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## CHAPTER 53

### “NEW NORMAL” – NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED<sup>2</sup>

*The deconstruction of the former world order and zero point of history were declared with the declaration of the pandemic and the initiation of the world war against the pandemic as early as on 11 March 2020.*

(Kljakić 2022: 23)

**Abstract:** With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, humanity faced numerous new challenges. The fight against the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the disease caused by it led towards an urgent response at the national and global levels, in the situation when both the virus and the disease were new, formerly unknown. The virus is a subject of biological science, but the pandemic is a social phenomenon and, therefore, its sociological aspect must also be explored. Global social circumstances were the key ones in making it possible for COVID-19 to become a disease with the most rapid pandemic spread in the history of medicine. During the pandemic, both scientists and politicians and public figures in general introduced the term “new normality”. It seemed that the pandemic had reshaped our everyday life to such an extent that it would no longer be the same, that the “new normal” would prevail as a new life concept of the people on the planet. The aim of the research is

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<sup>2</sup> The research was financially supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia within the scientific-research of the Faculty of Education, the University of Belgrade, according to the Agreement on the transfer of funds for financing the scientific-research work of the employees in the teaching process at accredited higher education institutions in 2023 (Record number: 451-03-1/2023-01/4).

to explore theoretically the concept of the “new normal”. Is it an ideological concept which should be achieved for the sake of fulfilling certain large capital interests or a necessity of facing the new virus for the purpose of preserving people’s lives and health? The results of the conducted research point out that the “new normal” was an ideological attempt of reshaping people’s everyday life, but not only by dictating certain stricter rules of behaviour, connected with a higher degree of control over human freedoms and over people’s behaviour, justified by the concern for people’s lives and health, which should definitely be taken into consideration, but only as the initial stage. What no one noticed on time, however, were two other elements of the “new normal”: geopolitical (and geoeconomic) reshaping of the world, in the whirlwind of war (first the Russian-Ukrainian war, and then the Palestinian-Israeli war) which practically immediately followed the pandemic crisis and, on the other hand, the beginning of the omnipresence of artificial intelligence (AI) in human lives. These are two most important elements of the “new normal” in which we are living today.

*Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, “new normal”, rapid development of AI, Russian-Ukrainian war, Palestinian-Israeli war, sociological implications.*

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The COVID-19 pandemic broke out, from the perspective of broad public, completely suddenly. On the last day of 2019, the People’s Republic of China reported the lung pneumonia cases with special characteristics, which were determined to have been caused by a new type of virus from the coronavirus group, hence the name of the virus SARS-CoV-2, while the World Health Organization (WHO) named this disease COVID-19. Soon a hypothesis was proposed that the disease had spread from the market in the city of Wuhan, where wild animals were illegally sold, so that the virus was transmitted from the Malayan pangolin to the man, whereas the Chinese scientists quite soon isolated and sequenced the virus (see Zhou, Yang, Wang et al. 2020; Wu, Zhao, Yu et al. 2020; Lam, Jia, Zhang et al. 2020; Xiao, Zhao, Yu et al. 2020).

Despite numerous suspicions about this being an artificial laboratory-produced virus, this “Wuhan paradigm” has been accepted in science for the time being. Malayan pangolins were the transmitters of the virus to the man and then the virus spread rather rapidly. To this end, it should be kept in mind that this type of trade is prohibited in China, and that these wild animals were smuggled into the country and sold in the market, since they are used both in human diet and for the needs of Chinese traditional medicine. In any case, if we start from the proposition that the “Wuhan paradigm” is correct, the culprit for the epidemic outbreak is the man – those who illegally traded wild animals which are legally

protected and which, thanks to such trade, gain huge profits. In this case, however, the inflicted damage was of the global character, not only in material terms, but in terms of millions of human lives.<sup>3</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens were informed that they would have to adapt to some “new normal” in the course of and after the pandemic. Naturally, the first thoughts were directed towards asking people to wear protective masks on a daily basis, then to de-socialize by not participating in any type of grouping (from schools with live classes via cafés and restaurants to museums, theatres and other cultural institutions) and by being regularly vaccinated. Having in mind the statements of the officials and doctors who worked on suppressing the disease, this conclusion about the meaning of the concept of the “new normal” almost imposed itself. No matter how difficult for us it might be to accept – and in the long run it was, in our opinion, almost unimaginable – at the height of the pandemic, with the application of the social coercion instruments on a smaller or larger scale, people began getting accustomed to this way of life. People were thinking rationally: the “new normal” is temporary, and we should try to survive this virus, and then we will go on with our lives. Even then there were authors who, having in mind the ecological problems related to climate change and caused by globalism, warned that it was necessary to prevent returning to the old production method, pointing out that perhaps it was necessary to invent a new system that would “dispute production as such” (Latour 2020). At that time, we also perceived that globalism was the cause of the crisis, and we pointed out that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis was only the symptom of the disease of globalism as an ideology of global capitalism (Šuvaković 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic began abruptly and, in the same way, it also ended abruptly. We no longer wear masks (at least not on a large scale), vaccination has been completed, people still gather on a daily basis for different purposes, but changes have occurred that have modified the picture of the pre-pandemic world. These changes are in the domain of the application of scientific-technological achievements through substantial massification of the application area of artificial intelligence on the one hand and in the domain of geopolitical changes in the modern world on the other hand, through the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Europe in February 2022 and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in October 2023. These changes are so important that they can change the picture of humanity towards some “new normal” which was not even thought of during the pandemic,

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<sup>3</sup> According to the data of John Hopkins University, until 5 July 2022 as many as 4.5 million people died and it was known that their death was caused by COVID-19. This number, however, does not make any difference to those who died of this disease and those who died due to being infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, but the cause of death was actually a comorbidity, which was merely stimulated and accelerated by the presence of this virus producing the general weakening of the immune system. See <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/cyr/svet-52291930>

and not in a long period of time at that, while the above-listed conflicts (as well as potential ones) acutely threaten the survival of the Earth. Is it the “new normal” to which no one pointed (in public) during the pandemic? In our research, we will attempt to show what the content of the concept “new normal” implied and how that concept was enriched by new content.

## METHODOLOGY

The paper applies the qualitative content analysis for some of the academic papers related to the concept of the “new normal”. Efforts were made to establish the etymological meaning of the term, the sociological understanding of the concept through the prism of different theoretical approaches, when the term was first used, what the content of the concept is and how the concept was used in the public (and academic) discourse in Serbia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, conclusions are drawn about the direction in which the world was recomposed during and after the pandemic of this disease and what the post-pandemic “new normal” is like.

## RESULTS

### Meaning of the compound “new normal”

#### a) Linguistic meaning

The compound *new normal* was created linguistically by using the time adverb *new* in the feminine gender, which is used in Serbia as “*the first part of many adjective compounds and, less frequently, noun compounds showing that something is new, modified, recent etc.*” (Pešikan 1996: 742). In this case, of course, it is a noun compound.

In language terms, the adjective *normal* denotes “1) **a.** something that is usual, in a normal, ordinary manner; in ordinary circumstances, usually... **b.** as it should be, proper” (Nikolić 2001: 16), apart from various other meanings not relevant for our paper. We would like to turn attention to the provided meaning a) *in ordinary circumstances*, and b) *as it should be, proper*. According to these meanings, normal is something that corresponds to ordinary circumstances, something usual, but also something that is proper, or the way it should be. Apart from the statement that something is the way it is, the statement about the existing, this expands the meaning of the adjective, so that it also contains the statement – the value attitude about how, in what way, something should exist so as to be considered, or accepted, as proper existence.

The noun *normality* denotes “a characteristic of someone or something of being normal...” (Nikolić, 2001: 17) and, taking into account the meaning of the corresponding adjective, this noun denotes a usual, existing state or a state that is desirable, being proper in value terms.

Therefore, in strictly linguistic terms, the *new normal* denotes the recently modified state as compared to the previous, ordinary circumstances, while it has been modified in the desirable manner, as it should be. Here we notice that it is the completed state, since normality, even if it is new, always denotes a relatively crystalized state of affairs or circumstances.

*b) Sociological meaning*

In its sociological meaning, the normal is treated as opposite to the pathological. In that respect, the normal-the pathological are correlative concepts.

One of the most famous professors of social pathology at the University of Belgrade, Milan Popović, classifies the definitions of the normal and, based on the emphasized elements, they could be a) classical medical; b) utopian; c) statistical; d) normative, and e) relativist.

In the first group of classical medical definitions, Popović lists all those definitions determining health as the absence of a disease. This ranks among the so-called *negative definitions* and it is the subject of his criticism, but he also indicates that such definition “has not stayed long in medical practice because it is difficult to fulfil all medical, psychological, sociological and cultural criteria of a general definition of normality” (Popović 2007: 365). He asserts that the World Health Organization has abandoned this definition, opting for an integrative approach to understanding the concept of health, and for a positive definition, which, apart from the absence of a disease, also includes psycho-physical and social welfare, according to which Popović categorizes it in so-called *utopian* definitions, from Greek οὐδέν – zero or not even one, and τόπος – place, or: a non-existent place. This coined word has come into use thanks to Thomas More and his book *Utopia*. However, today it also has the meaning of “a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions” and “an impractical scheme for social improvement” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/utopia>). It is in this second meaning that Popović characterizes this definition provided by the WHO as “utopian” because “it is not easy to achieve it, due to an increasing number of criteria to be fulfilled” (Ibidem). In this respect, he also points to the problem of the relationship between the normal and life cycles in the theoretical understanding of the identity creator Eric Ericsson, who believes that man goes through several life cycles, and what they all have in common is the permanence of identity. From this, Popović concludes that the concept of normality cannot be understood as something static, but as a dynamic category that, in Ericsson’s opinion, changes through life cycles. A typical representative of the third, *statistical* type of definitions is Durkheim. He finds that social facts are normal if they do not significantly deviate from the average, within a society, at a certain degree of its development. “Within the statistically understood normality, as normal is declared something that is already normal in the broadest possible terms”,

i.e., it is considered that “the normal is always *normative* as well, i.e., conditioned by the valid norms”. Popović objects to this saying that it is a positivist and pragmatist attitude “which ignores the fact that man is a ‘being of possibilities’” (Ibidem). He actually borrows this understanding from Vladimir Jakovljević who, according to Popović, “introduces the Marxist concept of the optimum of possibilities in the definition of the normal” (Popović 1979: 18). Milan Popović believes that sociology has encouraged the relativization of the concept of the normal, contextualizing it in time and social space. The definitions by social anthropologists understand this concepts as “more relative than absolute”, and the theoretical example for criticism of their understandings is attitude of H. J. Wegrocki, who considers normal that behavior “which maintains or improves a certain culture (Popović 2007: 366). Relativist definitions can include Fromm’s understanding “of the pathology of normality” as an individual’s escape from loneliness and non-freedom into conformism, i.e., “statistically shaped normality”. Popović also includes Lemert, the creator of the theory of deviant behaviour, into this group of definitions. The essence is that society responds to primary deviation by stigmatization and discrimination, whereas an individual accepts the role imposed by society. Popović criticizes such reduction of normality to a social aspect, indicating that the aim of such understandings is “adaptation to the existing, not taking care of the pathology of norms, society or social situation” (Ibidem). In that context, he also points to the problem of anomy and disorganization of societies, when some norms disappear and others have not been emerged yet, thus leading to a phenomenon called “amoral vitalism” by Emil Cioran, as a condition for survival. Curiously, Popović does not mention Parsons’ definition of illness either in his paper from 1979 or in the item in the *Sociological Dictionary*, written almost four decades later, although this definition is considered in literature *the first sociological definition of illness*, with which he describes illness as something that “incapacitates for the effective performance of social roles” (Parsons 1951: 430). Parsons’ definition, as well as the determination of the sick role, is functionalist, and even normative and, therefore, under Durkheimian influence, but definitely a true substantial step forward towards the connection between the disease and society and rejecting mere reduction of the disease to biological-psychological aspects. Parsons constitutes the sick role out of four elements: a) the sick person is exempt from normal social roles; b) the sick person not responsible for their condition; c) the sick person should try to get well), and d) he sick person should seek technically competent help and cooperate with the medical professional (Parsons 1951: 435-436; cf. Šuvaković 2007: 47).<sup>4</sup> It may be rightfully said that this introduced a value-cultural element in the determination of

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<sup>4</sup> How important this is can be established merely by a simple insight into what was considered illness in Western societies in Parsons’ era (1902-1979), while it is no longer classified as such nowadays. On the other hand, what is no longer considered illness in the Western cultural circle is still considered illness in some other societies (e.g., African or Eastern civilizations) etc.

illness, and that such interpretation of the illness concept was dominantly valid for the sphere of Western cultural influence.

However, Popović explicitly admits that it is much easier to define normality when it comes to an individual than when it concerns a social group, and he also gives his own determination of normality as “optimal realization of a person in a specific social situation” (Popović 2007: 366), based on Jakovljević’s definition, in this manner trying to answer this harder task – by placing an individual into a social context which, only with huge efforts, can be imagined without taking into account affiliation to a social group.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary Serbian theoreticians of the middle generation, such as Jugović, also indicate that the very word normality already contains the word “norm” in its root. Therefore, normality is acting by the norms established by the order. Nevertheless, they also point out that many social rules change with time, so the views of “social deviations are also permeated with value, normative, cultural, customary and ideological factors” (Jugović 2022: 17). When writing about social deviation, Jugović is guided by the teleological explanation and thus reaches a conclusion that “the criteria of social normality are relative and changeable” (Ibid: 18). Temporality plays an important role in the altered grade of some behaviour: while in one epoch it is a feature of normality, in another epoch that identical behaviour will be treated as deviant, and *vice versa*. In addition, Jugović also points to the cultural space as an important element of the grade whether some behaviour is an expression of normality, abnormality, or even a criminal offence,<sup>6</sup> as well as to the stigmatization of certain behaviour, from *subcultures of the deviant*, so that it may be concluded that dominant cultural patterns are always – the patterns of normality. Since from the example given in footnote 5) it can be seen that in different

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in the case of ostracism, for a certain period of time, and only conditionally, if not taking into account the group to which the exiled individual belongs.

<sup>6</sup> We can follow this process with our own eyes when it comes to homosexuality. First the American Psychiatric Organization, immediately followed by the American Psychological Association, took off homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders (APA, 1975). The process of its decriminalization ensued worldwide, including some of ex-SFRY republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina decriminalized homosexuality as early as 1977), while other part of Serbia (including Kosovo & Metohija) was decriminalized in 1994 (Šuvaković 2021: 736); it was subsequently normalized gradually, and then some of the countries completely equalized the norms regulating marriage and marital relations, regardless of whether marital partners are of different or same sex. It was first done by the Netherlands in 2000 (Ibidem). Many countries have recognized different transitional forms and different names for registered homosexual communities without normatively equalizing them with marriage fully, in relation to all rights and obligations (Šuvaković 2021). Moreover, at the same time, a large number of countries do not look at homosexuality as an acceptable way of behaving, and in some countries, e.g., in Africa, but also in some European countries, it is still the subject of criminal prosecution.



cultures (or, perhaps, more precisely, civilizations) different behaviours are part of normality as a practice, which once again relies on civilizational values, so it can be concluded that the criteria of normality are conditioned not only by time, but also by civilization. Dugin also writes about it when emphasizing the following: “Values that seem ‘understandable’ to a modern European or American, are not at all like that to a modern Chinaman, Indian or Russian. They may be attractive or repulsive, but the main thing is that they are not universal. Nothing in the history of the majority of humanity, except for the experience of the Western countries, bears witness about those values having developed everywhere independently, and not having been imposed in a colonial manner, almost by force” (Dugin 2013: 234).

### Short overview of the historical use of the new normal coined compound

Ever since ancient times, philosophers, and then scientists, have searched for the first, the cause, something first, something mentioned first... It is usually difficult to track the first, since everything has its prehistory. Even in the era of print and electronic media, now digital as well, it is difficult to establish completely precisely when an expression was mentioned first and in what meaning – particularly today, when media production, including scientific production, is increasing on a daily basis. Many scientific journals are not even printed any longer, or only several copies are printed for the authors of the articles, while everything is published online. Who can guarantee whether those articles will be able to be read in a few decades and that they will not be destroyed, for example, by the collapse of the world network? No one can give such a guarantee. Today’s relatively easy accessibility in the electronic form may very easily be turned into their absolute inaccessibility, preventing the process which famous Régis Debray called *transmission* – transfer of information from one generation to another, from one peer group to another, distinguishing it from *communication*, which he used to denote the transfer of information in space (Debray 2000). Or course, hoping that it will not happen, today we use the advantages of the electronic search of scientific journals, trying to find data of relevance for our research.

Although some modern economists take the credit for it, which will be further discussed below, researchers (Krajčović 2021: 2) have so far established that the compound “new normal” was first used by American media magnate Henry A. Wise Wood in his article “Beware!”, published in the American journal *Bulletin - National electric light association* back in 1918. In his text, Wise Wood points to socio-economic and political consequences left by the First World War in the American society, in the global context, also including the October Revolution. The text itself reflects conservatism and anti-communism, emphasizes American exceptionality and places



America before the choice of its own future. “To consider the problems before us, we must divide our epoch in to three periods, that of war, that of transition, that of the *new normal* (italics by the author) which undoubtedly will supersede the old. The questions before us, therefore, are, two: How we shall pass from war to the *new normal* (italics by the author) with the least jar, in the shortest time? In what respect should the *new normal* (italics by the author) be shaped to differ from the old one?” (Wise Wood 1918: 604). In this article written on only two pages, he repeats the expression “new normal” as many as seven times – namely, in the post-war context.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term “new normal” has indisputably gained an extremely high frequency of use both in the academic speech and in the speech in general during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is difficult to say precisely when the use of that term has been re-actualized, and in what meaning, since this term covers rather different content of the concept.

We have found a paper from the field of medicine, accepted as early as 2001, but not published online until 2006, which uses the term “new normal” which refers to women’s post-partum experiences completely different from the previously described ones, according to this study (Martell 2001). In the field of architecture, regarding the conversion of old buildings, there is a chapter published in 2003 under the title “Conversions – the New Normal” (Jessen and Schneider 2003), while one year later, this concept was used in a text from the field of sociology of disaster, sociology of identity and culture of remembrance in relation to the event of 11 September 2001, published under the title “Contesting the New York Community: From Liminality to the “New Normal” in the Wake of September 11” (Abrams, Albright, Panofsky 2004).

In the field of economics, the term *new normal* was first mentioned by Rich Miller and Matthew Benjamin in their text “Post-Subprime Economy Means Subpar Growth as New Normal in U.S.” (May 2008), published on Bloomberg website.<sup>7</sup> It is easy to see that it is yet another postism, a phenomenon following a phenomenon preceding it. These two authors argue that adapted economy following the economy based on high-risk financial affairs (and thus producing the global economic crisis, which is also agreed on by Stiglitz, despite his different conclusion, as we will show below) leads to below-average growth as compared to that recorded in the USA in the period of minimum two decades. They point out that “the U.S. may have to get used to a *new definition of normal* (italics by the author), characterized by weaker productivity gains, slower economic growth, higher unemployment and a diminished financial-services industry” (Miller, Benjamin 2008).

The next chronologic use of this concept can be found only two years later, once again in economic terms, and it was used by Mohamed A. El-Erian in his lec-

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank my colleague, Gordana Stoković, Teaching Assistant, who helped me to download the whole text.

ture at the prestigious Per Jacobsson Lecture in October 2010. The lecture is entitled “Navigating the New Normal in Industrial Countries”. Giving Miller and Benjamin the credit for using the concept “new normal” in a similar meaning somewhat earlier, El-Erian asserts that he and his associates from the international financial corporation PIMCO coined this concept at the beginning of 2009, naturally, once again with an economic meaning, “in the context of cautioning against the prevailing (and dominant) market and policy view that postcrisis industrial economies would revert to their most recent means. Instead, our research suggested that economic (as opposed to financial) normalization would be much more complex and uncertain—thus the two-part analogy of an uneven journey and a new destination. Our use of the term was an attempt to move the discussion beyond the notion that the crisis was a mere flesh wound, easily healed with time. Instead, the crisis cut to the bone. It was the inevitable result of an extraordinary, multiyear period which was anything but normal” (El-Erian 2010: 12). He emphasizes that this concept “was not an attempt to capture what *should happen*. Instead, the concept spoke to what was *likely to happen* given the prevailing configuration of national and global factors — some of which were inherited, and others that were the consequences of the choices being made. Put another way, the new normal postulated the world that would evolve absent a significant change in policy and business approaches” (Ibidem). In fact, in this interpretation, that is the concept denoting the preservation of (adapted) capitalism in modified circumstances of the suppressed growth, persistently high unemployment (which, therefore, has a systemic nature), private sector de-leverage, strict control of public finance and regulation once again being replaced by deregulation, “in the context of an accelerated migration of growth and wealth dynamics from industrial to emerging economies” (El-Erian 2010: 13). Continuing the explanation of this concepts, El-Erian asserts that the challenges of the new normal are connected with “two interrelated phenomena: first, a multiyear process of massively going structurally out of balance, as illustrated by excessive consumption in industrial countries, leverage-fuelled asset bubbles, inadequate risk management and incentive structures, and disruptive accelerators in the form of ill-understood financial innovations; and second, the aftermath of large balance sheet destruction, part of which remains obfuscated even today by accounting issues. Their interactions were accentuated by ongoing global realignments” (Ibidem). However, this author does not fail to state that even then the term had exceeded the meaning attached to the concept of the “new normal”, and that the coined compound is used so that “it now means many different things to many different people!” (El-Erian 2010: 13).

Namely, in its more recent meaning, the concept of the *new normal* emerges in the economic terminology as a result of encountering the economic situation in the USA after the outbreak of the Global economic crisis in 2007/2008 and the ensuing changes caused by it. It should be observed that the above-listed authors,

as well as the public discourse, find this crisis equally important as the First World War as for Wise Wood! Stiglitz writes in a quite convincing manner about its causes (2013). However, his conclusion is more radical than the conclusion of those who launched the concept of the new normal. He ends his 2010 book entitled “Freefall”, in which he deals with the causes of the global economic crisis from 2007 and 2008, with the chapter “Toward A New Society”. Answering the question “Will we grab the opportunity to recover the feeling of balance between the market and the state, between individualism and togetherness, between man and the nature, between goals and means?” (Stiglitz 2013: 327), he emphasizes that “the most important of all is the opportunity to create *a new society*” (italics by the author). This *new society* is determined by Stiglitz as one “in which every individual will be able to realize his/her aspirations and potential, one in which citizens will achieve common ideals and values, in which we will create a community that will treat our planet with due respect” (Stiglitz 2013: 328), stressing that these are possibilities, but that the real danger lies in their not being used. New society defined in this manner would actually have important characteristics of a form of eco-socialism,<sup>8</sup> even surpassing it, while those who wrote about the new normal in those years are still thinking within the frameworks of capitalist society, but in modified circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

In educational sciences one of the first uses of the concept “new normal” is connected with working while studying. A 2015 study of Georgetown University shows that a substantial share of those who study, after completing high school, opt for finding a job and studying at the same time, which ensures, inter alia, “convenient learning options, such as *distance learning or online courses*” (italics by the author) (Carnevale et al. 2015: 20). An “example of good practice” is also an agreement concluded by the Starbucks Company with the Arizona State University. “The company

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<sup>8</sup> For the concept of eco-socialism see (Nadić, Šuvaković 2010: 460-461; Nadić 2012: 129-136; Miltojević 2012). Nadić’s projection should be noted because, according to it, “not human consciousness, but an energy and resource disaster will lead to eco-socialism” (Nadić 2012: 135-136).

<sup>9</sup> This opinion is also shared by Castells, who laments over the crisis of the neoliberal model of capitalism, leaving the choice between restructuring or transformation of capitalism. Under the first term, “restructuring”, he implies “tempering of a new model of capitalism, which will be even less redistributive and will have less respect for our planet, which will give an absolute priority to stability and rentability of the financial system, keeping at distance any profound social reform”. In his interpretation, transformation covers “expanding the boundaries of economy towards ecological transition and social redistribution which would increase the internal market and achieve a new model of development supported by tax policy which will tax financial and technological capital in global markets. In both cases, strong, stable political institutions are needed, within neo-authoritarianism of the centralized state or within the re-legitimization of democracy, particularly through its establishment in the social tissue, as well as active action at the local level, which would spread democracy towards citizens” (Castells 2022: 123). The point is clear: either way, capitalism must be preserved.

announced in 2014 that its College Achievement Plan (CAP) would allow employees to pursue a Bachelor's degree in partnership with Arizona State University through ASU's online distance learning program EdPlus, at no cost to the student" (Carnevale et al. 2015: 55). As it can be seen, the period of commitment to studying remained in the distant past, reserved for the generations of American veterans from the Second World War, while now time has come for compulsory work, while studying remains in the interest of the company in which an employee works. That is essentially a prototype of the dual system of education, at the level of the faculty. Therefore, in sciences about education, the concept "new normal" is beginning to be used in the context of neoliberal ideology, applied to the educational system and closely connected with the development of information-communication technologies, particularly the Internet and the concept of the distance learning system,<sup>10</sup> which enabled "ideas to travel, instead of people" (Mandić, Ristić 2006). It is worth noticing that this does not have the consequence of only spreading enlightenment, as it could be assumed, but also of the increase in the economy of the educational process, which is achieved by reducing costs of the teaching process, with the increasing profits of those who have opted for this approach.

### Use of the concept *new normal* during the COVID-19 pandemic

In *COVID-19 Dictionary* (Slijepčević Bjelivuk, Nikolić 2022: 196), the *new normal* is defined as a sociological concept denoting "a set of changed social rules which imply different everyday behaviour in the community as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic". In typical examples supplied with this item, and downloaded from different websites, the following is listed: a) those that refer to working from home for the purpose of avoiding physical contact (hand-shaking, being too close to someone's face, kissing, hugging), b) sports consequences, referring to matches without the presence of spectators in order to prevent mass gathering in public places, c) decisions of the German courts in the light of the pandemic and the emergence of the "new normal", which refer to working from home, prohibition of movement, delay in the payment of rents, d) request for physical distancing and prohibition of "hugging and kissing with close persons", with the question as to how long this "new normal" will last and whether it will evolve into a permanent pattern of behaviour, d) online selection is indicated as the "new normal" which leads to reduced costs, alternation of generations, and improved quality. Namely, the examples listed in this dictionary show that the concept of the "new normal" actually denotes the newly-created state of the COVID-19 pandemic, for which it

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<sup>10</sup> For a short review of the development of distance learning studies in the world and in our country, see (Šuvaković, Nikolić, Petrović 2022: 244–249).

cannot be established whether it is temporary or permanent (or how temporary or permanent it is), while it is connected with the practice of social (in fact, physical) distancing (Šuvaković 2020a), as an epidemiological measure applied for the purpose of stopping the spread of the infection. However, it should be observed that the meaning given by the authors of this dictionary and the examples illustrating it are rather discordant. While the item speaks of “a set of social rules implying different everyday behaviour in the community”, the examples reduce such behaviour to the practices which should ensure the effect of physical distancing. However, although social rules changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, they certainly cannot be reduced only to physical distancing and working from home. In the beginning, schools and universities changed to the complete teaching process with the aid of mass electronic media (television) and working in the online environment (Jovanović, Dimitrijević 2021; Šuvaković, Nikolić, Petrović 2022; Osmanović Zajić, Maksimović, Lazić 2022; Jovanović, Dimitrijević 2023; Mandić 2023; Mičić, Vračar 2023; Jošić 2023), and subsequently transferred to combined lessons in a gradual manner, and after the pandemic, they resumed regular lessons in classrooms, cabinets and amphitheatres. However, the general population broadly applied wearing masks indoors (at the beginning of the pandemic, also outdoors), the use of gloves (at the beginning of the pandemic), and after the invention of the vaccine, vaccination against this disease, the obligation of self-isolation for those who were in contact with someone who turned out to be infected later on, the obligation of hospital treatment for the infected ones, particularly those with comorbidities, lockdown which first included the entire population in a certain time interval, and for those 65+ in the city and 70+ in the country on a 24-hour basis (later on, buying supplies was made possible for this population during night hours), and there were volunteers helping the elderly (Šuvaković 2020b), travelling abroad was rather difficult or, in the beginning, completely forbidden (many other countries introduced such prohibition), while entering our country was forbidden for all those who were not Serbian citizens. This was followed by the “opening up”, but with the limited opening hours of cafés and catering services in general; a digital certificate of vaccination was introduced for the purpose of controlling visits to catering facilities and the possibility of travelling abroad etc. Many countries also introduced digital surveillance over people’s movement, which also placed the question of human rights into the focus of the pandemic-related events. “The *new normal* of the coronavirus era, connected with the unprecedented breadth of the use of the artificial intelligence system, video surveillance technologies, geolocation and ‘big data’, in an unusually short period of time led to the emergence of new existential and legal problems” (Gnatik 2021: 769). Serbian authors also agree about this. “The restrictions were introduced regarding the rights and freedoms that could not be imagined before in the Western democracies. The borders between the countries were not only put under strict control, but in some cases, they were completely closed down. An even

greater deviation from the ordinary one was the introduction of compulsory permits for leaving municipalities, which represents the restricted movement within the country” (Jović 2020: 484–485), whereas this author indicates that Croatia applied such measures only at the beginning of its military operations in the 1990s. This association of war and war state is also shown by the authors who studied the media discourse in Croatia (Hromadžić, Popović 2022), but also in Serbia (Prohorova 2021) and many other countries. One of those authors is Chomsky, who writes about “profound relations between militarism, capitalism and the pandemic”, pointing out that the US army budget has reached the value of the army budgets of ten countries with the largest military budgets collectively and that, on the other hand, the US subsidies for national public health and scientific institutions amounted to about 6% of the US army budget at the time of the pandemic outbreak (Chomsky, Waterstone 2021/2022: 353). He also indicates that “an important relation between militarism and the pandemic functions with the aid of neoimperialism and globalized neoliberalism. The USA uses military funds for ensuring access to strategic and necessary resources, to prevent access for its economic competitors, and to open up markets and ensure protection for American companies operating worldwide” (Ibid: 354). Such behaviour certainly increases the circulation of people and goods, and thus the spread of the virus, Chomsky concludes. Numerous authors point to the application of electronic surveillance as a potential factor of violating the right to the freedom of movement, the right to privacy and personal data protection (Marković Savić 2020; Čović 2020), as well as the violation of the right to the protection of competition due to spreading fake news (Rakić 2020), the violation of religious rights (Mirović 2020; Antić 2021) and rights of migrants as a particularly stigmatized population (Vesković Anđelković 2021). On the basis of all the above-mentioned, Vuletić concludes that “for sociology, the source of the crisis is not in the health disaster itself, but in the manner in which institutions and society cope with it” (Vuletić 2021: 118). Of course, an important change that will subsequently become even more important was also vaccine diplomacy, with which China and Russia demonstrated being substantially better prepared in technical, organizational, medical and public-health terms to face this type of challenge as compared to the countries of the collective West. All this was part of the *pandemic normal* and it actually was the *new normal* in comparison to the pre-pandemic situation.

## DISCUSSION

According to the conducted research and obtained findings, it can be stated that the concept *new normal* is quite an old one, whose use was actualized from time to time, mostly with the changed content of the concept. It may be said that the concept now belongs to the category of *postisms*: it denotes something following after



something occurring to date, in this specific case adaptation to different everyday life, to different behaviour in different everyday life. Moreover, it is also clear that the use of this concept tends to become more frequent after large wars, economic and social crises, dramatic changes in society or in one of its segments.

In its most recent meaning, it could be concluded that the pioneer in researching the new normal was Shoshana Zuboff who, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, constructed the term *surveillance capitalism*, and used it in the title of her monograph (Zuboff 2019/2020). In her interpretation, surveillance capitalism is based on personal data collection via large browsers (Google), which are sold to commercial companies so that they can understand the direction of consumers' interests. However, technical-technological development enabled not only understanding people's habits, but also predicting their future behaviour. Zuboff asserts that in this constellation "people are a source of the basic surplus, the subjects of technologically advanced and increasingly inevitable operation of extraction of raw materials. True clients of this type of capitalism are enterprises in the markets of future behaviour... Now when it has become completely normal, the only thing that remains to us is to sing like slaves in chains" (Zuboff 2019/2020: 21). It transpires that exactly what Zuboff called "surveillance capitalism" will actually become the *new normal*, and not wearing masks, physical distancing, online work and learning etc. Those were only some of the outer manifestations of the new essences which will come surface to the foreground after the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Zuboff is not the only one who announced the development of events. There is also Manuel Castells, the creator of the "networked society" paradigm and the author of a very optimistic book, entitled *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Castells 2012/2018), which promotes the democratic potential of social networks, where the author finds his inspiration in the idealization of the "Arab Spring".<sup>11</sup> In his book *Rupture: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy* (Castells 2020/2022), he points his finger at social networks and (mis)information placed through them, as being responsible for "bringing into question science and democracy" (sic!), with an important statement that "the geopolitical order is being undermined" (Castells 2020/2022: 120). During the pandemic, there were other authors who also warned about the same that was emphasized by Zuboff and, some time before her, Castells, in the revised edition (during the COVID-19 pandemic) of his book about the rupture of liberal democracy. "The new normal" of the coronavirus era, connected with the unprecedented development of the artificial intelligence system, video

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<sup>11</sup> Castells' optimism regarding the democracy of the Internet and social networks based on it, with the potential of changing the world, disappeared during the COVID-19 pandemic, when his world of (neo)liberalism, which he respected so much, collapsed. This optimism was not shared by some of our younger authors, who critically re-examined the causes and effects of the "First Internet Revolution" (cf. Kragović 2013).



surveillance technologies, geolocation and “big data”, created new existential and legal problems in an unusually short period of time. By proclaiming the danger to public health as significant establishment of goals, it has become a dominant justification for introducing serious innovation which enable the ruling elites to block civil rights, particularly to legalize the use of surveillance systems. Within combating the pandemic, personal identification systems based on advanced technologies are transformed from the safety tools of law enforcement agencies into the tools of mass social engineering,” with a serious, not a rhetoric question whether digitization will turn into a threat to people due to the development and improvement of artificial intelligence algorithms, extension of the use of biometric surveillance etc. (Gnatik 2021). We may affirmatively answer this question even today, not only from the level of theoretical possibilities and warnings of the experts who have thoroughly dealt with this issue (Kissinger, Schmidt, Huttenlocher 2021/2022),<sup>12</sup> but also from the aspect of some practical indicators, for example, today’s ability of artificial intelligence to assume someone’s identity, to say everything what that person would never say, and to place it in the public discourse and so on, let alone the threats to the security of Humanity in case artificial intelligence becomes able to wage wars instead of people, with no moral restrictions, of which Kissinger and his associates warn in their book. Namely, “big data” collection would enable rapid development and prompt use of artificial intelligence in different spheres of social life, and that became obvious after the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the emergency, pandemic state prevailing all over the Earth also turned into the war state with the onset of two serious military conflicts; in the heart of Europe (see Šuvaković 2023) and in the Middle East. Simultaneously, serious economic wars began between the collective West and Russia and/or China, on the other hand. The very idea of *decolonizing* Russia, which reflects the claims of the West to parts of the Russian territory primarily *because of the Western claims to Russian rich ore and mineral resources* in the areas of Russian Far East and Siberia, and it has, as we can see, not only a political (Russophobe), but also an economic, imperialist foundation.

## TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

*The new normal* we are currently living in is not what we imagined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the face of the pandemic new normal did not seem appealing at all, *the new normal* established after the pandemic is much worse.

Humanity is facing huge challenges, two of which seem to be constitutive for *the new normal*. The first one is related to incredibly rapid development and use

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<sup>12</sup> The rapid development of artificial intelligence is also proved by the authors who, in their book published in 2021, consider the possibilities of ChatGPT-3 artificial intelligence, while today the fourth generation, or ChatGPT-4, is already used on a large scale.

of artificial intelligence for various purposes, which may benefit Man, but also threaten Humanity. Therefore, it is rightful to advocate the establishment of rules and control of artificial intelligence, based on the rules of human, generally accepted moral and right which should regulate its use at the global level. As for creating such regulations, the initial steps have already been made, with Serbia taking part in it as well. *The new normal* has always been created through wars and dramatic crises, which is also confirmed by the war between Russia and the collective West in the territory of Ukraine that began in February 2022, and the recent Palestinian-Israeli war that broke out in October 2023. These two war conflicts, both at important junctions of geopolitical interests, involving world military super-powers, threaten to cause other conflicts, and even to escalate into a world war conflict, in which even the use of nuclear weapons would not seem unrealistic. Concurrently with them, great economic wars are underway, once again between the collective West and Russia and/or China. The world geopolitical order, whose “undermining” has been warned about by Castells, has actually ceased to exist in reality. This includes the OUN, which will, most likely, share the destiny of its predecessor – the League of Nations. The new geopolitical order has not been created yet, although it is possible to discern its contours, primarily multipolarity as an important determinant. *The new normal* we are living in today is based on new, global uncertainties and risks encountered by Humanity. Those are the challenges of irrational rationality to which we pointed. In order to progress. Instead of developing human, natural intelligence, we have developed artificial intelligence which should serve us, but we still do not know how it reaches its results, and thus we do not know what decisions it may make in case it develops so much to do it without human approval (Artificial superintelligence, ASI). The warning about a good servant who turns into a bad master is here imposed simply as a metaphor. Instead of establishing permanent peace, ever since the Second World War not a single day on the Earth has passed without a war, whereas the two largest wars waged at the moment, with their cumulative potentials, might evolve into an existential threat to Humanity. That is the *new normal* resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic, in which we will have to find a way of living (surviving) in the forthcoming period.

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