states that such a world would definitely be a threat to the USA.

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These stances of Todd are picked up by German professor Herfried Munkler. According to him, empires provide security, but right at the moment of the peak of their power, they enter periods of constant danger for their destruction.²⁸

Italian philosopher Antonio Negri and American theoretician and philosopher Michael Hardt tried to formulate a critique of fluid capitalism and a critique of empires as a decentralized and deterritorialized bio-political governance apparatus that includes the global area. As one of the first symptoms to announce the new paradigm, they see the weakening of sovereignty of nation states. However, they do not see this as a reason to dethrone sovereignty as such. According to them, empire is a new form of sovereignty. It is a fundamental reshaping of sovereignty from singular national centers into a supranational form configured by multifaceted networks of hybrid identities, elastic hierarchies and multilateral exchange. They believe that the UN actually paved the way for the establishment of the Empire unjustified idea to produce a global norm that can act in a sovereign manner. In all other cases, the UN is based on paradoxes - namely, on

28 Herfried Munkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States*, Polity Press, 2007

one hand, sovereignty of national states must be respected, and on the other hand, they are only effective when violating that same sovereignty. Their position is that the imperialist era is finished. No nation can be a world leader any more. There is a merge of political and economic power at the global level. In another one of their books, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, they introduce the category of “multitude” as the summary of all those exploited and subordinate that might confront the Empire. The first political demand of such multitude should be global citizenship. That would establish a completely new political geography and new political subjectivity. According to them, it will be a time to observe the mysterious ways of fate, unusual topologies and sufferings, but the desire to be free will only be calmed through the conquering of new space.²⁹

HEGEMONIC INTERREGNUM

On June 5, 1947, the Chief of General Staff of the US Army during World War II, and later State Secretary of the USA, George Marshall, held a speech before Harvard graduates. This address of his will be remembered as an introduction into US hegemony. Namely, in his address, he states the following:

“It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist. Such assistance, I am convinced, must not be on a piecemeal basis as various crises develop. Any assistance that this Government may render in the future should provide a cure rather than a mere palliative. Any government that is willing to assist in the task of recovery will find full co-operation I am sure, on the part of the United States Government. Any government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries cannot expect help from us. Furthermore, governments, political parties, or groups which seek to perpetuate human misery in order to profit therefrom politically or otherwise will encounter the opposition of the United States.”³⁰

29 Hardt, Michael, Negri, Antonio, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000

30 <http://www.oecd.org/general/themarshallplanspeechatharvarduniversity5june1947.htm>

Only ten months later, the then US President Harry Truman signed the Economic Cooperation Act, better known as the Marshall Plan. Between 1948 and 1951, the US sent money, goods and services to Europe, worth an estimated 13,5 billion US dollars, which in today's value would be around 140 billion dollars. American citizens, who enjoyed peace and —, renounced one percent of their gross national product for the benefit of 16 European countries, among which was also 1948 Germany.

Four years later, at the end of the aid plan, industrial production in the beneficiary countries had grown by 36 percent, whereas income per capita was way beyond the one before the war.

It is especially important that the great plan of George Marshall incited Western – European integration, opened the doors to NATO, to the common market, as well as German – French understanding.³¹

The aim of the Marshall plan was to promote US interests and strengthen US positions, but under the pretext of preserving world peace. The similar formula of “US weapons and dollars” will establish US domination in other regions of the world, thus becoming a leading trade partner of most countries.

The US will achieve their domination in world economy through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose representatives are always American, and managers European. According to the NATO model, led by the USA, the Central Treaty Organization in the Middle East was established, to which Washington also joined. The South-East Asia Treaty Organization was also established by the USA, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand and the Phillipines. In this way, the USA imposed themselves during the 20th century as the leading military force in the world.

During the 20th century, the biggest challenge to US hegemony was the Soviet Union. The Communist bloc will establish its own “empire” and will enter a “Cold war” with the USA, which will eventually end in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR. Following that collapse, the USA will remain the only superpower at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

31 <https://harvardmagazine.com/1997/05/marshall.html>

Seen from today's point of view, according to the standard economic, political and social indicators, the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century were perhaps the best years in human history. It was a time without great wars between superpowers; global trade was expanding and driving economic prosperity forward; poverty was almost halved and the rapid progress of science and technology, through overall digitalization and availability of Internet to a bigger number of users seemed to bring wellbeing to all areas of the planet.

For almost two decades, the USA were sovereign and unrivaled rulers of the world scene, creating the so-called American "hyperpower". This will only remain so until the mortgage crisis in 2008, the credit crisis in 2008 and the great recession in 2009. The Lehman Brothers bankruptcy marks the beginning of the great financial crisis that will shake the USA and have an aftershock on all Western countries and their financial systems. This major crisis will uncover the deep criminal structures of financial capitalism. The crisis showed that managing structures were unable to govern in a competent and fair manner, which led to a strong resistance against traditional political structures and political party elites. US left - wing will continuously emphasize cultural deregulation, whereas the right-wing will insist on economic deregulation. The left will ask for a slow and precisely oriented economic deregulation, whereas the right - a slow, but precisely oriented cultural deregulation.³²

The global crisis will also show that the legislative and executive power in the USA are nothing but a curtain, a mechanism to provide political legitimacy of decisions actually made by corporative lobby groups behind closed doors.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the world seems to be entering a new phase. The politics of idealism and hope will be increasingly substituted by a politics of identities and fear.

The USA will continue to lose their position as hegemon and humanity will enter a rare moment in history where the absence of hegemony can actually be felt. This period can be qualified as a hegemonic interregnum featuring an intensive multilateral rivalry - a time when the predominance of the American order is fading but a new order has not been fully produced yet.

32 <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/03/goodbye-heraclitus>

As any other former hegemon, the USA and the G7 insist on maintaining the status quo of world order as it has been so far. We are about to enter a period of hegemonic interregnum whereby the implications from redefining the role of USA as a former hegemonic power with global domination cannot yet be fully observed, especially during the term of President Donald Trump. The role of G7 in this interregnum is also quite unclear. There is an increased need for a comprehensive analysis of China and its transformation from a regional actor into the main rival and competitor of the previous hegemon. An actor introducing the “new normal” and implementing ambitious projects such as “One belt, one road”.

We have before us new challenges that other international and regional actors face, such as Russia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Poland, South Africa, Argentina; but also sub-regional actors such as Iran, Indonesia, Ukraine or Colombia.

In this hegemonic interregnum, what prevails is the impotence, and even incompetence of international organizations to handle complex humanitarian (migration), environmental and security related problems of today. In many areas of everyday life, the entire planet feels a global worsening of the situation.

Perhaps the solution to this would be a well implemented US transition from hegemonic hyperactivity towards a selective global engagement. Yet, history teaches us that so far, there has never been a case of peaceful withdrawal, especially not coming from a state of such high predominance and hegemony.

The USA and G7 are faced with a great challenge – to find a way to convince the majority of the populations in their countries that there will be benefit from the integrated multipolar world and to come to terms with the fact that the new world leadership will have to be shared with new actors.

During this hegemonic interregnum, Germany will use the EU to promote its own geo-economic and geopolitical interests. The huge EU internal market will become a solid ground for German economy, whereas in geographical and demographic terms, the EU area will turn Germany into a global power, although it is not one in itself. Namely, Germany has always been too small for a global power, and too big for

a regional power. However, EU will enable Germany to bridge that gap and start creating its own global power.

In international relations theory, that is the moment when potential power becomes real power. Brexit once again revives the theories of Heartland³³ and Rimland³⁴. In other words, maritime powers (USA and Great Britain as Rimland) start blocking the new growth of continental powers (Germany and continental Eurasia as the Heartland). Through its Brussels transmission, Germany is taking over all mechanisms for management of European integration. Instead of the longed for European Germany as an essential factor of EU political structure, we are witnessing the rise of a German EU, something that French President De Gaulle and British Prime Minister Thatcher warned about years ago. US President Donald Trump and his administration are fiercely confronting German interests not only in the area of Europe, but also its desire to realize geo-economic and geopolitical interests in the East of Europe, the Middle East and Asia. This is a fight to supervise the European part of transatlantic integration between a strong Germany that is turning into a European hegemon, and its strive to gradually reshape EU into its own empire. In the realization of these goals, Germany is using American military protection and NATO military potential as its shield. However, 70% of NATO funding comes from the United States. It becomes illogical for someone to use their own money and military force to help another competitive power in the strengthening of its imperial ambitions. This is why US administration under Trump no longer wants to help and protect the reshaping of the EU into an imperial power dominated by Germany. This sort of EU insists on reshaping North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) into a unique geopolitical unit reminiscent of the former Roman Empire. Hegemonic interregnum leads to new potential conflicts. The attempts to control Eurasian integration are clearly felt. The US will probably not

33 “Mackinder suggested that the “Heartland” for an emergent global land-power could be anchored in the tremendous collection of natural resources in and around Western Russia, wherefrom suzerainty could be established over vast regions stretching eastwards across the steppelands and forests of Eurasia. From this Heartland, the whole of the ‘World Island’ (continental Europe, Asia, and Africa) might be dominated and World Empire realized. He had the wit to give the pith of his doctrine urgent clarity: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; | Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; | Who rules the World-Island commands the World”. Kearns, Gerry, *Geopolitics and Empire – The Legacy of Halford Mackinder*, Oxford Geopolitical and Environmental Studies, 2009, p. 4-5

34 On a contrary to the Heartland theory, the Rimland theory introduced by the American geopolitician Nicholas John Spykman, pointed the water space that reaches from Europe all the way to South Korea as the world’s main battlefield. In other words, Spykman argued that: Who controls the Rimland controls Euro-Asia, who controls Euro Asia controls the world.

allow the European Heartland to be under exclusive domination of German politics, which is already jeopardizing vital geo-economic and geopolitical interests of the Rimland. German export economy in full throttle, based on monetary manipulation of an underestimated euro, makes EU Member States fully dependent on Germany and disables any bilateral agreement with the USA. Economic subordination creates political dependence and thus allows Germany to dominate over the entire EU. As a result of this, Germany is gaining geopolitical influence it would never have had, unless it adapts and dominates the EU for its own interests. With such a position that enables a realization of its strong economic interests, Germany becomes a global actor that spreads its influence and will, according to the experience and geopolitical logic, enter into conflict with the regional and global interests of the US. This is also backed by the claim of Trump administration that in its trade exchange with the US, Germany is realizing an enormous trade surplus which in turn prevents US economic growth.

THE POLITICAL “WEST” IN INTERREGNUM

Today’s interregnum is currently in a phase in which, according to some thinkers, it becomes an imperial interregnum, and for some a hegemonic interregnum. These views are partly due to the perception that the crisis of neo-liberalism is also a crisis of the entire humanity, and that whatever the crisis that will affect the hegemonic center of power, it will also affect the rest of the world. On the other hand, this is due to the fact that international politics and international relations are today led (at least up to now) by one center of power that we can locate in the image of the Western civilization. The purpose of the West after the Second World War was to grow into a hegemonic force that further aimed at becoming an empire. However, the world order established after 1945 “was not as radically new system but it rather represented the concentration and the climax of the previous one. Empires became spheres of influence of the superpowers. And the old multilateral balance of power in Europe has become a bilateral balance of fear on a global level.”³⁵ During the American era, the balance that at the same time was playing and is playing a role in democracy and is favorable, explains the reason why the liberal revolutions that happened later in that era proved to be successful. “It clearly points to the fact that if the USA themselves were not powerful to the extent that they were, we

35 Kuper, Robert, *Raspad Nacija*, Filip Fišnic, Beograd, 2007

would have witnessed fewer transitions, and those that would have happened would have been short-term. It could have led to a shallower and easily reversed third wave.”³⁶

According to Robert Cooper, for the most part of their history the USA were consciously anti-imperialist, “first of all, from its own struggle for colonial liberation through to the Monroe doctrine. True, it has interfered relentlessly in the internal affairs in Central America, acquired territory by force (as well as purchase), and it was caught up in the imperial frenzy at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was also one of the first to give up its colonies.”³⁷ Cooper continues arguing that “the United States is a country founded on ideas, and its vocation is the spread of those ideas. European countries are based on nation and history. For Americans, history is bunk. They aim, as the Mexican author Octavio Paz says, at the colonization not of space but of time: that is, of the future.”³⁸ Cooper concludes that if America is not imperial in the usual sense, it is certainly hegemonic: “it does not want to rule, but it does aim to control foreign policy. The hegemony (according to Cooper) is “essentially voluntary, part of a bargain in which America provides protection, and allies offer bases and support. From an American point of view, countries can choose to be allies or they can be irrelevant, in which case they can be left alone? If they begin to be a threat then they become, potentially at least, a target.”³⁹

But despite the successful realization of the Western idea, it is the interregnum of its domination that was created at the moment when the concepts of hegemony and empire began to move away from one another, that is, from their center. The crisis of Western domination, through Europe, but certainly more through the United States, reached its zenith at the moment when it lost its hegemonic role, but wanted to continue its own imperialist neo-liberalism, which for many anti-capitalists is, in fact, a despotic imperial force but with a human like face. In other words, borrowed from Gramsci and Bauman, the crisis arose when the consensus of domination and governance shattered, that is, the authority lost its power, but continued to rule; and at the moment when power and politics separated from one another.

36 Kagan, Robert, *The World America Made*, Vintage Books, New York, 2012

37 Kuper, Robert, *Raspad Nacija*, Filip Fišnic, Beograd, 2007

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

But what has led to such a state and does the West itself, in its very nature, bear the seeds of its erosion? On the other hand, can the whole state in which the West is today be called good? “The words ‘good’ and ‘justice’ have meaning as long as people believe in human nature, even though the modernists sought to control nature rather than living by it, and the basic issues of political philosophy remained possible - and that is to say, as long as people are guided by anthropology.”⁴⁰ “While Strauss accepted the theology of Plato, which has the nature in its basis, “Heidegger denied nature in favor of the creative will of “the existing people”... Conditions created after modern rationalism, persuaded Strauss that the West had a fateful choice ahead: the question *Plato or existentialism* is an ontological question today. Or, in other words, he should choose between ancient or modern thinkers.”⁴¹ Strauss emphasized that the first wave of modernism resulted in the creation of the American foundation of liberalism, more precisely through Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, but he is nevertheless sceptical about the limitation of these authors alone. “Strauss considered that the United States is the only country that is in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles”.⁴²

CONCLUSION

In his work “Decline of the West” Spengler writes that the 19th century was “the *winter of the West*, the *victory of materialism* and skepticism, of socialism, parliamentarianism, and money.”⁴³ Arnold Toynbee mentions the cycles, the reactions of the creative minorities, followed by the weakening, that is the civilizational suicide when the leaders do not face the challenges before them creatively enough.⁴⁴ Sorokin claimed that great civilizations go through several phases: crisis, ordeal, catharsis, charisma and resurrection.⁴⁵ All of these forgotten authors in their works start with the assumption that history has its own rhythm and even own cycles. The interregnum is a part of that rhythm and it is

40 Мекалистер, В., Тед, Револт кон Модернизмот, Просветно Дело, Скопје, [Mcallister, V. Ted, Revolt Against Modernism, Prosvetno Delo, Skopje]

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Spengler, Oswald *The Decline of the West I&II*, Utopija, Beograd, 2003

44 Toynbee, J., Arnold, A Study of History – Abridgement of Volumes I-VI, Oxford University Press, 1987

45 Sorokin, Pitirim, *Društvena i Kulturna Dinamika*, Beograd I Podgorica, Službeni List i CID, 2002

a transition from one to another cycle. However, from the research in this paper it can be concluded that the dilemma whether the history of the international relations is cyclic over long periods, or arrhythmic, or, according to Niall Ferguson, it is almost static at times, but capable of rapid acceleration. What if the historical time is less like a slow and predictable change of the seasons, and more like the elastic time of our dreams? Moreover, what if the collapse of the civilization does not take centuries to occur, but slyly and suddenly?⁴⁶

Precisely because of everything that Fergusons lists, we can conclude that it is almost impossible to predict the future of the political “West” based on just the data and the experience from the past and the death of its adversary, the political “East”. The period of interregnum of the international relations in the past was a transition from an established balance in lawlessness. It is always *ad interim*, a period which might have lasted for even decades, but was never permanent. This period, as correctly defined by Gramsci, is a period of morbid symptoms, or metaphorically speaking, a period of a hangover. The triumphalism from the death of the political adversary “East,” which resulted in globalization and the creation of a complex system of economic connections, starting from 2017, was headed towards a collapse, shifting the focus from the West to the East, East which is different from the East from the Cold War, but East which contains creative minorities that led to the economic success in China, India and other Asian economies. Therefore, rightfully, there is the dilemma about whether this interregnum announces the decline of the western civilization after its 1500 years of domination with the rest of the world and the other civilizations.

Numerous authors, contemporaries to this interregnum of the international relations are preoccupied with new questions about what can be done about this “autumn” in the West, that is, as Ferguson, quoting Zakaria, concludes that in a post-American world, the monopoly of what has been typical for the West, and lacking for others is being lost. Namely, the Chinese now have capitalism. The Iranians have science. The Russians democracy. The Africans “slowly” receive the modern medicine, and the Turkish have a consumers’ society. That means that the western ways not only do not decline, but they flourish almost everywhere. There are only a few areas which show resistance.

46 Ferguson, Niall, *The Great Degeneration – How Institutions Decay and Economies Die*, Penguin Press, New York, 2013

The number of people sleeping, showering, getting dressed, working, playing, eating, drinking and traveling like Western people is rising.

Evidently, the period of interregnum is not the disappearance of the western civilization, but its globalization and global spreading. Although in the past 1500 years it caused a great deal of injustices regarding other civilizations, some of which it destroyed, still it can be said that the West offers institutions in the area of economics, societies and politics which are unparalleled, and from which it is expected to unleash the human creativity in order to find solutions for the latest challenges.

Although, perhaps, the political “West” will not survive many of the threats and challenges it faces, it is of utmost importance to open a dialogue with the non-western world, rather than to retreat waiting lonely for the end, running away from the new, multipolar world. Perhaps now is the time to remind ourselves of Toynbee who asks for “repeated devotion” to freedom, which will be in accordance with the time we live in and it will be a new narrative of philosophy and a manifest of the new creative minorities created with the digital transformation of the entire humankind, which is interconnected and full of interaction.

The interregnum offers a moment for self-reflection regarding the “West” before transitioning into the next phase in history in which instead of fighting, self-accusation, confrontations and debates, the West will start a debate with the rest. It will accept the reality of the multipolar world and the others’ growth.

In this interregnum the creative civilization will be forced from the outside to adapt to the cultural configuration of the dominating civilization, although the ideas of the dominating civilization will not become rooted in the creative civilization. The interregnum is a time for thinking by looking in the past in order to project the future. Like in the past, the interregnum is a period when we need to find strength and show courage to face what lies ahead.

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