

**A Sketch of the World After the COVID-19 Crisis:
Essays on Political Authority, The Future of Globalization, and the Rise of
China**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Abstract: This introductory section identifies how the Covid-19 may either contribute to exacerbate the current problems of Political Modernity or accelerate certain political phenomena that may result in challenges to the world order.

Keywords: Covid-19; Political Authority; Nation-State; China.

As was repeated six times by French President Emmanuel Macron during his presidential address on March 16, 2020, the world is at war with an invisible and elusive enemy that has forced all countries to implement extraordinary measures. Following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease outside mainland China, all countries have had to impose quarantine and the lockdown and confinement of entire cities, close their borders, and severely restrict their citizens' freedom. As has been the case during all other wars humanity has faced, this crisis may lead to profound political changes and changes to the world order. Therefore, it is important to try to identify the lessons we should learn from this crisis and how the world may potentially look once this crisis is behind us. These are tough questions to answer while we are still at war with this virus. However, one thing is certain: COVID-19 has accelerated the development of trends that already existed, and this pandemic will most likely serve as a trigger for long-lasting systemic changes. In the pages that follow, I focus on three such changes.

First, this crisis has revealed important problems related to political authority and community spirit in Western states. This is best evidenced by the numerous charismatic statesmen who have been exposed as amateur rulers who lack proper leadership abilities and the absence of civic sense on the part of countless citizens who have displayed anti-social behaviours. Consequently, significant demands have been placed on citizens living in liberal democracies regarding the implementation of extremely harsh liberticidal policies. Although these decisions have been welcomed by the population, this is nonetheless a worrisome feature that illustrates the profound social crisis to which these societies are victim, providing a clear example of the loss of community spirit, or a sense of commitment to the greater good that usually comes with the virtues of solidarity. As the first chapter will show, liberal democracies have followed this path for many reasons, namely because since the 1970s, political elites have lost control of the economy and have placed emphasis on the satisfaction of people's negative freedom. These two elements have led politics to become an empty shell; consequently, politics have become the playground of leaders who have shown a profound lack of leadership during this crisis. Paradoxically, this lack of authority, combined with the disappearance of community spirit, has led individuals to cry for measures that are detrimental to their freedom. Indeed, faced with the hesitations of their leaders and the individualistic behaviours of some of their fellow citizens, many believe that the only way to protect themselves from this deadly virus is through harsh confinement, quarantine, and

the aid of technologies used to track people's movements. To paraphrase Alexis de Tocqueville, the excess of freedom to which people have been accustomed over the last fifty years has led them to ask for measures that are all but favourable to their liberty. This is indeed a risky path for liberal democracy, as once this crisis has passed, these measures may be perceived as having been highly effective, and they may thus become permanently instated.

Second, this health crisis will most likely open a new chapter in the history of inter-state relations. Indeed, analysts and world leaders have identified our open borders and the free flow of people and goods as primary reasons for the quick spread of the coronavirus disease. This is why the re-affirmation of states' sovereignty has been a dominant feature of this crisis, and citizens have found reassurance and a feeling of safety in the fact that they are now protected by their national borders. In the long run, we may witness the emergence of growing nationalism and a willingness to recalibrate globalization at the nation-state level. In hindsight, the primary institutional victim of this erosion of global trade and national selfishness appears to be the European Union, which, during this crisis, has indeed shown an incapacity to generate community spirit and solidarity between member states that have conversely been left on their own. However, even if a reorganization of globalization results from this crisis, it is not likely to happen at the national level. Conversely, the rescaling of international trade at the regional level is the most promising possibility. In light of the discussion presented in the first chapter, this outcome may become an improbable twist of *fortuna* that could play a determinant role in the reformation of political authority and the revival of community spirit not only at the national level but also at the supra-national one. From this perspective, the regionalization of globalization that this crisis may cause may constitute an unforeseen but welcomed second chance for the European Union to reinvent itself as a genuine ethical community: something it has been unable to generate ever since its beginning.

Finally, as individuals have become accustomed to seeing the 'Made in China' tag on almost every manufacturing good that surrounds us, this rescaling of globalization to the national or regional level may severely hamper China's economy, which has increasingly depended on its capacity for global exportation. The initial consequences of the coronavirus disease outbreak provide evidence for this fact; China's inability to export its goods abroad due to the closing of borders severely impacted the country's GDP, witnessing its first contraction since 1992. Thus, we may conclude that tomorrow's world order will be highly unfavourable to the world's second economy, which might trigger what Graham Allison has called the 'Thucydides's trap', an open conflict that occurs when a rising power is prevented from transforming its ambitions into reality by those who are currently in a position to impose what the norm ought to be (in this case the United States and, to a lesser extent, the European Union). To avoid war as the outcome of this public health crisis, we must take this threat seriously and be wary that actions that emerge out of hatred against those deemed as responsible for the outbreak may have devastating effects in the long-run. However, there are

reasons to believe that this fear is largely exaggerated and that the rescaling of globalization may be welcomed by Beijing, as it would accelerate the economic trend China has been pursuing over the last couple of years through various attempts to become economically self-sufficient. In this sense, China's ambitions will not be hampered by this potential shift in globalization. Conversely, it will fit into the country's strategy and ultimately be beneficial for its power and prestige.

Nur-Sultan, April 2020

Chapter 2: The Western Model of Liberal Democracies and the Need for Authority

Abstract: The Covid-19 crisis has showed how the Modern principle of individualism has been detrimental to states' efforts to limit the spread of the virus. As this chapter argues, this is the result of a tendency that has started in the mid-1950s which has since then altered fundamental notions essential to social life, namely the respect of political authority and a care for others.

Keywords: Individualism; Political Authority; Solidarity; Responsible Freedom

Liberalism is organized around the notion of 'negative freedom'—the idea that men have inalienable natural rights that cannot be violated without their consent and that these rights ought to be as extended as possible. The concept was first discussed by John Locke, who is rightly considered the founding father of this ideology, and these ideas quickly spread like wildfire throughout Europe in the 18th Century, which led to what we now call the Enlightenment Revolution. The ideological origins of the American Revolution as well as those of the French Revolution that occurred a little over one decade later were obviously dependent upon these sets of beliefs¹. Soon, liberalism led to the disappearance of a world that had been based upon the privileges of a few, inequalities between human beings, and the inherent right of one individual to rule over the majority. Instead, what philosopher Charles Taylor has called 'a politics of equal dignity'², was established—a system in which all individuals are given the same rights irrespective of their social conditions, and these rights are protected against the abuses of popular governments through a constitution and other documents like Charters of Rights and Freedom. Despite having been challenged by other doctrines (Marxism having been its fiercest enemy), liberalism has gradually managed to become the dominant ideology such that Francis Fukuyama famously declared in 1989 that it had triumphed over all other ideologies and that it was the final form of human government.

Over the last 300 years, people have embraced this 'rights revolution' and come to adopt a self-centred individualistic conception of the world. According to this vision, people consider that their rights to pursue their conception of happiness takes precedence over the interests of the state. In this regard, the 'Western brand' now sees the state simply as the guarantor of people's rights and societies have now become—in the words of Margaret Thatcher—a simple gathering of individuals who no longer share political bonds³. Further, the erosion of intersubjective ties has been encouraged by the proliferation of the ideology of

¹ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 5th Edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.

² Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in (ed.) Amy Gutman, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 25-74.

³ For the "Iron Lady", the only bounds people had together were the natural ones, more specifically those among family members.

multiculturalism, which has made common historical and ethnic values an unwelcomed and discriminatory way of sustaining an imagined community in societies that are more open than ever to ethnocultural diversity. Consequently, politics has forever lost its historical meaning as a field in which the primary focus is placed on ensuring the general interest of the community, which implies that individuals must sometimes sacrifice a part of their self-interest to that of the majority. For many of us, this form of dedication is now antinomic to the belief that only the right to be unique and authentic human beings matters.

Moreover, at the same time that this rights revolution was occurring, the economy started to become more global, which also meant that it became independent from the political sphere. As a result of losing their grip on economic production and the distribution of wealth, statesmen became unable to plan socially desirable policies in the long run. In other words, the welfare state, which has been defined as a democratic planning political organization pursuing certain economic policies with egalitarian tendencies⁴, can no longer serve its purpose when everything is left at the mercy of the uncontrollable flows of labour and capital in the global market. In this world, territoriality and sovereignty no longer have the meaning they had before the emergence of globalization. Combined with the first impact of the rights revolution, this second reality has created the not-so-false impression that politics is now an empty shell.

Therefore, it is not surprising that politics has been abandoned by talented and ambitious individuals, who have decided to turn their attention elsewhere. Consequently, the nature of this profession has shifted to a form of political spectacle dominated by individuals whose success is no longer associated with their capacity to serve the common good but is rather judged largely—but not exclusively⁵—by trivial considerations of the image they are projecting. This has been the case in Canada with the election of Justin Trudeau, in the United Kingdom with Boris Johnson, in Ukraine with Volodymyr Zelensky, and in the United States with Donald Trump.

However, we now realize that in times of crisis, political leadership matters—it is in fact a matter of life and death. The initial stages of the crisis have clearly illustrated these statesmen's inability to take proper measures to protect their citizens. For instance, we now know that British Prime minister Boris Johnson missed the first five emergency meetings with health experts and top government officials at the beginning of the crisis because he was taking a two-week break at Chevening, where aides were told to shorten any briefing notes given to him⁶. In

⁴ Herbert von Beckerath, "Economic Planning in the Welfare State", *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* Vo. 63, 1949, pp. 49-81

⁵ For the other reasons explaining the emergence of these new leaders, see in this regard, Jean-François Caron, *The Prince 2.0: Applying Machiavellian Strategy to Contemporary Political Life*, London : Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.

⁶ Mikey Smith, "Boris Johnson's country manor getaway with Carrie Symonds as coronavirus crisis grew", *the Mirror*, April 19, 2020. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/coronavirus-boris-johnsons-country-manor-21891035>

the Canadian case, the clash between Provincial Premiers' leadership and Prime Minister Trudeau was eloquent. While some provinces swiftly implemented confinement measures by ordering the closing of movie theatres and schools and requiring all government employees to remain at home and work remotely, these efforts proved to be useless as the Canadian government kept the country's airports open and refused to impose quarantine or test people returning from infected areas. This permissiveness reached a ludicrous level when cities—political entities with few powers under Canadian federalism—started to impose a second customs line in airports. After days of inaction during which many Canadian citizens became exposed to the virus, the Canadian government finally decided to act.

In other cases, politicians' lack of leadership was demonstrated through their unwillingness to acknowledge the seriousness of the virus by minimizing the threat and refusing to lead by example. This was the case in Great Britain, where Boris Johnson notoriously and publicly stated that he would keep shaking hands until he was himself contaminated by the virus and almost died from it. Poetic justice led him and his government to adopt the required sanitary measures but after a period during which many British people contracted the virus. Faithful to the attitude he has shown since he assumed office in 2016, President Trump also refused to acknowledge the seriousness of the crisis by refusing to exhort his compatriots to adopt social distancing measures or making misleading comments about the virus. For instance, he infamously said in February 2020 that the virus would suddenly disappear like a miracle⁷, that his administration had done a marvellous job testing people (six weeks before the United States became the new centre of the virus), and that Americans would quickly have access to a vaccine⁸. As has been argued by Peter Wehner in a widely shared article, this lack of leadership will undoubtedly be the only legacy of Trump's presidency⁹.

⁷ He said the virus could "maybe go away. We'll see what happens. Nobody really knows." He predicted it is "going to disappear. One day it's like a miracle – it will disappear."

⁸ See Oliver Milman, "Five of Donald Trump most misleading coronavirus claims", *The Guardian*, 28 March 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/28/trump-coronavirus-misleading-claims>

⁹ As he wrote, "the president and his administration are responsible for grave, costly errors, most especially the epic manufacturing failures in diagnostic testing, the decision to test too few people, the delay in expanding testing to labs outside the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and problems in the supply chain. These mistakes have left us blind and badly behind the curve, and, for a few crucial weeks, they created a false sense of security. What we now know is that the coronavirus silently spread for several weeks, without us being aware of it and while we were doing nothing to stop it. Containment and mitigation efforts could have significantly slowed its spread at an early, critical point, but we frittered away that opportunity. (...) The coronavirus is quite likely to be the Trump presidency's inflection point, when everything changed, when the bluster and ignorance and shallowness of America's 45th president became undeniable, an empirical reality, as indisputable as the laws of science or a mathematical equation. It has taken a good deal longer than it should have, but Americans have now seen the con man behind the curtain. The president, enraged for having been unmasked, will become more desperate, more embittered, more unhinged. He knows nothing will be the same. His administration may stagger on, but it will be only a hollow shell. The Trump presidency is over",

All these examples of political dilettantism displayed by individuals who have been able to effectively gain power by taking advantage of the new logic of political spectacle culminated without much surprise in their incapacity to fulfil the most important duty countries owe to their citizens, namely guaranteeing their right to life. Indeed, according to our modern tradition, governments are instituted to ensure the protection of their citizens, as has been argued by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau¹⁰. In other words, states have a contractual obligation to ensure that their citizens are provided with an environment that will be better than the one they could have in a state of nature.

Moreover, because the Western model is based on the prioritization of individual freedom over any other considerations, people have argued that this regime is inherently limited in times of crisis. As this right has been constitutionalized in many liberal societies, the impression is that their governments have been unable to implement the sorts of measures that have been shown to be effective in China and in other Asian countries, namely putting an entire city under quarantine, as was the case for the 18 million people living in Wuhan, Huanggang, and Ezhou. Faced with the choice to take similar measures, many legal experts have expressed the belief that such measures would not be legal, as people's freedom of movement in a liberal society supersedes any other considerations. This is why many countries, such as Canada and Italy, resorted to softer confinement measures in the early stages of the outbreak that primarily relied on people's good will and voluntarism. At this level, the legacy of the rights revolution and the lack of deference for political authority showed their effects. More precisely, they proved themselves to be insufficient, as many individuals refused to obey the government's urge to abide by the law and stay at home. As people continued to feel that their negative freedom was more important than the public interest, the usual lines and crowds of people were still evident in Italian *caffès* and restaurants, while others openly bragged about how they could elude police checkpoints by taking rural roads in order to have drinks with friends in establishments outside of the locked-down zones¹¹. In Canada, reports emerged of people who had tested positive for the virus refusing to obey the quarantine they had been required to follow, while polls in countries deeply affected by the virus have shown the reluctance of numerous people to follow the

"the Trump Presidency is Over", *The Atlantic*, 13 March 2020.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/peter-wehner-trump-presidency-over/607969/>

¹⁰ Following this philosophical tradition, the US Supreme Court has adopted this perspective by saying that: "the people (...) erected their Constitutions, or forms of government (...) to protect their persons from violence" (*Calder v. Bull*, 3 U.S. 386, 388 (1798)) and that "the obligation of the government to protect life, liberty and property against the conduct of the indifferent, the careless and the evil-minded may be regarded as laying at the very foundation of the social compact" (*City of Chicago v. Sturges*, 222, U.S. 313, 322 (1911)).

¹¹ Jason Horowitz and Emma Bubola, "On Day 1 of Lockdown, Italian Officials Urge Citizens to Abide by Rules", *New York Times*, 8 March 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/08/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-quarantine.html>

recommendations of their public authorities. For instance, in March 2020, a Belgian poll showed that nearly 50% of people aged between 18 to 21 were not respecting the confinement measures (overall, that number was 23% of the population). Even worse, the survey also showed that only 24% of people who had experienced one symptom of the virus and 39% of those who had experienced at least two symptoms were respecting strict measures of confinement¹². In France, the imposition of strict confinement measures in mid-March 2020 did not prevent people from defying them: ten days after their implementation, more than 225,000 people had already been fined for not respecting the measures¹³.

These events provide a good representation of the crisis of political authority that is the result of the process described above. Collective life requires authority to control the inherently destabilizing forces of selfishness, as the existence of societies requires their citizens to be capable of adopting a view that transcends their beliefs and private interests. Once this essential 'we' is no longer present, the 'egos' are free to express themselves. When Max Stirner's world becomes reality¹⁴, namely when individuals start thinking that there is nothing higher than themselves, societies lose their essence and become a conglomerate of individuals living side-by-side who no longer share anything in common. When this occurs in the context of an outbreak of a deadly virus, ignoring what the common good dictates and the government's orders makes matters even worse. On the other hand, in countries where political authority is highly respected, such as China, Singapore, and South Korea, the handling of the outbreak has been more successful because citizens have been willing to follow their governments' orders. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, citizens trust and show the most deference to their authorities in these countries¹⁵.

As Hannah Arendt wrote, authority can only survive insofar as the person or the institution from which it emanates is respected. Once it starts being despised or mocked or shows its impotence in the face of the contingencies of the world, nothing can hold back people's selfishness. Indeed, when people no longer feel the need to serve a higher goal, why should they be expected to obey those who are the incarnation of this evaporated authority? Why would people continue to participate in the *ecclesia* if they no longer believe that it can have a positive impact on their lives? Why would they continue making the financial sacrifices required to maintain services essential to the permanence of the community?

¹² RTBF, 25 March 2020. https://www.rtf.be/info/societe/detail_coronavirus-le-confinement-une-taneechez-44-des-jeunes-de-18-a-21-ans-selon-test-achat?id=10467310

¹³ Sud-Ouest, "Coronavirus : plus de 225 000 verbalisations pour non-respect du confinement". <https://www.sudouest.fr/2020/03/26/coronavirus-plus-de-225-000-verbalisations-pour-non-respect-du-confinement-7366241-10861.php>

¹⁴ Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*. 1844.

¹⁵ China ranks first, Singapore sixth and South Korea tenth. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/440941/Trust%20Barometer%202020/2020%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report.pdf?utm_campaign=Global:%20Trust%20Barometer%2020&utm_source=Website

When societies have reached this stage, their sources of authority become aphonic and generate individualism. Moreover, in a liberal world in which the idea of equality is celebrated as a religious dogma, all authority figures tend to lose their positions as exceptions and their capacity to have influence and control over others. Therefore, it is fundamental for individuals not to see other people strictly as their equals but as the bearers of social status they have acquired through time and effort. This is why students must accept that the person standing in front of them, delivering a lecture, and grading their papers is a professor. Similarly, individuals watching a TV program in which a scientist discusses the measures that should be implemented to fight a deadly virus need to acknowledge that the scientist's advice ought to be followed. When people start losing this capacity to see others as the normal representatives of a social group whose expertise should not be challenged in the name of equality, authority collapses. In return, disobedience, rebellion, and an absence of deference are social foundations upon which societies cannot exist¹⁶.

This has become a trend in the Western model—people are losing the art of obedience. This lack of authority in liberal democracies can be perceived on many levels, namely through the decline in political participation, the growing distrust towards political leaders, and the celebration of choices that are detrimental to collective life. The case of President Trump is a quintessential example of how the spirit of communities and respect for authority can be easily dismissed as essential components of societies. In this regard, we can, for instance, recall Trump's pride when he proudly claimed during a presidential debate that he was smart for having avoided paying taxes. He has perverted the presidency as an institution defined by lies, downplaying the impact of a deadly pandemic, interfering in the judicial process, obstructing law enforcement investigations, and encouraging mob violence. Through these actions, he has normalized the idea that the 'common good' is nothing more than an expression that no longer has any meaning for millions of Americans.

Owing to the emptiness of politics and the superficiality of its leaders, this field of activity now bears the terrible fatality of constantly being a disappointment. No longer able to grasp the difference politics can make, but rather seeing it as a theatre and sphere completely dominated by the outside forces of the market economy over which it has no more control, citizens are no longer keen to show the proper deference they ought to manifest. This is easily understandable. Why would citizens bow down to this secular God that has continuously shown its weaknesses over the last decades?

However, the disappearance of the 'collective we' and the absence of dedication to common social ties is also the result of the rights revolution that has slowly eroded the common anchoring of societies by undermining the values, ideas, and sources of pride that once united people. Having emphasized people's right to authenticity, it has encouraged them to emancipate themselves from all forms of

¹⁶ When this is the case, societies begin to feel what Plato described in *The Republic* (562c-563d)

transcendence that are currently perceived as heteronomous powers contrary to their autonomy. Consequently, dedication to religious beliefs or the nation have become forms of renunciation of oneself. Similar to the way the main character in Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* (Meursault) is perceived by the other members of the community for not abiding by the usual norms, those who evoke the idea that people have a duty of loyalty to their community are now seen as *strangers* in a world in which these values no longer matter or are welcomed with suspicion as a potential threat to our freedom. With time, the results of this delinquency are not only political but also moral, as people begin to think that their inherent right to do what they want is expressed in non-repenting manners. This happens when people openly brag about how they have managed to escape a curfew or a city lockdown in order to enjoy a drink with their friends during a deadly pandemic. Even the natural ties of family have been a victim of this downward spiral due to the overemphasis liberal societies have placed on the supremacy of individual rights over any other social considerations. This is evidenced by the fate of the 15,000 elderly French citizens who, having been left alone by their children who preferred to enjoy their summer holidays at the beach, died alone in a terrible heatwave in 2003.

These behaviours have not only been denounced by people who have rightfully seen them as rogue and dangerous to general interests. They have also led to growing calls to implement harsher measures akin to those of a police state and similar to those imposed in authoritarian regimes. Apart from being understandable from a public health perspective, this request is also symptomatic of a broader need for political authority after people have realized the excesses and dangers of the individualistic thesis. In a somehow paradoxical manner, people who are genuinely happy with the liberal approach nonetheless seem to be lured back towards a need for strict authority in times of crisis. In a shift that is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's legend of the great inquisitor, when they are given freedom, people end up realizing its excesses and the insecurity it creates. In times of crisis, anarchy leads to a demand for authority: even extreme forms of authority. Tormented by their anxiety (in a somewhat Hobbesian manner, the fear of dying from a virus), people will gladly accept being blindly guided and reassured in every possible manner, even if this means that their freedom may be hampered in the long run. Paradoxically, instead of allowing us to become free and enlightened citizens able to determine by ourselves what ought to be our responsible actions, the erosion of everything perceived as being superior to individuals' freedom—including political authority—has on the contrary led to our infantilization and the growth of political power over us. This trend is simply increasing in times of crisis as it was admirably argued by Bertrand de Jouvenel in 1945¹⁷. When people's lives are at stake, the terrifying feeling of being alone and not having any bounds with a community will lead individuals to become blind subjects to authority once again and will simply wait and expect to be led by an omnipotent state.

¹⁷ See *Du Pouvoir, Histoire Naturelle de sa Croissance*. Paris : Hachette, 1972.

The lack of deference to political authority—for the reasons I have already evoked—is also instrumental in the need for the imposition of harsh liberticidal measures. The Spanish Flu pandemic at the end of World War I is a good example in this regard. As was the case with the current crisis, many politicians chose to ignore the dangerous nature of the situation, as they either lied to their citizens or downplayed the threat. This proved itself as not only a very hazardous strategy but also a detrimental approach to people's capacity to trust and listen to those ruling them. As was argued by John M. Barry, the author of *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, this resulted in the disappearance of the trust citizens had in their leaders. People lost faith in their government and isolated themselves further. When the community collapses and people are left alone in the face of a deadly virus, only one option becomes available: the imposition of strict measures by a Leviathan-esque power that everyone will welcome with open arms.

This is where the Western model may be seriously threatened. If Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville have already warned us about the danger of tyranny emerging out of the over-enjoyment of negative freedom, the erosion of authority caused in part by this same phenomenon may lead to similar consequences. In the long run, the goal is not to entirely sacrifice the core principles of liberalism but to contain them in order to avoid their current excesses. What ought to be avoided is an excessive response to the rogue individualistic behaviours we have seen emerge from this crisis that may lead to the implementation of policies that will bring long-lasting structural changes to liberal societies—policies that have proved to be dangerous slippery slopes in other similar circumstances.

When there is a fine balance between the importance of individual rights and the general interest of the community, people will make the choice of what French philosopher Frédéric Lazorhtes has called 'responsible freedom', that is a voluntary and self-conscious limitation of one's individual freedom when that person believes that acting otherwise would have a negative impact on their co-citizens. This behaviour will be possible when people have able to show respect and deference to authority figures who are able to explain the nature of the crisis their society is facing. When this situation prevails, people do not need to be ordered to practice social distancing; they will do it by themselves. They will not wait to be ordered to stay at home if they are feeling sick; they will do it by themselves.

Unfortunately, the swing of the pendulum has been unbalanced in this regard, and many liberticidal measures—similar to those imposed in authoritarian regimes—that are antinomic to what they stand for have either been implemented or suggested. This is by far the greatest collective defeat of Liberal democracies that this crisis has highlighted. For instance, when the virus first hit the United Kingdom, the population itself asked the government to shut down

public life and impose liberticidal measures¹⁸. Likewise, in France, many citizens said that they would have been willing to see the government impose harsher measures than those that were implemented in March 2020, such as resorting to the military to regulate people's movements. The same pattern was seen in Switzerland, where several people felt that the strict confinement measures imposed by the federal state were still insufficient¹⁹. However, the most extreme of these cases has probably been in Hungary, where Parliament granted Prime Minister Viktor Orban the right to rule by decree for an unlimited period. Those who opposed to this measure were accused of hampering efforts that had to be made to fight the virus and of showing utter disrespect for the lives of Hungarians. It is difficult to oppose this kind of rhetoric when people are genuinely afraid of contracting a deadly virus²⁰. However, impressions have been growing in Western states that the initial measures ordered by liberal states did not lead to the same effective outcomes as those that were implemented in authoritarian countries²¹. Thus, the model adopted by the latter has largely been perceived as the one that ought to have been followed. Whether this is true, the fact remains that several people tend to believe that it is the case. Therefore, there are many opportunities for abuse. When people are in desperate need of authority, as is the case with this virus, resistance runs the risk of being scant. Once people have been told that these measures have been effective in fighting this virus, they may also think of them as being impactful in preventing or fighting against other social problems. There are indeed serious reasons to fear that these liberticidal measures will outlast the virus as was rightfully stated by Edward Snowden, 'When we see emergency measures passed, particularly today, they tend to be sticky'²², or by Douglas Rutzen, who argued that while 'It's really easy to construct emergency powers, it's really difficult to deconstruct

¹⁸ Holly Ellyat, "Where is Boris?": The UK Government Cautious Coronavirus Strategy Provokes a Public Backlash", *CNBC*, 16 March, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/16/coronavirus-uk-public-backlash-against-lack-of-restrictions.html>. The only exception in the United Kingdom, was the *Daily Telegraph* which criticized the harsh confinement policies ordered by the British government.

¹⁹ "Santé, quotidien, autorités, ce que pensent les Suisses du coronavirus", *RTS Info*, 25 March, 2020. <https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/11191960-sante-quotidien-autorites-ce-que-pensent-les-suisses-du-coronavirus.html>

²⁰ As it was said by a foreign businessman in China, "I do not really care about my freedom as long as I remain safe", Francis Vailles, "Un Québécois de Shandong dévoile la recette chinoise", *La Presse*, 2 April 2020. <https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/202004/02/01-5267709-un-quebecois-de-shandong-devoile-la-recette-chinoise.php>

²¹ See for instance Rachel Kleinfeld, "Do Authoritarian or Democratic Countries Handle Pandemics Better?", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 March, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/31/do-authoritarian-or-democratic-countries-handle-pandemics-better-pub-81404>; See also Stephen M. Walt's comment in "How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic", *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/world-order-after-coronavirus-pandemic/>

²² Thomas Macaulay, "Snowden warns : The surveillance states we're creating now will outlast the virus". <https://thenextweb.com/neural/2020/03/25/snowden-warns-the-surveillance-states-were-creating-now-will-outlast-the-coronavirus/>

them'²³. The Patriot Act is a good example of this phenomenon. While it was initially designed as short-term legislation that intended to help government agencies combat terrorism, this law has since then been regularly renewed and has now become a common tool at the disposal of the US government for cases that have nothing to do with anti-terrorist purposes.

In this regard, the violation of people's privacy is at stake with measures that were first implemented by authoritarian regimes to use Internet data to better track the virus before such measures were considered by liberal democracies. In this respect, we should consider Singapore, which used Bluetooth signals from cell phones to determine with whom carriers of the virus had been in contact and for how long. In China, citizens were required to upload details about their movements in public places and were contacted and requested to quarantine if it was found that they had been in the vicinity of a carrier of the virus. Using personal data for such reasons can be deemed valuable and justifiable, but as these data are not encrypted, third parties may also end up obtaining access to them. There is no guarantee that such methods of determining individuals' whereabouts will stop being used once this health crisis is behind us. If these methods remain active, state agencies may be tempted to use them to track different social problems that are not related to public health.

Another problem deriving from constant surveillance could be people's hesitation to behave outside of social norms. For instance, surveillance drones have been used by authorities in China to monitor 'rogue behaviours' such as wandering outside without wearing a mask or doing what appeared to be unessential work. Videos of people being called out for such actions became viral online, raising numerous questions such as states' capacities to control behaviours that fall outside of the norm through public shaming. In a manner reminiscent of Orwell's *1984*²⁴, this Big Brother technology could extend to other forms of control over socially marginal behaviours. Consequently, this may lead to what John Stuart Mill has called the risk of conformity,²⁵ which may destroy individuality and originality—elements that have always led states to find new truths. The British philosopher asserts that societies must cultivate eccentricity; otherwise, they will be doomed to stagnate²⁶. If this type of surveillance is ever normalized after

²³ Selam Gebrekidan, "For Autocrats, and Others, Coronavirus Is a Chance to Grab Even More Power", *New York Times*, March 30, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/world/europe/coronavirus-governments-power.html>

²⁴ Jacob Dreyer, "The State Transformed: The Crisis has Turbocharged China's Intrusive State Capitalism", *New Statesman*, March 25, 2020.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/2020/03/state-transformed-crisis-has-turbocharged-china-s-intrusive-state-capitalism>

²⁵ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. 1859.

²⁶ When people start adhering to the rule of conformity, Mill wrote the following : "The mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of it; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either

having proved effective, we can only wonder how marginalized groups will feel and behave knowing that there is an ‘eye in the sky’ looking over everything they are doing. The events of 9/11 should make us think twice about this possible slippery slope—the United States transformed the role of drone technology from a monitoring tool to a method for eliminating real and perceived enemies. As has been discussed in the literature, this shift has led the military to target individuals abroad who have displayed what was called ‘suspicious patterns of behaviour’ (what Grégoire Chamayou calls ‘signature strikes’²⁷). Naturally, this led to mistakes, as everything that looked suspicious, such as the gathering of men for a traditional wedding or awkward movements in urban areas, was deemed to be akin to terrorists’ patterns and was treated accordingly by drone operators.

What is the solution to this dilemma? Let me summarize the problem once again. On the one hand, there is an inherent danger in the imposition of harsh measures of control in order to fight the virus, as they might endanger people’s freedom in the long run and damage the essence of liberal societies. On the other hand, these measures have been made necessary by the foundation of liberal democracies. More precisely, by creating a situation in which individualism has taken over the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the common good and in which authority—political authority being in this case most important—has lost its meaning, liberal societies have been unable to manage the crisis simply through voluntary measures. Faced with the rogue behaviours of oblivious citizens, which correlates with the exponentially growing number of cases and with the obvious fear of dying from the disease, other citizens have asked that these harsh measures be implemented. Only time will tell if these measures will remain in place once this health crisis will be behind us, but if the past is an indication of the future, there are reasons to be sceptical in this regard.

The question remains therefore unanswered: what lessons can liberal democracies take from this crisis if they wish to cope with such problems in a way that will not lead to the erosion of their core principles? As I wrote above, the wisest course of action may be to find ways that will contain the current excesses of the Western model without hampering its foundations. The re-establishment of authority is the central element to consider. However, this should be conducted in a non-repressive fashion and without glorifying the authoritarian model. Of course, when people are scared of being arrested or punished for the slightest misconduct, as is the case in China, it is no wonder that they are fearful of showing any form of dissent. This is obviously not the model liberal societies should follow. Rather, the revival of authority must be a soft, natural outcome. However, this will imply certain conditions. As is discussed in the next chapter, the most important condition is certainly the revalorization of politics as a domain that actually matters. This implies states’ development of the capacity to reaffirm

opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature?”, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3 (Of Individuality as One of the Components of Well-Being).

²⁷ Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*. New York: The New Press, 2015.

their sovereignty and their ability to intervene in matters that have a daily impact on people's lives. This will result in the rediscovery of politics that is not merely a spectacle from which we cannot expect anything more than the scandals, drama, and treasons usually associated with television series. Under our current situation, emptied of all its noble substance, a presidential term or an election is seen by citizens as entertainment, similar to watching an episode of *House of Cards*. As a result, citizens end up electing actors who are pretending to be leaders. On the contrary, and as was the case before, when politics regains its centrality in people's lives, we must be hopeful that the current actors trying to seize power will no longer look as entertaining and worthy of our support as candidates displaying ideas and virtues that will play a direct role in our well-being.

As a consequence of reviving the centrality of states in people's lives over markets and undemocratic supranational institutions, communities will also need to redefine themselves as entities through which people are able to enjoy a vast margin of freedom and liberty, but in a way that is not prejudicial to general interests. Individual freedom should not become synonymous with anarchy. On the contrary, in order to enjoy freedom on a collective basis, it must be controlled. Of course, as this crisis has shown, the fear of punishment by a Hobbesian Leviathan is a solution, but relying solely on the state's intervention might be problematic for freedom in the long-run. This task rather ought to be a cultural one and requires allowing essential figures of authority, such as teachers, professors, parents, and scientists, to regain their normative voice. This might be done through education and through the valorisation of a new ethics that recognizes and values expertise as well as the idea that life is a process akin to exiting Plato's cave –a slow process that requires time, effort, dedication, and listening to those who have taken the path before us.

Societies will also need to find ways to allow individuals to identify their personal dignity and sense of recognition not only with their egoistic conception of personal self-development, but through a broader collective narrative that surpasses selfish interests by emphasizing the importance of the community. In other words, the construction of self-esteem ought to depend on positive social outcomes rather than the egoistic matrix. Inscribing one's life choices within a collective framework implies sharing common moral values that will serve as guidelines for people's actions without them becoming a form of positive freedom that will end up creating social conformism by imposing one simple sets of acceptable behaviours and life choices. It must be broad enough so that people will maintain their capacity to develop their respective conceptions of the good life but remain restrained within boundaries that are essential for survival in times of crisis. In other words, the goal is to find a way to balance the sacrosanct primordality of personal freedom with the importance of the community, without which the enjoyment of this freedom is impossible.

When this puzzle is in place, resorting to extraordinary measures that are inherently and fundamentally dangerous for people's freedom should not become the obvious reaction to social crises. On the contrary, once this logic becomes an integral part of societies, individuals will do what must be done in times when public health is threatened (among other serious social problems) when sources of authority will explain the seriousness of the situation. Just like an invisible hand, people will then behave in the way they are encouraged to conduct themselves without the need to be coerced with legal sanctions because of their tendency to respect authority.

In summary, there is no reason whatsoever to celebrate the way authoritarian states have fought the virus, nor the similar methods Western states have adopted for the same purpose. The normalization of these liberticidal measures is dangerous for societies that cherish personal freedom. By entering this path, Western states may have opened a door that will ultimately weaken their moral foundations.

Chapter 3: The Resurgence of the Nation-State and the Future of Globalization

Abstract: The most explicit phenomenon of the Covid-19 crisis has been the realization of how globalization is posing a threat to states' capacities to protect their citizens, which has led to growing calls for the need to re-establish control over states' borders. This chapter discusses this trend, the forms international trade may take in the future and how this may be an opportunity to rethink the foundations of social life.

Keywords: Globalization; Nation-State; European Union; Solidarity

The coronavirus crisis has revealed a profound cultural and social crisis for liberal democracies. Attempting to protect their citizens' individual freedoms since John Locke proposed the theory of natural rights in the 17th century, these societies have entered into an extreme phase of this logic that has led in the course of this crisis to what can be labelled uncivil individual behaviours that have hampered collective efforts. As a result, political authority has suffered tremendously from this evolution of liberalism for the reasons explained in the previous chapter. This paradoxically explains the quasi-unanimous demands for state interventions in the pandemic. Unfortunately, one extreme can hardly be fought with another extreme, and liberal societies' response to the situation has been simply inadequate. The danger is that the implementation of harsh measures that have a strong liberticidal potential may become normalized in the eyes of the multitude and could become an obvious solution in times of crisis in the future.

For instance, one may very well ask how states will react when a similar health crisis emerges in the future. So far, the only solution has been to forcefully confine people for weeks at the risk of punishment. This has received huge public support. Of course, as they impose social distancing against an invisible enemy that is spreading thanks to interpersonal contact, it is obvious that these measures will prove to be successful. Even though the same outcome may have been possible with voluntary measures supported by a genuine willingness to think of others, people may simply ignore the hypothetical potential of the latter and only remember the demonstrated effectiveness of the former. As a result, societies may only consider liberticidal measures as a solution to the risk of the next health crisis. Explicit coercion will become the sole accepted norm, and if it proves insufficient in the face of a future crisis, citizens will simply ask for more extreme measures. With time, this type of reaction has the potential to create, in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, a growing soft despotism that will become a reality thanks to citizens' own demands and blessings.

The potential for liberal democracies to develop a more balanced approach to individual rights and collective obligations may be facilitated by another very likely consequence of this crisis, namely a re-emergence of nation-states as

central actors in world politics. In the course of this crisis, states have indeed been largely seen as the sole entity able to protect individuals' lives through their respective national health care services. This was also shown in the early stages of the crisis when people did not call for international collaboration but for the closing down of state borders. On the contrary, this crisis is perceived as the direct consequence of the deliquescence of the nation-state in favour of its replacement by the forces of globalization and markets²⁸. According to this narrative, the disappearance of political frontiers allowed the virus to spread so quickly, first in China and then throughout the world. Just like in the Medieval period, people now see other countries and the mass movement of populations as threats, while they find comfort in the protection of borders that are now perceived as safe, impenetrable fortresses. It would therefore not be a surprise if we were to witness a re-emergence of the importance of the nation-state and a retreat from globalization as it exists today. After all, we should not forget that markets and profits prosper when the situation is consistently good, but that when fear and instability dominate, the state re-takes control²⁹.

This outcome is not in itself problematic. Actually, as was discussed in the previous chapter, this is not necessarily a bad thing if we wish to regenerate political authority and renew a collective spirit that will influence people's actions by counter-balancing the extreme forces of egoism and selfishness. Politics needs to regain its centrality and once more become the field of collective activity that matters most in our lives as a means to unite people over common values to which they will subordinate a part of their personal interests when circumstances require it. Unfortunately, having lost their capacity for collective self-determination in favour of the heteronomous forces of market economy that is entirely controlled by individuals over whom we no longer have any control, politics no longer matters for people who have come to realize the impotence of politicians in the face of industrial delocalization or the effects of financial speculation. With politics having suffered this fate, hollow politicians whose charisma is inversely proportional to the depth of their social projects have now replaced genuine political leaders who can inspire people to participate in a common collective project that is more profound than a simple catchphrase used as a political slogan. From this perspective, this crisis provides societies with an amazing opportunity to regain their capacity to control the forces of the market economy, collectively plan the way they are organized, and play an active role in the common well-being of their people. If these changes are made, there is a hope

²⁸ Frédéric Saint Clair, "Coronavirus : la fermeture des frontières peut-elle marquer le retour en grâce du nationalisme ?", *Valeurs Actuelles*, March 25, 2020.

<https://www.valeursactuelles.com/clubvaleurs/politique/coronavirus-la-fermeture-des-frontieres-peut-elle-marquer-le-retour-en-grace-du-nationalisme-117428>. Mathieu Bock-Côté, "Le péril réactive les caractères nationaux", *Le Figaro*, April 3, 2020.
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/mathieu-bock-cote-le-peril-reactive-les-caracteres-nationaux-20200403>

²⁹ François Langlet, "Il faut déjà penser au monde d'après", *Le Figaro*, March 25, 2020.
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/economie/francois-langlet-il-faut-deja-penser-au-monde-d-apres-20200324>

that people will stop seeing themselves simply as asocial atoms, but rather as constitutive members of an ethical community that matters and which they ought to consider when choosing to pose certain individual actions.

There are many reasons to believe that this crisis will lead to the revival of communities at the nation-state level. States have proven in the past that they are able to create ethical, social bonds between strangers. In fact, nationalism may be the best possible tool for re-creating a sense of community that will counter-balance individual egoism. After all, nationalism has proved its strength in this regard since the 19th century. By instilling in citizens' minds the idea that they are bound to each other through common cultural, linguistic, ethnic or linguistic features, nationalism has been able to create imagined communities that have allowed millions of people who do not know each other to make collective sacrifices and to support their fellow citizens. Philosopher David Miller asserts that a common national identity allows the state to legitimize its decisions³⁰ and Ernest Gellner³¹ states that it allows people to integrate within a single economical space. This view is repeated by Will Kymlicka, a Canadian philosopher who has advocated for multiculturalism throughout his career but nonetheless remains conscious that the recognition of minority groups may hamper the value of a common identity. He writes in this regard:

‘ (...) [T]he health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens : e.g. their sense of identity, and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment; and their sense of justice and commitment to a fair distribution of resources’³².

Ostensibly, when the nation is in danger, political elites can simply use nationalist rhetoric to encourage their people to act in a certain way without having to literally force them to do so. This is undoubtedly a powerful and effective tool at the disposal of communities to balance individual rights and collective obligations. There is no doubt that over the last fifty years, the national psyche has been significantly altered by rights revolutions and the willingness to move from a model of cultural assimilation to one that rather encourages ethnocultural diversity. However, this debate is beyond the scope and purpose of this book.

³⁰ David Miller, *On Nationality*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1995.

³¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell : Cornell University Press, 1983.

³² Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 175.

The potential problem attached to the resurgence of the nation-state as a collective reference point is that—though hardcore nationalists would deny this possibility—nationalism is a feeling of attachment that does not have to be a monistic and exclusive, and excludes the ethical significance of broader forms of attachment. History has shown that there is a genuine threat to international security when nationalism becomes the sole form of attachment, especially when this form of attachment is constructed in an exclusive manner. When this is the case, François Mitterand’s well-known quote that nationalism is synonymous with war rings true. Thus, for the sake of peace and cooperation, broader senses of attachment must be considered. This was a trend over the 20th century. Indeed, as has been argued by Dimitrios Karmis and Jocelyn Maclure³³, a monistic conception of identity was dominant until the second half of the 20th century thanks to the creation of the European Union. For the first time in history, citizens of member-states were *de facto* granted a supranational citizenship that came with rights. The goal of this project was to slowly generate a sense of community that was parallel to that felt by citizens of member countries towards their respective nations as a guarantee of unity and peace between nations that historically fought one another.

Since the Maastricht Treaty, this objective never really took root and the coronavirus crisis has shown in the most explicit fashion the failure of this European attempt at community. Not only were the open borders of the European Union severely criticized for having facilitated the spread of the virus, the member states showed an explicit form of egoism towards their co-citizens living in other countries. Of course, this has led the most vocal anti-Europeanists to claim victory, such as French polemist Eric Zemmour, who wrote that ‘there is no European people, there is no European nation and no European sovereignty. The coronavirus has been a brutal indicator of this fact’³⁴. The pandemic has also forced Europeanists to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, such as French Minister of finances, Bruno Le Maire, who clearly manifested his fear that the European Union would simply collapse if its member states maintained their selfish courses of action³⁵. The same fear was expressed by Paolo Gentiloni, the Union’s economy commissioner, that a refusal on the part of some states to show solidarity to those more affected by the virus would put their common project in jeopardy³⁶. The most significant plea was however made by Jacques

³³ Dimitrios Karmis and Jocelyn Maclure, “Two Escape Routes from the Paradigm of Monistic Authenticity: Post-Imperialist and Federal Perspectives on Plural and Complex Identities”, *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2001, pp. 361-385.

³⁴ Eric Zemmour, “L’Union européenne, première victime du coronavirus”, *Le Figaro*, March 20, 2020. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/eric-zemmour-l-union-europeenne-premiere-victime-du-coronavirus-20200320>

³⁵ “Coronavirus : Bruno Le Maire estime que si l’UE n’aide pas l’Italie, elle ne s’en relèvera pas”, 20 Minutes, March 20, 2020. <https://www.20minutes.fr/economie/2744507-20200320-coronavirus-bruno-maire-estime-si-ue-aide-italie-relevera>

³⁶ Efi Koutsokosta and Joanna Gill, “EU project in danger if no solidarity on coronavirus crisis, says economy chief Gentiloni”, *Euronews*, March 30, 2020. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/30/eu-project-in-danger-if-no-solidarity-on-coronavirus-crisis-says-economy-chief-gentiloni>

Delors, the former European commission president who helped build the modern EU, who warned that a lack of solidarity between the European people constituted a deadly threat to the Union³⁷. These cries of joy or fear over the possible collapse of this great political project are the results of various decisions and declarations made by EU officials that show how the European political community was an empty shell that saw solidarity simply as a rhetorical tool without any real implications. This is supported by Czech Republic's theft of masks that were destined for Italy in March 2020 as well as the debate over the 'coronabond', the aim of which was to decrease the borrowing costs of some of Europe's most affected countries (namely Italy and Spain) through the issuance of a common debt instrument, thereby preventing another economic crisis and allowing these states additional resources to invest in their public health systems. After it was been initially rejected by some states who refused to embark onto this path, claiming that it would penalize states that had shown fiscal balance in the past and rather encourage the same states that would have benefited from this idea to further mismanage their public finances, a toned-down version was eventually adopted. However, the initial refusal, which was largely led by the Netherlands, simply condemned more of their so-called fellow citizens living in Italy and Spain to remain at the mercy of the virus.

This reaction perfectly illustrates the failure of the political project of the European Union. Indeed, as was stated earlier, a community or society needs to be more than just a union of random people who share nothing but a common passport and similar political rights. Citizenship must go beyond these mere judicial and political dimensions; otherwise, it is doomed to become a simple community of free-riders in which no one cares about anything else but themselves. This health crisis has revealed the true state of the European Union, as nothing more substantial has ever cemented the European peoples together, producing a psychological sense of attachment that would have generated on a display of solidarity and a genuine willingness to make sacrifices for their fellow citizens.

However, the coronavirus disease was not the first event to reveal the lack of this essential dimension of citizenship. In fact, studies over the years have relentlessly shown that identification with the Union was mainly instrumental and could largely be attributed to economic reasons. More precisely, there has been a strong correlation between those who have developed a European sense of attachment and those who have benefitted from the common market³⁸, namely educated and multilingual young professionals with transferable skills. It is not only highly risky for the sense of identity to depend on such a notion, it is also

³⁷ Sophie de Ravinel, "Le manque de solidarité est un «danger mortel» pour l'Europe, selon Jacques Delors", March 28, 2020. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-manque-de-solidarite-est-un-danger-mortel-pour-l-europe-selon-jacques-delors-20200328>

³⁸ Josh A. Tucker, Alexander C. Pacek and Adam J. Berensky, "Transitional Winners and Losers: Attitudes toward EU membership in Post-Communist Countries", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2002, pp. 557-571.

unable to generate what ought to be the ethical essence of a community. Indeed, since there will always be ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in a liberal economy, the idea of linking economic benefits with attachments to a community is largely divisive, while community spirit ought to be as inclusive as possible. Second, communities cannot be exclusively perceived as selfish instruments that allow people to make personal gains. This way of thinking creates a false feeling of attachment in the sense that while people may appear to be truly subjectively engaged with their work or community, they are nonetheless profoundly detached from them. In reality, these people solely see their involvement and dedication as a means to gain valuable work experience (in the case of their work) or other personal benefits, such as obtaining a promotion or increasing their salary. At no point do they identify with these forms of attachment nor develop any solidarity with their co-workers or their co-citizens. Instead, whenever they are asked to make sacrifices for the well-being of these entities, they are nowhere to be found, as they feel that they belong only to themselves.

Communities must therefore be conceived of in a manner that bears some similarities with Aristotle’s conception of politics: Aristotle believed that a genuine political community was inextricably linked with ethical considerations, the most important being justice and the capacity of its members to distribute the common wealth equitably among them. This is why he discarded other forms of political associations, such as military or economic alliances between city-states, as false communities because of their purely instrumental nature³⁹. Although Aristotle was by no means a liberal thinker in the sense that he thought that everything—even individual freedom—had to be subordinated to this quest for justice, he nonetheless reminds us of the necessary ethical essence of communities in the absence of which they are doomed to erode and disappear at the slightest crisis. On the contrary, when a community is organized around the belief that it is meant to realize a higher collective purpose, people will feel bonded to one another and will be willing to make sacrifices, the most important being the display of

³⁹ Without referring to Aristotle, Emmanuel Macron has expressed that the absence of a community spirit in the European Union is the result of the fact that this supranational entity has never been more than a simple economic market. He said: “[The European nation have] decided to have a shared journey. If at this point in history we don’t do it, there will no longer be any shared adventure. Because if we don’t do this today, the populists will win. Today, tomorrow, the day after, in Italy, Spain and maybe even France and in other places. And in countries which are still against it today. It’s obvious because they will say: “What is this adventure you are offering us? These people will not protect us in times of crisis, they won’t protect us the next day, they show us no solidarity. When migrants arrive, they ask us to keep them for ourselves. When an epidemic arrives, they ask us to handle it. They’re great really. They are all for Europe when it’s about exporting to our country the goods that they are producing. They are all for Europe when it’s about having your labor and your markets and producing car parts that we no longer make in our own country. But they’re not for Europe when it comes to mutualizing debt.” That’s nonsense. But it’s the reality. So we have reached that moment of truth when we must know whether or not the European Union is a political project or strictly a market plan”. Emmanuel Macron, “Transcript: We are at a moment of truth”, *Financial Times*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/317b4f61-672e-4c4b-b816-71e0ff63cab2>.

solidarity and regard for the well-being of the other members of the community. As was stated before, people will come to see this feeling as a natural obligation and not as one option among many. In other words, solidarity is a natural common obligation, while charity is rather a voluntary action based on the presence or absence of good will and is generally shown towards those who are not part of a community. Based on this conceptual difference, it is rather easy to understand why nation-states—even liberal ones—dedicate a significant part of their national budgets to social programs, while the share dedicated to humanitarian aid—that is to individuals living abroad—is an insignificant portion of the budget. In the former case, social programs are perceived as obligations, while humanitarian aid is seen as an optional beneficence. The coronavirus crisis has shown that the latter option dominated the logic of EU leaders, who have refused to acknowledge their obligations towards their fellow citizens simply because they did not think of them as fellow citizens but as strangers.

Craig Calhoun is therefore right to argue that ‘nationalism is not a moral mistake’⁴⁰, as it facilitates large-scale social solidarity by bonding millions of people. This illustrates the force nations possess over any other form of supranational political bonds. Thanks to their control over the means of mass communication as well as the educational system, nation-states are able to effectively unite people over the sharing of a common language or historical traditions: something supranational entities can hardly do. The coronavirus crisis and the lack of solidarity demonstrated by EU members states may therefore contribute to a weakening of any future ideas to create post-national communities, as the failure of the European project will always serve as a reminder of the utopian nature of this quest and that only nationalism can sustain genuine political subjects. It nonetheless remains a mistake to abandon the goal of developing other forms of collective identities and attempts to establish broader communities beyond national borders.

First, it must be pointed out that this may be dangerous for international security. Indeed, as stated earlier, nationalism can also be a moral hazard, as it has been connected with mass atrocities and discriminatory practices at the domestic and international levels. While nationalism can produce unity, it can also lead to profound divisions and violent conflicts. The desire to avoid a repetition of two major bloody conflicts fuelled by the dark side of nationalism led to the creation of the European Union. This founding principle was recalled in 2017 by Emmanuel Macron in his ‘Initiative for Europe’ speech in which he referred to the words of Robert Schuman, who explained that war had always been the outcome of a politically divided Europe. The economic and political cooperation that European nations have displayed since the end of WWII proved the wisdom of his words and we may be wary of what may result from the coronavirus crisis, which may very well be the last nail in the coffin for the idea of a European community. The resurgence of nationalism in Europe may bear the fruits of future divisions and

⁴⁰ Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter : Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream*. London: Routledge, 2007.

conflicts between nations that have at least assumed the hope of becoming one people.

Moreover, the resurgence of the importance of national borders in the collective imagination may also result in another victim—globalization. Many citizens and political leaders perceive loose borders as the main cause of the rapid spread of the virus. For example, Dominique Strauss-Kahn has asserted that the acceleration of the free circulation of people and goods has been at the heart of the propagation of the virus⁴¹. Faced with this reality, the sole answer provided by statesmen—and approved by the populations—was to rebuild tight walls around their countries. This feeling may very well outlast this health crisis, as many of us have realized how the system of open borders increased our vulnerabilities. Here, I am not only referring to the fear of being contaminated, but to the outsourcing of strategic production that made millions of us realize that the availability of medical or protective equipment was no longer controlled by our national governments. This has largely been reported considering the lack of availability of medical masks and ventilators, but also referring to the fact that a significant percentage of the material necessary for the active components of medicine was produced in Asia, which has become the ‘factory of the world’⁴². In this sense, globalization has revealed states’ vulnerability in protecting the lives of their people and has led to calls for a reduction of countries’ dependence on others concerning the production of goods that have a strategic character. This feeling of vulnerability may increase if the crisis eventually leads to a shortage of certain types of foods or other manufactured products⁴³.

Even prior to this crisis, globalization had already proved itself to be contagiously unstable, as the deregulated financial system in the United States caused a similar global economic collapse in 2008, from which we have still barely recovered. However, this time, contagion is no longer a metaphor, as people must now isolate themselves from one another as their ancestors did in order to avoid the plague, walking around with surgical masks and gloves as well as the tens of thousands of coffins lined one next to the other (with some of them being buried in mass graves because funeral parlours are no longer able to meet demands). Due to its apocalyptic vision, this crisis may serve as the ultimate wake-up call that will lead to a fundamental shift in organization of the world economy. In fact, statesmen across the world have already come to this conclusion. Emmanuel Macron has openly said that this crisis will forever change the nature of globalization and the structure of international capitalism⁴⁴, and

⁴¹ Dominique Strauss-Kahn, “L’être, l’avoir et le pouvoir dans la crise”, *Slate*, April 7, 2020. <http://www.slate.fr/story/189339/economie-politique-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemie-analyse-dominique-strauss-kahn- crise-economique-democratie>

⁴² China’s share of global manufacturing value represented 28% in 2018, while it was only 1% in 1990.

⁴³ This may be the case with the prêt-à-porter industry, electronic, batteries or spare parts for the automobile sector: productions that are all concentrated in China.

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Macron, “Transcript: We are at a moment of truth”, *Financial Times*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/317b4f61-672e-4c4b-b816-71e0ff63cab2>. He said more specifically

President Trump's repetitive calls for retaliation measures against China show that this crisis will serve as a paradigmatic shift in world politics and international relations.

As stated previously, the necessity to reaffirm political control over the forces of the market and international trade is necessary and unavoidable in the current context. It is indeed problematic for states to be depend so heavily on the will of other states for the delivery of equipment and medicine upon which the lives of so many depend⁴⁵. Moreover, this control is essential if we wish to find long-term solutions to the serious problems associated with individualism and the lack of political authority that have plagued liberal democracies for the past fifty years. This implies a refoundation of politics as the primary field that impacts people's lives and the revival of the spirit of communities. At the moment, for reasons previously discussed, it now seems obvious in the eyes of many that nation-states will be the central entities at the heart of this reorganization of the world order. After all, if the main actions that were taken in order to control the pandemic came from the national and even the subnational levels, we might also expect that the methods of recovering from this crisis will also be at that level. Moreover, since this crisis will most likely last for at least another year until a vaccine is finally found, we can postulate that protectionist measures that are contrary to what globalization stands for—the free movement of people, goods, and capital—will appear more and more as normal and lead people to believe that it is possible for their state to live in autarky. This belief will simply be reinforced by fear of another pandemic and the trauma of having left tens of thousands of loved ones to die and be buried alone. In fact, the general belief

the following about the end of globalization as we know it: “And I think [the coronavirus crisis] is a shock, a very deep anthropological one I would say, and we have put half the planet on hold to save lives, it is unprecedented in our history. So it will have clear, anthropological consequences I would be unable to describe. But it's going to change the nature of globalization. The globalization we lived through for the past forty years, a globalization made of exchanges, people, knowledge etc, we were under the impression that frontiers no longer existed. But deep down, it was about faster and faster circulation and accumulation. With great success, it has dethroned totalitarianism, there was the fall of the Berlin Wall thirty years back, and with some ups and down it has taken hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, but it has also increased inequalities throughout developed countries, especially in recent years. And this globalization, we can definitely feel it, has gone full circle. Because it was weakening democracy, as I have mentioned several times, by increasing inequalities in our countries. Because, and that was the result of that globalization, the consumers and financiers were the key elements. I believe this shock we are currently going through with many others will force us to review globalization, and bring us to rethink society's terms”.

⁴⁵ This is in line with what Emmanuel Macron said. According to him: “This crisis is revealing that certain goods and services must be kept away from the laws of free trade. To delegate our food production, our capacity to treat sick people, to protect our lifestyle to others is pure madness. We need to retake control over these things”, André Grjebine, “Même en dehors de cette crise, la Chine pourrait menacer la sécurité de nos approvisionnements”, *Le Figaro*, March 26, 2020. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/economie/meme-en-dehors-de-cette-crise-la-chine-pourrait-menacer-la-securite-de-nos-approvisionnement-20200326>

among those who are nostalgic of nationalism and oppose globalization is now the following:

'If you can produce your own food, if you do not depend on publicly provided electricity or water, you are not only safe from disruptions that may arise in food supply chains or the provision of electricity and water; you are also safer from getting infected, because you do not depend on food prepared by somebody else who may be infected, nor do you need repair people, who may also be infected, to come fix anything at your home. The less you need others, the safer and better off you are. Everything that used to be an advantage in a heavily specialized economy now becomes a disadvantage, and the reverse'⁴⁶.

Although this assertion is attractive, it would nonetheless be a mistake to imagine that the reorganization of the world economy ought to happen at the level of the nation-states because economic self-sufficiency is impossible in our world and because the lack of economic cooperation is detrimental to international security. Indeed, in order for states to preserve the current state of affairs on their own, they must have the capacity to be completely self-sufficient with relation to food, water, energy, manufacturing, and high-tech goods, which is a possibility only for a handful of countries. Second, as is the case with nationalism, autarky may also be detrimental to international peace. Many studies have echoed the words of Emmanuel Macron in 2017 and have shown that the decrease in wars is mirrored by the increase of international trade. More precisely, countries with more trading partners are less likely to go to war with their commercial allies as there is more to lose—money—if they are to fight each other⁴⁷.

Therefore, a middle ground must be found between autarky and the anarchic way globalization has worked until now. We must hope that the coronavirus crisis will engender a creative destruction that will not only impact economics, but also the realm of politics. The opportunity created by this crisis that could ensure greater political control over the forces of market and the refoundation of communities can find its roots at the supra-regional level, that is a space where states can not only come together and achieve this relative autarky, but also gives themselves sufficient mechanisms to have effective political control over the flows of goods and capital as well as laying the foundations of interregional solidarity.

What does this mean concretely? Currently, globalization is defined by the absolute competition between firms and companies that are looking to maximize their profits as much as possible through various means, namely the outsourcing of production to places in which salaries are low. This has obviously led

⁴⁶ Branko Milanovic, "The Real Pandemic Danger is Social Collapse", *Foreign Affairs*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-19/real-pandemic-danger-social-collapse>

⁴⁷ Jong-Wha Lee and Ju Hyun Pyun, "Does Trade Integration Contribute to Peace?", *Review of Development Economics*, Vol. 20, No.1, 2016, pp. 327-344.

economies to be vulnerable to these uncontrollable flows that have created economic crises in the past over which national governments could do very little, but also to health hazards because states have lost control over the production of strategic material. This philosophy of free trade is most probably coming to an end because of these reasons, but also in the face of a world economy that is simply collapsing in front of our powerless eyes. Indeed, what is left to expect of a system that has left countless businesses and individuals on the verge of ruin and stock markets plummeting like has never been seen since 1929? What can we expect of a system that has put the entire planet at a standstill and led billions of people to seclude themselves from the outside world? History is not over, as was famously proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in 1989. It is rather a series of events dominated by a specific form of phases that are initially boosted by their successes before they are victims of their excesses. Today, we are witnessing the end of unregulated globalization in favour of a new system that will not leave us at the mercy of every disruption. From this perspective, Karl Polanyi was probably right when he said in 1944 that the anarchic evolution of globalization that we have been witnessing in the last fifty years is only a digression between two periods of economic regulation⁴⁸. If the previous one—namely, the economic protectionism of nation-states—proved itself unable to ensure world peace, the upcoming one might be able to do so by preserving trade between nations through regionally controlled markets.

The obvious alternative is therefore to create a system that will prevent states from being the victims of the various forms of contagion that accompanies globalization by creating a system that can be controlled and that no longer acts as a heteronomous force upon societies. This involves the creation of closed markets that can limit external vulnerabilities as much as possible. As was discussed earlier, if states alone do not have this capacity (alongside being undesirable for the sake of peace and international security), a gathering of states coming together by creating a closed market does. Moreover, with so many companies on the verge of bankruptcy that will need financial support in order to resume their business, individual states do not have this capacity at their disposal. The world is not only facing a health crisis, but also an economic and financial one that will most likely be equal to none in the history of capitalism. Just to give an approximation of the magnitude of this crisis, it took 30 trimesters for the global GDP to return to the level it had before the 2008 crisis: a financial earthquake that led at the time to a contraction of the world's GDP by 0.1%. The IMF has estimated that the coronavirus crisis will lead to a contraction of the global GDP by 3% in 2020⁴⁹. With an upcoming crisis of this nature, it is hardly possible for individual states to be able to restart their respective economies through their own stimulus measures as hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of people will end up losing their jobs, which will not only make economic growth improbable, but will create a burden for states that will have to support them

⁴⁸ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation : The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1944.

⁴⁹ The European union's GDP fell by 4.3% in 2009, while it is estimated to fall by 7.5% in 2020.

through social programs. However, states acting together thanks to a common financial tool have the possibility to do this. In other words, a nationalist withdrawal implying the closing of borders to people, goods, and capital is a 'false good idea' as it will simply end up making things worse than they are right now. However, a large economic market of hundreds of millions of people in which the partners are collectively able to protect themselves from external vulnerabilities by creating incentives through a common financial institution that will favour the reindustrialization of this economic space through a common industrial policy is a much more reasonable solution.

In a nutshell, this regionalization of globalization is an amazing second chance for Europe that has at its disposal a sufficient economic market of nearly 450 million people (that can always grow in the future) as well as a powerful and wealthy Central Bank that can help stimulate the economy through a 2.0 version of the Marshall Plan. However, this financial help needs to be politicized and is dependent on the willingness of companies and businesses to operate within this space. This may sound counter-intuitive after having lived for nearly half a century in a world in which the rhetoric of the free market economy has dominated. However, in light of the current and past disturbances caused by globalization this political control and capacity of businesses to act within a more limited space is actually in their best interest as they have been the direct victims of an unregulated world system. The downside of accumulating lower profits will be compensated by the stability of the system in which they will be operating.

Moreover, the ability to regionalize globalization creates an amazing second chance for Europe to create a better balance between its economic aspirations and the dream of its founding fathers to transform the continent into a viable and meaningful political project. Indeed, this political control over the forces of markets also offers member-states the opportunity to transform this space not only into an economic scheme but also into a genuine community that generates solidarity through the use of the collective means of corporate taxation. In this regard, we often think of the European Union as the first attempt to create a supranational political subject. This is inaccurate, as the first attempts were rather achieved by federal systems—like the United States, Canada, Great Britain, or Switzerland—that have been able to create a rather peaceful balance between national and federal identities: the latter being supported by the ethical principles of peaceful relations between nations and also by the solidarity this plurinational scheme is able to generate. These aforementioned states are in fact the precursors of what Europe now has the potential to achieve and are therefore prime examples of rooted cosmopolitanism⁵⁰. Since they were created at a time when economic protectionism dominated, one of the *raison d'être*s of these states was their capacity to generate a large enough protected economic market that was controlled by common political institutions that redistributed the common

⁵⁰ For a discussion about this notion, see Jean-François Caron, "Rooted Cosmopolitanism in Canada and Quebec", *National Identities*, *National Identities* Vol. 14, No. 2, 2012, pp. 351-366.

wealth among the various components of the country. This is in essence the same as equalization payments in most federal states (with the notable exception of the United States), that is, the sharing of financial resources from the central government to the subnational governments with the objective of offsetting economic disparities between regions. This sharing may result from many sources of income, with the most important being the direct and indirect taxations of individuals or corporations. This could also be achieved through what is referred to as a Tobin tax—named after James Tobin, an economist who received the Nobel Prize in 1971—that is, the taxation of financial transactions between financial institutions such as banks, investment firms, insurance companies, pension funds, hedge funds, and others. In a report published in 2011 by the European Commission, the establishment of such a tax—which was never implemented—would have generated 57 billion euros per year thanks to a taxation rate of 0.01% and would not have harmed the institutions affected by it⁵¹. These are simple examples, and the options are countless in this regard.

At the end of the day, these examples show that the prospect of increased government control over a territorialized economy makes it possible to revive politics and once again make it a field of activities that matters in daily life. In this sense, politics would no longer be a game played by amateurs, but rather by real leaders as was the case before. In the same vein, this makes possible and desirable the creation of larger entities that would have the capacity to become genuine communities in the ethical sense of the term and therefore to generate a broader sense of solidarity that might unite different people and allow for the sharing of needed goods in times of serious crises instead of the shameful selfishness shown by various European states during the coronavirus crisis.

⁵¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_11_1085

Chapter 4: On the Risk of a Thucydides's Trap

Abstract: The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in the intensification of the already tensed relations between China and the United States that will ultimately hinder the former's political ambitions. This chapter rather defends another thesis, namely that this crisis will accelerate China's ambitions to become more economically self-sufficient and to transform itself into a regional hegemon.

Keywords: China; Thucydides's Trap; Globalization; Regionalization.

China is the elephant in the room. This statement sums up both the origins of this pandemic as well as the potential geopolitical outcomes of this crisis. Considering what has been discussed so far, the latter point is of course of great concern. Indeed, if this crisis ends up sounding the death knell of globalization as we have known it for the past fifty years and either leads to the resurgence of nation-states—which is the least promising outcome—or to the formation of large economically autarkic regional blocks, China appears to be the greatest loser of this pandemic. If some may consider this a well-deserved fate due to the lack of proactive actions on the part of the Chinese authorities to forbid the presence of 'wet markets' where this pandemic and previous sanitary outbreaks such as SARS and H1N1 likely originated according to scientists and for its decision to hide the first signs of the outbreak,⁵² which may have made things worse. However, when it comes to geopolitics, the desire for revenge is the mother of all evils, as it can lead to resentment and ultimately war. This is especially true when dealing with China, an increasingly powerful nation whose share of the global economy continues to grow exponentially and that possesses significant military means (although to a lesser extent than the United States⁵³). Considering revenge against a sleeping giant—which is, according to the late Prime minister and founding father of Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew, 'the biggest player in the history of the world'⁵⁴—would be a dramatic mistake with dire consequences.

⁵² This was the case with Doctor Li Wenliang who warned on December 30, 2019, about the appearance of a new virus that resembled the SARS. He was then summoned a couple of days later by the authorities that forced him to sign a statement denouncing his warning and being an illegal rumor. He eventually dies himself of the virus in February after having contracting it from patients he had been treating.

⁵³ China possess only one military base abroad (in Djibouti) and its military has no war experience contrary to those of the United States, Russia, France or the United Kingdom.

⁵⁴ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p. 39. As a support to his thesis, Allison writes the following: "As the largest producer of ships, steel, aluminum, furniture, clothing, textiles, cell phones, and computers, China has become the manufacturing powerhouse of the world. (...) China has also become the world's largest consumer of most products. America was the birthplace of the automobile, but China is now both the largest automaker and the largest auto market. Chinese consumers bought twenty million cars in 2015—three million more than were sold in the US. China is also the world's largest market for cell phones and e-commerce, and has the largest number of Internet users. China imported more oil, consumed more energy, and installed more solar power than any other nation. Perhaps most devastatingly for America's self-conception, in 2016—as it has since the 2008 worldwide financial crisis—China continued to serve as the primary engine of global economic growth" (p. 46).

However, even if statesmen were to leave revenge aside, the economic trends that will likely result from this crisis and that have been described so far appear in the eyes of many as feat that will dramatically hamper China's economic ambitions. The current situation may be a first taste of what is coming. Indeed, the world's economy has come to a halt in the first half of 2020 because of the imposition of measures that have disrupted supply chains and, consequently, weakened the global demand for Chinese exports in the short-run and greatly affected its manufacturing sector. These trends may become more permanent if the American and European economies seek self-sufficiency in the aftermath of the crisis. This decision would hurt the growth of Chinese economy, as it would unravel its commercial ties with the economies of the US and EU. Chinese authorities are very wary of such an outcome, as maintaining the country's status as the factory of the world—with the 'Made in China' stamp appearing on a third of the world's manufactured products—has clearly been voiced as a strategic priority⁵⁵. This certainly explains in part why China has been consistently trying to reassure the rest of the world by sending comforting messages that it is able to meet affected countries' high demands for medicine and why it has largely exported or donated protective gear, such as masks, as well as ventilators. The message behind this form of soft power, which has been labelled as Beijing's 'Mask Diplomacy, is quite obvious and has been summed up by the European Union chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, as a 'politics of generosity that is hiding 'a geo-political component including a struggle for influence' pushing the message that, unlike the U.S., [China] is a responsible and reliable partner'⁵⁶. Its goal is to convince the Europeans that China is the only entity offering help in the clear absence of support from the United States, which is becoming more and more isolationist, and the lack of European solidarity. This narrative has been used by some politicians, such as Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. Through these actions and rhetoric, Beijing is probably not only hoping that this crisis will not harm its trade relations with the European Union, but that they will become more prosperous and that the threats of regaining control over the production of strategic industrial goods will never materialize.

Needless to say, maintaining healthy trade relations with Europe is instrumental in Xi Jinping's greatest project, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). Launched In Astana, Kazakhstan, this gigantic project announced in 2013 aims to link more than 100 countries through a wide range of infrastructure projects that would connect China with Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the rest of Asia through overland and maritime routes.

⁵⁵ Sébastien Falletti, "La Chine fermement résolue à demeurer l'usine du monde", *Le Figaro*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/la-chine-fermement-resolue-a-demeurerl-usine-du-monde-20200413>

⁵⁶ Charlie Campbell, "China's 'Mask Diplomacy' Is Faltering. But the U.S. Isn't Doing Any Better", *The Time*, April 3, 2020. <https://time.com/5814940/china-mask-diplomacy-falters/>

The project will cost China between 4 to 8 trillion USD over the course of its completion, which is scheduled for 2049. If it is ever completed, this project will become a game-changer and will cement the 21st century as ‘the Asian Century’ in history books. First, by physically connecting the world’s largest economy through overland commercial routes, the BRI will have long-lasting implications on international trade, as the current seaborne corridors in the Pacific Ocean will shift to the more profitable westward routes, which are faster than sea travel and cheaper than air travel. Second, it will make Asia the new centre of world trade, as it will physically connect China with numerous countries through overland routes that are in great need of infrastructure investments⁵⁷. However, in order to achieve its goal, China needs Europe’s support and collaboration. Otherwise, it will not be able to export its manufactured goods along the cheaper route.

This is why there are reasons to fear that the protectionist measures that might result from this crisis—whether they are nationalistic or regionalist—could hamper China’s economic ambitions by creating a new world order with more restraining rules on international trade. Such restraints will be perceived by China as a direct attack against its economic interests, thereby creating what Graham Allison has labelled a ‘Thucydides’s Trap’. This theory is based on Athenian historian Thucydides’s explanation of the war between his city-state and Sparta 2,400 years ago that ‘the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta made war inevitable’⁵⁸. Through an analysis of 16 other conflicts, Allison has found that war is caused by a combination of two elements: on the one hand, when an emerging power develops a sense of entitlement and begins asking for a reform of the world system in order to satisfy its demands and, on the other hand, when the hegemon tries at all costs to maintain its declining power by refusing to alter the status quo in any way or by undertaking measures that are detrimental to the interests of the rising power. According to Allison, this pattern caused the bloody war between Athens and Sparta. He writes:

‘Athens had emerged over a half century as a steeple of civilization, yielding advances in philosophy, history, drama, architecture, democracy, and naval prowess. This shocked Sparta, which for a century had been the leading land power on the Peloponnese peninsula. As Thucydides saw it, Athens’s position was understandable. As its clout grew, so too did its self-confidence, its consciousness of past injustices, its sensitivity to instances of disrespect, and its insistence that previous arrangements be revised to reflect new realities of power. It was also natural, Thucydides

⁵⁷ Alessia Amighini, “Towards a New Geography of Trade?”, in Alessia Amighini (ed.), *China’s Belt and Road: A Game Changer?*, The Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2017, pp. 121-140.

⁵⁸ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?”, *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

explained, that Sparta interpreted the Athenian posture as unreasonable, ungrateful, and threatening to the system it had established—and within which Athens had flourished⁵⁹.

When such a pattern occurs—when a ruling state is unwilling to meet the expectations of a rising power, the result is usually war: an outcome that can be triggered by anything once it appears as though the situation can no longer be dealt with through peaceful channels. When this happens, states are trapped and things quickly escalate for the worst. This was the case in June 1914 when heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne Archduke Franz-Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. Despite being a rather unimportant event, it nonetheless served as an excuse for powers that had been confronting one another for many years (Germany being the rising power and Great Britain being the declining hegemon) to settle their tensions through war.

For many⁶⁰, the coronavirus crisis may lead to a similar outcome in a context in which China's ambitions have been hampered in recent years by measures taken by the U.S. administration that may simply accelerate in the upcoming months. Indeed, there are no doubts that the crisis will serve as a wake-up call for the general public, which was unaware of the degree of Western states' economic dependence on China. If politicians are consequent with their previous declarations, this will likely result in the repatriation of strategic productions at the national or regional levels—a decision that will impact China's economy. The fact remains, however, that protectionist measures had already been implemented against China prior to the pandemic. The best example remains the various attempts by the Trump administration to 'decouple' the two economies over fears of over-dependence and spying, namely by starting a 'tech Cold War' with China and its companies. By signing an executive order that restricted the purchase of technology from certain companies deemed a threat for national security, the US government seriously stripping Huawei of a vast market and its capacity to become a key player in the field of 5G mobile communications by depriving the company from buying crucial hardware made in the United States as well as from being able to run its smartphones on Google operating platforms. The coronavirus crisis may accelerate this trend and lead major computer companies such as Apple, Google, or Microsoft to move out of China by outsourcing their production

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Dominic Green, "The Coronavirus is Springing the Thucydides Trap", March 18, 2020. <https://spectator.us/corona-crisis-pushing-us-thucydides-trap/>. Manoj Joshi, "Thucydides trap: China-US rivalry has made international governance difficult – even as they fight a common threat", March 28, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/thucydides-trap-china-us-rivalry-has-made-international-governance-difficult-even-as-they-fight-a-common-threat-63805/>

in Vietnam or in Thailand⁶¹. A similar decision to prevent Huawei from becoming a vendor for 5G networks has also been announced in the United Kingdom, where the Foreign Minister has also warned that the UK and China will not return to business as usual after this crisis⁶².

While the economic disruptions caused by the coronavirus may lead to an acceleration of the decoupling of the Chinese and American economies, companies were already considering outsourcing their chains of production since the Trump administration threatened to implement tariffs on goods produced in China. This has led American companies to rethink their supply chains, either by convincing their Chinese partners to move elsewhere in East Asia or simply by opting out of sourcing their production in China. With this sword of Damocles pending above their head, many companies have already concluded that the risk—meaning the imposition of tariffs—of producing in China was no longer worthwhile. Thus, China moved from its position as the United States' first trading partner before the trade war started by Trump to third behind Mexico and Canada. As a consequence, there has been an increase in imports of goods produced in countries to which companies relocated after leaving China. The coronavirus crisis may simply become the final straw for companies that have realized how vulnerable their production was in a country that has been plagued in recent years by life-threatening diseases. As a result, a survey has shown that more and more senior executives of companies now see the decoupling of the Chinese and American economies as a real possibility⁶³, which may grow thanks to the implementation of various measures, such as Japan's 2.2 billion USD\$ plan to provide direct loans for companies willing to shift their production back to Japan or elsewhere in East Asia: an idea that has been publicly entertained by the White House since April 2020.

As stated earlier, whichever form the redefinition of globalization will take, it appears as though China will be on the losing end, as it will no longer be the factory of the world. In the case of the BRI, the potential creation of a protected European market may also prevent Chinese companies from acquiring strategic infrastructure—namely harbours—without which their pharaonic project is doomed. Would this willingness of Western states to protect their economic interests—while simultaneously hurting those of a

⁶¹ Arjun Kharpal, « Apple, Microsoft, Google look to move production away from China. That's not going to be easy », CNBC, March 4, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/05/coronavirus-apple-microsoft-google-look-to-move-production-away-from-china.html>

⁶² Steven Nelson, "UK vows 'hard questions' for China in coronavirus 'deep dive'", *New York Post*, April 17, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/04/17/uk-vows-hard-questions-for-china-in-coronavirus-deep-dive/>

⁶³ A joint survey made in March 2020 by the American Chambers of commerce in Beijing and Shanghai has shown that the proportion of their members who thought the decoupling of the two economies was impossible fell to 44% from 66% in the previous survey performed before the coronavirus crisis. See "Most American firms have no plans to leave China", *Arabnews*, April 18, 2020. <https://arab.news/8kzc4>

rising power—constitute a structural stress significant enough to confirm China’s impression that the international norm is not representative of the actual shift in global power? Would the series of humiliating accusations levelled against China⁶⁴ and calls for financial compensation⁶⁵ act as a trigger that could initiate a cascade of irrational actions that could lead to war, as was the case with the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand in 1914?

This is obviously a concern that needs to be addressed. Are China and the United States actually heading towards a conflict because of the coronavirus? If we leave aside the severe criticisms Allison’s thesis has received, especially that of from renowned China expert Arthur Waldron⁶⁶, specific points related to the current situation ought to minimize this fear. Indeed, China’s recent economic shift has already shown that the country had been on a ‘degloblizing’ trend in recent years, moving to a form of economic autarky by focusing mainly on its domestic consumption. For China and for many other economies, the Chinese consumer is the primary path to economic prosperity and has been described by a former Goldman Sachs chief economist ‘as the most important thing in the world economy, [since] the next 40 years of global growth might be about [him]’⁶⁷. In this

⁶⁴ For instance, President Trump has openly said that Beijing may have been “knowingly responsible” for the virus, while Emmanuel Macron said that China may have covered up the virus and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on China to be more transparent. Others have contemplated the possibility of asking China to pay reparations for being responsible of the outbreak. It is also worth noting the full frontal attack launched by the editor-in-chief of Bild, Germany’s largest newspaper, who wrote an open letter to Xi Jinping in April 2020. He wrote: “(...) your government and your scientists had to know long ago that coronavirus is highly infectious but you left the world in the dark about it. Your top experts didn’t respond when Western researchers asked to know what was going on in Wuhan. You were too proud and too nationalistic to tell the truth, which you felt was a national disgrace. You rule by surveillance. You wouldn’t be president without surveillance. You monitor everything, every citizen, but you refuse to monitor the diseased wet markets in your country. You shut down every newspaper and website that is critical of your rule, but not the stalls where bat soup is sold. You are not only monitoring your people, you are endangering them – and with them, the rest of the world. (...) surveillance is a denial of freedom. And a nation that is not free, is not creative. A nation that is not innovative, does not invent anything. This is why you have made your country the world champion in intellectual property theft. (...) China enriches itself with the inventions of others, instead of inventing on its own. (...) The reason China does not innovate and invent is that you don’t let the young people in your country think freely. China’s greatest export hit (that nobody wanted to have, but which has nevertheless gone around the world) is coronavirus”. Benjamin Weinthal, “Germany’s Largest Paper to China’s President: You’re Endangering the World”, *the Jerusalem Post*, April 20, 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/international/germanys-largest-paper-to-chinas-president-youre-endangering-the-world-625074>.”

⁶⁵ With an estimated drop of 4.2% of Germany’s GDP caused by the pandemic, *Bild* newspaper estimated that China owed Germany €149 billion of damages, which represented an amount of €1,784 per person.

⁶⁶ Arthur Waldron, “There is No Thucydides Trap”, June 12, 2017. <https://supchina.com/2017/06/12/no-thucydides-trap/>

⁶⁷ Tom Hancock, “Chinese Consumers: Your Country Needs You”, *Financial Times*, February 27, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/074395d2-38f2-11e9-b72b-2c7f526ca5d0>

perspective, this health crisis, which will most likely result in more self-dependent national or regional economies, will not clash at all with Beijing's willingness to make its economy even less vulnerable to the rest of the world. On the contrary, if Western countries are trying to sever their economic ties with China, they will simply weaken themselves even more as Chinese companies will not have the ability to completely dominate the world's biggest consumer market. Such an outcome is definitely not a trap that would lead China to engage in war with the United States, but rather the most desirable outcome for Beijing, as it would not need to rely as heavily as other nations on international trade, instead generating economies of scale through its domestic market. In other words, far from creating a path to war, the coronavirus crisis may simply lead to a new world order that will finally play to China's interests thanks to the irrational desire of Western states to becoming self-sufficient, fuelled by a willingness to exact revenge on the country responsible for the outbreak. This is the main aspect to consider concerning the value of Allison's thesis in relation to the future economic relations between China and the United States.

Of course, if we are to think of Chinese economy as it was when the country first opened its borders to foreign investment, Allison's thesis would make sense. Indeed, during its initiation to capitalism, China took advantage of its competitive advantages by positioning itself at the bottom of the global value-chain by producing and exporting low-income value goods. This model, which was largely based on exporting its produced goods to an overseas market and on the subsequent huge inflows of international capital, has served China very well over the last forty years. It has led to the increase of personal wealth, the creation of a middle-class, and the emergence of indigenous businesses. However, this model has come to an end under Xi Jinping's leadership as China now has the tools to heavily rely on its domestic market as the main source of economic growth. Recent years have shown a rebalancing of China's economy towards its domestic market. As has been summarized in a 2019 research paper:

'China's exposure to the world in relative terms has fallen because the major driver of its economic growth is no longer trade or investment but rather domestic consumption. In 11 of the 16 quarters from January 2015 to December 2018, consumption contributed more than 60 percent of total GDP growth. In 2018, about 76 percent of GDP growth came from domestic consumption, while net trade actually made a negative contribution to GDP growth. As recently as 2008, China's net trade surplus amounted to 8 percent of GDP; by 2018, that figure was estimated to be

only 1.3 percent—less than either Germany or South Korea, where net trade surpluses amount to between 5 and 8 percent of GDP⁶⁸.

This ‘deglobalization’ of China and its turn towards its domestic economy is the result of many factors, namely the enrichment of Chinese people, which has allowed a growing number of consumers to devote a larger share of their revenue to discretionary spending on unessential goods⁶⁹. Moreover, despite the fact that China’s consumption is theoretically threatened by the country’s aging demographics (a problem multiplied by the now eased One Child Policy)⁷⁰, studies have revealed that China’s elderly population has accumulated a significant amount of money over the years that will allow them to be self-sufficient during their retirement and that more than three-quarters of them possess their own property. As a result, middle-aged adults (those aged between 40 and 60) who have the highest income of all age groups in China will most likely not be financially pressured to limit their spending on consumption goods and will not play a detrimental role in the growth of China’s domestic economy in the future. Moreover, as these adults do not have to worry about their parents’ financial security, there is a phenomenon of the downward transfer of financial resources to the members of the younger generation, who are usually supported by their parents when they buy their first apartment and who can also expect to inherit their parents’ wealth upon their deaths, as well as high-value properties.

The ‘deglobalization’ of China and its turn towards its domestic economy can also be explained as a by-product of the country’s openness to capital and foreign investments since the 1980s with Chinese patriotism. More precisely, the presence of foreign companies in a country that had no history of entrepreneurship has led to the development of home-grown industries that have not only copied the business models, tools, and approaches of their Western counter-parts, but has also created similar products, which has led to a steady decline in the market shares of Western products over time in favour of Chinese products. The perfect example of this is Huawei and other Chinese companies that have not only replaced other companies as the main providers of smartphones over the last decade⁷¹, but that have also started to export elsewhere in the world. This trend has also hit other domains (although to a

⁶⁸ *China and the world : Inside the dynamics of a changing relationship*, McKinsey Global Institute. July 2019, p. 48. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/china/china-and-the-world-inside-the-dynamics-of-a-changing-relationship>

⁶⁹ For instance, spending on food has declined from 50% of people’s budget in 2000 to 25% in 2017. See Johnny Hi, Felix Poh, Jia Zhou and Daniel Zipser, “China Consumer Report 2020: The Many Faces of the Chinese Consumer”, December 2019. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/china/china%20consumer%20report%202020%20the%20many%20faces%20of%20the%20chinese%20consumer/china-consumer-report-2020-vf.ashx>

⁷⁰ A growing aging population creates the risk of reducing the supply of labor and the number of consumers, while increasing the cost of welfare programs.

⁷¹ In 2019, Huawei’s market share in mainland China was 38%, while Apple had to settle for a meagre 6%. Overall, when it comes to the smartphone industry, the market share of Western companies has dropped from 90% in 2008 to 10% in 2017.

lesser extent), such as computers and peripherals, watches, over-the-counter drugs, passenger vehicles, and video games. Although studies have revealed that Chinese still have a taste for high-quality goods that are not always produced by local companies⁷², surveys have shown that a growing number of them are now willing to prioritize Chinese products over foreign ones, irrespective of their quality⁷³. Moreover, China's self-sufficiency is destined to keep growing thanks to its state's intervention and to expand beyond the mere low-value manufacturing sector in which it has been a champion since the 1980s. Through various initiatives, such as the 'Made in China 2025' program, which aims at upgrading China's manufacturing basis by making the country a world leader in ten high-tech industries like electric cars, artificial intelligence, telecommunications, aerospace, and high-end rail infrastructure, China is hoping to become fully autonomous in every segment of its high-tech supply chain, meaning that decoupling will most likely affect telecom, Internet, and 5G systems in the upcoming years: a trend that may simply accelerate with the current willingness of the rest of the world to become more independent from China.

This may explain why China was quite open to the decoupling of its economy from that of the US when President Trump started a trade war; it was welcomed by both countries as a matter of economic independence. In fact, as was stated by economist Brad Setser of the Council on Foreign Relations, Xi Jinping has probably deglobalized more than the United States under the Trump administration⁷⁴. Indeed, imports to China have steadily declined from the end of 2012 until now, while China's GDP has grown significantly over the same period, a clear sign of deglobalization since globalization usually implies a close symmetry between these factors. When we asking ourselves who serves to gain the most from deglobalization and the decoupling of the Chinese and American economies, it is obvious that China is the answer. China possesses an asset the U.S. economy does not have: a domestic market big enough to sustain the offer of their homemade goods produced at much lower costs than what their American counterparts can produce⁷⁵. For the American companies and government, the sole option for maintaining the current state of affairs is by being able to either repatriate its manufacturing sector—a very costly and hugely unrealistic

⁷² The contamination of baby food formula in 2008 that caused the death of around 300,000 children is still fresh in people's memory.

⁷³ Johnny Hi, Felix Poh, Jia Zhou and Daniel Zipser, "China Consumer Report 2020: The Many Faces of the Chinese Consumer", December 2019.
<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/china/china%20consumer%20report%202020%20the%20many%20faces%20of%20the%20chinese%20consumer/china-consumer-report-2020-vf.ashx>

⁷⁴ Brad Setser, "President Xi, Still the Deglobalizer in Chief...", June 25, 2019.
<https://www.cfr.org/blog/president-xi-still-deglobalizer-chief>

⁷⁵ By offering cost-effective manufacturing practices, China has been able to reduce by an estimated 27% the price of Chinese imports to the United States. Lawrence J. Lau and Junjie Tang, *The impact of U.S. imports from China on U.S. consumer prices and expenditures*, IGEF working paper number 66, April 30, 2018.

solution—or by encouraging companies to outsource their production from China directly or indirectly through tariffs, for instance, to other South East Asian countries. However, whichever option is chosen, this will never compensate for being cut off from the Chinese domestic market—the ‘market of last resort’—which is why the respective economic dependency of both powers is clearly not in favour of the United States. China has therefore no reason to worry about a possible rescaling of globalization at the national or regional level under the impulsion of the United States or the European Union, as it is a course of action that it has already embraced.

Of course, what will happen next remains a matter of pure speculation, more specifically concerning what China will choose to do. Will it stick to an autarkic model within its borders or will it rather try to create a Beijing-led self-dependent region that will be connected thanks to the BRI? Only time will tell, but the first option does not appear sustainable in the long run. China’s recent focus on its domestic market can only be an intermediary phase that must lead to another developmental path. Indeed, sticking to this policy comes with an obvious risk for China, since domestic consumption may be negatively affected in the event of a crisis of overproduction—a prospect that is already looming at the horizon. The risk of market saturation is not a novelty in the study of capitalism, since it had already been identified in the 19th century by economist Jean-Charles Sismondi as one of the main flaws of the system. Because of this risk, China may also follow the already discussed path of the regionalization of its economic market. In this regard, the BRI may play a vital role and may become the driving force behind the creation of a China-led regional economic sphere. The realization of this vast project would serve China’s interests in many ways. First, this would allow China to stimulate its domestic economy through investments by financing the required infrastructures for this project as well as increasing its potential markets in the region. More strategically, this would transform China into the regional ‘Good Samaritan’ that would, thanks to its project, keep afloat the regional Asian economy, which will be severely disrupted by this health crisis. In this regard, it is perfectly reasonable to expect that the coronavirus crisis will simply accelerate this project. This is because the region will be in desperate need of a ‘Marshall Plan 2.0’ that will promise to quickly boost economic growth and job creation once this health hazard has passed, since the world is entering a crisis that will be much worse than the 2008 financial crisis and maybe even than that of 1929. The advantages are clear countries that agree to become stakeholders in this project, as it means that China will further increase its investments in essential infrastructure. In return, this project would further increase the already existing tight trade links with China through regional supply-chains, meaning that China would not only be able to export its goods in these countries, but these countries might also expect to have an easier access to the Chinese market by exporting goods or raw materials China needs to support its projects whether it is Central Asia’s oil and gas, Australia’s iron and coal, or Chile’s copper.

If this scenario becomes a reality, there is a risk of conflicts between these new regional blocks, especially in buffer regions between them⁷⁶. However, the source of these clashes will not result from a declining hegemon's willingness to hamper the ambitions of a rising power. They will rather be the result of a world with disentangled economies that are all fighting to be self-sufficient. This phenomenon started before the COVID-19 outbreak and may simply be accelerated by it. This of course comes with the same concern evoked in the previous chapter that a lack of interdependence may lead to political tensions as these countries or regional blocks will have less to lose from an economic standpoint if they are to fight rather than to keep cooperating. In this sense, the post COVID-19 world may resemble that after 1945, leading to a new Cold War between self-contained economies or, in the words of Kevin Rudd, former Australian Prime Minister and current President of the Asia Society Policy Institute, 'the return of an iron curtain between East and West and the beginning of a new conventional and nuclear arms race with all its attendant strategic instability and risk'⁷⁷. This is indeed a troubling scenario that could lead to new battles for the control of buffer territories between regional blocks or to conflicts over natural resources that are essential for the self-sufficiency of these new entities.

⁷⁶ We can think in this regard to Central Asia which is located between Russia and China. Because of the strategic role it plays for both powers, this region might become in the future the space of a new 'Great Game'.

⁷⁷ Kevin Rudd, "To Decouple or Not to Decouple?", *Asia Society Policy Institute*, November 4, 2019. <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/great-us-china-decoupling-dilemma>. Similarly, Noah Smith has argued that "A world of self-contained national supply chains is probably going to be both less efficient and more dangerous than a world of distributed international production. At the very least, the trend threatens to raise prices for consumers. But the ramifications could be much more serious than that. The roll-up of supply chains into nationalist systems of production could take us back to a world where great powers feel less constrained in resorting to military means to settle conflicts. That's a future that should worry everyone", "China is the Biggest Protectionist Threat", *Bloomberg Opinion*, July 19, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-07-16/china-s-go-it-alone-economic-plan-is-biggest-threat-to-trade>