

Neoliberalism as Ideological Infrastructure of Modern Society: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

This article explores neoliberal ideology as the foundational force behind contemporary social development. Through the lens of political philosophy, social ontology, and media theory, the analysis traces how neoliberalism has transformed from an economic doctrine into a hegemonic ideological framework permeating political, cultural, and technological domains. Drawing upon the works of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Antonio Gramsci, Thomas Piketty, and Jean Baudrillard, the paper examines how power is exercised not only through institutional and economic mechanisms but also through discursive, digital, and symbolic practices. The digital environment — dominated by global tech corporations such as Google, Meta, Amazon, and Twitter — serves as a primary medium of control and consent generation. The paper argues that the virtualization of reality, enabled by digitalization and media hyperreality, significantly facilitates the internalization of neoliberal values among individuals. Social reality is increasingly shaped by simulation and spectacle, where ideological control is exerted through the production of affective and symbolic systems. Neoliberalism, therefore, functions as both a material and discursive regime, sustaining elite dominance through soft power and voluntary submission. The study contributes to understanding the ontological dimensions of ideology in the digital age and proposes a rethinking of hegemony, resistance, and the role of subjectivity in late capitalism.

Keywords

neoliberalism, ideology, hegemony, digital environment

Introduction

It is widely known that in the era of modern globalization — as a worldwide process of economic, political, cultural, and religious integration and unification — the ideology of neoliberalism

has gained the greatest significance as a totalizing worldview system of Western society. The purpose of this article is to examine the key tenets of neoliberal ideology, which, in its general sense, significantly influences not only the formation of ideological stereotypes throughout the civil world but also determines the current state of public consciousness of the entire civilizational community. This is especially relevant for Ukrainian society, as it will be an important component of its further development in the future, particularly during its post-war recovery period. Given this goal, there is a need to first review the general state and principles of neoliberal ideology. Specifically, it is necessary to determine the current significance of neoliberal ideology in the modern global process and to outline its fundamental differences from the dominance of past ideologies. Undoubtedly, this examination aims at a critical evaluation of neoliberalism as a worldview and ideological system. In turn, this analysis will enable an assessment of the efforts made by the modern global financial and economic elite to preserve the influence of neoliberal ideology through means of modernization. This modernization is currently being rapidly implemented, taking into account the significant changes in modern geopolitical processes. The importance of these geopolitical changes is demonstrated by recent studies of neoliberalism, which explore its ideological foundations as an active factor in political and economic globalist trends. In particular, this includes the works of Thomas Piketty (2020), Joseph E. Stiglitz (2019), George Monbiot and Paul Hutchison (2024), and *The Defeat of the West* by Emmanuel Todd (2024). Researchers now face an urgent need for a thorough analysis of the interconnections among various aspects of the development of modern civilizational society in the socio-historical dimension, which reflect the dynamics of neo-globalization processes.

Analysis of Recent Research

For quite some time, socio-humanitarian research by scholars from various fields has pointed to global socio-political and socio-economic changes in the modern world. These studies highlight the crisis and inevitable devaluation of the entire neoliberal ideological system of contemporary digital society.

Aspects of this transformation have been explored in the works of prominent scholars, including Giorgio Agamben (1993), H. Alemán (2023), Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), and Manuel DeLanda (2006). Other scholars contributing to the discussion include Benoist (2024), Umberto Eco (1997), Bowring (2008), Mark Fisher (2009), David Harvey (2007), M. R. Kehl (2018), Naomi Klein (2008), and Ernesto Laclau (2014). Further influential works come from Christopher Lasch (1996), Achille Mbembe (2019), Chantal Mouffe (2013), George Monbiot and Paul Hutchison (2024), Richard Sennett (2000), Joseph E. Stiglitz (2017; 2019), Steve Fuller (2018), Immanuel Wallerstein (1995), Shoshana Zuboff (2019), and Slavoj Žižek (2022), among others.

Methods

The examination of the stated topic necessitates the use of a range of modern socio-humanitarian methods that fully correspond to the interdisciplinary nature of the research. In studying this topic, the following methods were employed: comparative analysis, phenomenological, hermeneutic, discourse analysis methods, as well as constructivism and social constructionism.

Purpose

The main theoretical objective of the article is to examine the principles of operation and key components of modern ideology, particularly its neoliberal variant, which is acquiring the characteristics of a global phenomenon. An important part of the work is the evaluation of the dominance of this ideology in the modern world by scholars from various academic schools and political perspectives. The article assesses the prospects for its modernization for the further development of a civilizational society and analyzes the likelihood of its replacement by another ideological construct in the future.

Results

The analysis of ideology as a factor in the development of society points to significant worldview transformations in the modern civilizational society. The significance of ideology as a large-scale socio-political and socio-economic phenomenon is considered from a broad historical retrospective, particularly in the works of the French scholar T. Piketty. This is expanded upon in the studies of the genesis of neoliberalism by J. Monbiot and P. Hutchison. These studies highlight the potential positive aspects of ideology, in contrast to various critical interpretations of it as a form of false consciousness. However, when it comes to today's neoliberal ideology, attention is drawn to its negative consequences — especially in the digital network society — as vividly illustrated by Guy Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle (Deborg, 1996), Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, and Steve Fuller's concept of post-truth. These contributions make it clear that contemporary neoliberal ideology gradually devalues universal human values and reduces them to Baudrillard's notion of a «procession of simulacra».

Ultimately, this gradually leads to the devaluation of the essence of democratic and legal freedoms, and to the partial or complete loss by individuals of the ethical components of existence that define subjectivity — namely dignity, equality, justice, respect, and responsibility. Truth itself becomes devalued; knowledge turns into an arena of constant ideological struggle for dominance, particularly in politics and science. This confirms the thesis that ideology is a necessary condition for the existence of any society, especially a modern one dominated by the struggle for supremacy. At this point, it no longer matters whether the ideology is socialist, neoliberal, or any other — a claim supported by the concepts of E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe. By considering these theories, one may conclude that Western consumer society cultivates permissiveness, a cult of violence and coercion, while bureaucratic institutions, including legal bodies, do not fully uphold the humanitarian principles of civic freedom, equality, and justice. Furthermore, the networked world clouds the real world and promotes a continuous pursuit of pleasure, being aligned with an industry of endless media-driven sensationalism, entertainment, and performance.

Thus, the modern globalized ideology of neoliberalism now shares little more than a name with its predecessor — liberalism, which emphasized entrepreneurial initiative, pragmatism, rationality, relative equality, and competitiveness, all of which supported various forms of compromise, partnership, and cooperation. It is now evident that a new, refined ideology of half-truths dominates, where even forms of deliberative (consultative) democracy are being devalued.

This condition is significantly intensified by total digitalization and mediatization. It is suggested that, at this stage of civil society development, it is urgently necessary to substantially modernize or seek and implement alternatives to the ideology of neoliberalism — particularly in light of the powerful influence that information technologies have come to exert on the public.

Discussion

One of the most significant contributions to the study of the phenomenon of ideology in a broad cultural-historical and philosophical context was made by the renowned French scholar T. Piketty (2020). The significance of this work, like his other in-depth studies, is hard to overestimate. According to his concept of ideology, «each era develops a whole range of contradictory discourses and ideologies to legitimize existing inequalities or those that, in people's opinion, ought to exist» (Piketty, 2020, p. 3). These ideological discourses define the economic, political, and social rules that people accept and later use to make sense of the effectiveness of existing social structures. Through sharp, antagonistic clashes between ideological discourses — which are simultaneously economic, social, and political in their nature — a dominant narrative (or group of narratives) emerges that supports the existing regime of social inequality. The phenomenon of social inequality, along with people's perceptions of justice and injustice, has existed throughout the entire history of society. Therefore, ideology and its discourses are relevant to all societies throughout human history. Thus, the researcher, through the concept of an «inequality regime» — which is manifested through the ongoing struggle of discourses and the support of social institutions — argues that these institutions justify and, in fact, structure economic, social, and political inequality. This makes the history and evolution of inequality regimes a central object of study (Piketty, T. 2020, p. 9). It significantly expands the relevance of ideology as a phenomenon in historical perspective and allows for a better understanding of transformations on a global transnational scale. Furthermore, this approach rejects the Marxist ideological construction — the flawed orthodoxy of base and superstructure — which has already been thoroughly examined by radical critics such as E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 7–46).

Moreover, drawing on extensive empirical data — economic, political, social, and demographic — Piketty convincingly demonstrates the incompatibility of the concept of ideology as «false consciousness» with modern geopolitical realities. He concludes that the history of society is not merely the history of class struggle, as claimed by the classics of Marxism, but rather «the history of all societies that have existed so far is the history of the struggle of ideologies and the pursuit of justice» (Piketty, 2020, p. 1010). Furthermore, he posits that, through the lens of ideology, «the history of human societies can be viewed as a search for justice» (Piketty, 2020, p. 1012). In this view, all economic categories — especially the property regime and its historically specific origins in each nation — as well as political and social institutions, are subordinated to ideology. The tragic experience of former communist states serves as evidence of catastrophe, one that merely gave rise to new forms of injustice. We shall leave aside for now his project of the evolution of modern society toward participatory socialism and its ideological and politico-economic mechanisms... Perhaps the historical time for its realization has not yet arrived.

However, the most influential conclusion reached by the researcher in his thorough examination of the history of inequality regimes worldwide offers a fundamentally different perspective on the significance of the phenomenon of ideology. T. Piketty concludes that «the balance of power at any given moment depends on the interaction of the short-term logic of events with long-term intellectual developments, which produce a wide range of ideas that can be mobilized in moments of crisis» (Piketty, 2020, p.1016). Thus, one may conclude that the current state of neoliberalism and its ideological components — social inequality, injustice, meritocracy, and others — are transient in nature and will be transformed in the foreseeable future, losing the relevance they currently possess.

Hence, it makes sense to briefly revisit the development of ideas about ideology, which is not only imaginary but also based in language, starting from the late 18th century. It is widely known that the term «ideology» was introduced into academic discourse by the French

philosopher, economist, and political figure Antoine Destutt de Tracy. In his view, ideology is a philosophically grounded rational and scientific form in which language is not merely a vehicle for expressing ideas, but a fundamental and necessary condition for their formation, implying a significant influence of language on thought. According to Destutt de Tracy, this philosophical principle applies to all sciences generally, as well as to each specific field of knowledge. In this sense, de Tracy's view on ideology implicitly *acknowledges language and speech as factors in the formation of thought* — a position that anticipates by more than a century the linguistic turn of the 20th century. From this perspective, ideology is a philosophical premise and a crucial factor in the development of science (Destutt de Tracy, 2017).

However, in the 19th and later the 20th century, an entirely different understanding of the relationship between ideology and science emerged. Ideology became the object of harsh criticism in Marxism and positivist sociology of knowledge. According to the related views of these scientific traditions, ideology — as a system of ideas — escapes individual control, takes on a quasi-autonomous existence, and comes to be perceived by individuals as a dominating, «material» force of circumstance, where the normal perception of human existence is already distorted from the outset — particularly in the understanding of social reality and societal processes more broadly.

From this critical perspective, the naturalization and hypostatization of ideas reveal a nearly universal mechanism underlying all ideological systems. Karl Marx's foundational idea is that social interests, expressed as social relations, shape the social positions of individuals, groups, classes, and strata. These positions gain meaning through conscious intentions, goals, interests, and attitudes, which are articulated and given significance in various forms of social consciousness. Within this consciousness, distorted awareness and the process of reification create a socially constructed reality — on both individual and collective levels — which becomes fetishized in modern, predominantly commodity-driven societies. This tendency is only amplified in today's consumer society and reflects the pragmatism and instrumentalism of the contemporary social order.

It is worth emphasizing that Marx's analytical approach to ideology — especially his treatment of ideology as distorted or false consciousness and his understanding of ideology as a means of struggle, maintenance, expansion, and dissemination of power (power is fought for in order to control all processes in society) — has had a colossal influence on the subsequent development of ideology theory.

As a result, ideology came to be seen as the antithesis of objective scientific knowledge — a convenient target for social critique. This critique found further development in positivist sociology of knowledge, where social science positioned itself as an impartial arbiter, an external observer capable of identifying discrepancies and distortions in models of the objective world. Here, the issue of truth was framed in terms of transcendent versus immanent observation. One should recall that the radical critique of ideology reached its peak in the Frankfurt School, particularly in the works of M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno. It is also worth noting that the Frankfurt thinkers drew attention to a key feature of (neo) liberal ideology — what they called *Verblendungszusammenhang* (a “context of delusion” or “structure of ideological blindness”) — which complemented the process of reification (*Verdinglichung*) in capitalist (neoliberal) society.

One of the most recent studies of neoliberalism and its ideology — expanding upon the work of T. Piketty in exploring the historical roots and conditions of pre-liberal capitalism and its liberal stage — is the work *The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism* of British scholars George Monbiot and Peter Hutchison (2004). The researchers focus on the socio-cultural, economic, and historical-political genesis of neoliberalism, as well as its current state and future prospects in contemporary society. Their study introduces several innovative socio-economic and socio-cultural arguments. According to these British

scholars, neoliberalism has become such a deeply entrenched and pervasive phenomenon that it is no longer even recognized as an ideology. It has dissolved into the fabric of modern society, penetrating all social strata and digital networks. The authors pose a rhetorical question — what is neoliberalism? — and respond: «It is an ideology whose central belief is that competition is the defining trait of humanity. It tells us we are greedy and selfish, but that greed and selfishness light the path to social improvement, generating wealth that will ultimately benefit us all. It is competition that transforms us *into consumers, not citizens*» (Monbiot & Hutchison, 2024, p. 4).

In this regard, another contemporary scholar of neoliberalism, Wendy Brown, examines it as a totalizing phenomenon of modernity, where it makes little difference which variation dominates globally, since «neoliberal imagination endows capital with unprecedented value» (Brown, 2019). In other words, material wealth and money are elevated as the highest values of the present age. The British scholars further elaborate: «This ideology seeks to convince us that our well-being is best achieved not through *political choice* but through economic choice — particularly through buying and selling. It promises us that by engaging in market transactions, we will reveal a natural, *meritocratic hierarchy* of winners and losers». In this view, the most talented and industrious individuals will succeed, while the incompetent, weak, and unskilled will fail. The wealth generated by the winners will trickle down to other social layers, enriching the broader population. Thus, the free market is seen as capable of autonomously organizing social life at both national and global levels. Therefore, according to British scientists, this principle is now becoming the dominant ideological framework, implemented through all available means into collective and individual consciousness. The expected outcome is a deepening immersion of ordinary individuals into a consumerist, materialistic sphere, where money and economic gain become the principal measure of existence for nearly all people, supplanting political and social values — legal guarantees grounded in freedom, democracy, justice, and various civil rights (Peck & Theodore, 2019).

It is worth noting that George Monbiot and Peter Hutchison convincingly argue, based on substantial historical evidence, that gradual change — without revolutionary upheaval — guided by the strengthening of international financial-political and legal institutions, and with the mutual consent of elites and ordinary citizens, could lead to the realization of an ideal democratic system: a communal, multicultural community. This presents one of the potential avenues for salvaging neoliberalism by rendering its globalist ideology more democratic and effective.

The critical condition of neoliberal society is addressed in the works of prominent American scholar Joseph Stiglitz (2017, 2019). Stiglitz writes: «The simultaneous erosion of trust in both neoliberalism and democracy is no coincidence or mere correlation. Neoliberalism has been undermining democracy for forty years» (Stiglitz, 2019, pp. 4–6). Therefore, the scientist draws the conclusion that: «Due to the form of globalization dictated by neoliberalism, individuals and entire societies have largely lost the ability to control their own destinies» (Stiglitz, 2019, pp. 4–6). Furthermore, he asserts that «the reality is: despite its name, the era of *neoliberalism* was extremely far from *liberalism*» (Stiglitz, 2019, p. 7).

Accordingly, the global free market as the measure of all social relations has significantly diminished the importance of democratic institutions, making them entirely dependent on fluctuations in the global market economy. On this subject, contemporary Canadian scholar Quinn Slobodian argues that «the realization of the global neoliberal project is linked not to liberating markets, but to enclosing them — to inoculate capitalism from the threats of democracy» (Slobodian, 2020, p. 2). He further concludes: «Throughout the twentieth century, neoliberal globalism was obsessed with two problems: first, how to rely on democracy, given democracy's capacity to destroy itself; and second, how to rely on nations, given nationalism's ability to destroy peace» (Slobodian, 2020, p. 13).

According to representatives of neo-globalism, almost all nation states should be integrated into the global market economy and into international economic institutions that protect the free market from excessive national sovereignty. In other words, the relationships between states and global economic institutions are structured in such a way as to allow for the circumvention of national legislation when it interferes with the rights of global capital.

This eloquent acknowledgment by socio-economic experts — effectively, the ideologues of neoliberalism — demonstrates that the neoliberal doctrine no longer aligns with its original purpose as a continuation of classical liberalism. Thus, in addressing the pressing problems of contemporary society, the proponents of neoliberalism propose to fully «unleash» the global financial and economic elite in everything they intend to implement worldwide — regardless of any circumstances. At the same time, they seek to suppress any resistance, even mild objections or dissent, to the ambitions and potential plans of neoliberalism from national interests. Consequently, national states and their governments at all levels are required solely to uphold political legitimacy and stability — functions that fully support the existing institutional framework of neoliberalism as the foundation of free capitalist markets.

In this context, French scholar Daniel Bensaïd poses a rhetorical question: «Is it still possible to break the vicious circle of domination? Judging by certain authors, the answer today is a categorical ‘no.’ The vicious circle is closed in on itself, rendered unbreakable, for example, by the absolutization of Foucauldian biopower» (Bensaïd, 2011, p. 71).

The ideological doctrine of neoliberalism instills fear among ordinary citizens, asserting that state intervention and bureaucratic control will inevitably lead to tyranny, as the state could accumulate excessive power and dictate how civil society should function. Therefore, neoliberals argue, the government’s primary role must be to eliminate barriers hindering the emergence of a «natural» hierarchy, in which market economic laws — based on harsh competition — prevail.

Under pressure from transnational globalists, the state has deregulated the financial and other commercial sectors, granting the elite unrestrained freedom in all forms of activity — often dubious and on the edge of legality — while at the same time maintaining strict control over ordinary citizens. This control includes deeper intrusion into private life, suppression of protest, and severe restrictions on the exercise of democratic freedoms. Ultimately, why not go further? Why not destroy trade unions by corrupting them from within? Why not render democratic elections purely formal and predictable political spectacles? Why not place kleptocrats at the helm of many states to ensure they implement the directives of the global elite?

Meanwhile, the blame and responsibility for the failures of the socio-economic system are shifted onto individuals. Ordinary citizens are constantly subjected to the ideological narrative that they are somehow personally responsible for the objective state of affairs — until they begin to act as their own accusers. Gradually, all citizens, to varying degrees, are transformed into carriers of neoliberal ideology, thus becoming simultaneously both consumers and disseminators of this ideological doctrine.

At present and in the foreseeable future, the global elite no longer has a significant need for the legal frameworks of states as guarantors of freedom, democracy, and citizens’ rights. The transnational elite has come to believe that it alone can shape the world according to its own rules. This trajectory was anticipated in the works of renowned scholars such as Christopher Lasch (1996) and Richard Sennett (2000).

As vividly demonstrated by the aforementioned British scholars George Monbiot and Peter Hutchison, this neoliberal ideological strategy has rapidly begun to materialize, as evidenced by sociological surveys. In Chapter 9 of their work *The Crisis of Democracy* (Monbiot & Hutchison, 2024), the authors reference the 2022 Freedom House report, which states that only 20 percent of the global population currently lives in fully free and

democratic societies. This compels the researchers to make a sobering prediction: if democratic politics cannot be revived, this shift may only be in its early stages. They conclude that democracy and its institutions, when confronted with an unstable capitalism, are now retreating almost completely. At the same time, various forms of totalitarian ideologies are emerging in stable positions – flourishing where the state collapses, where politics collapses, and where the citizen can no longer find satisfaction within the framework of democratic processes. In accordance with this societal condition, the authors make a startling suggestion: what Friedrich Hayek feared most — the rise of a new totalitarianism — has been accelerated by his own doctrine. They argue that all totalitarian ideologies — fascism, National Socialism, radical Islamism, communism — share common mechanisms of propaganda and agitations that are focused on the realization of a particular ideal in society, which have their own ideals of justice. However, as the great humanist Dante Alighieri once said, — «the road to hell is paved with good intentions». This idea was further developed by his fellow countryman, philosopher and writer Umberto Eco, in his essay *Ur-Fascism*. Eco explained that a defining feature of all reactionary ideologies is their inherent elitism, rooted in deep aristocratic values, he wrote regarding the *archetypes* of «eternal» fascism that for all reactionary ideologies are characterized by elitism because of its deep aristocratic nature. Throughout history, aristocratic and militaristic forms of elitism have thrived on the disdain for the weak. Ur-fascism, he emphasizes, embraces a populist elitism, asserting that «ordinary people are the best people in the world» (Eco, 1997, p. 87). He further argued that, in the eyes of such ideologies, the individual has no personal rights, and the people are seen as a monolithic entity embodying a collective will — warning that this predatory ideology may continue to reappear «in the most innocent of forms and guises» (Eco, 1997, p. 90).

It should be noted that research on the inconsistency of neoliberal ideology as an «ideal» model for the prosperity of modern capitalist society has existed since the second half of the 20th century. Renowned Western scholars warned about the fallacies of neoliberalism long before its peak. For instance, Immanuel Wallerstein, in the mid-1990s, forecasted the development of a neoliberal society over the next 25–50 years, emphasizing a critical point: «the enormous inequality in the system, which implies the absence of democracy» (Wallerstein, 1995, p. 281). The chasm between the rich and the poor — referred to as the «biomass» — has grown to colossal proportions in recent decades.

Another prominent American scholar, David Harvey, wrote in the early 21st century that the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm — with its proclaimed ideals of freedom, democracy, and justice — actually reveals the opposite: it exposes deeply troubling processes occurring in contemporary, especially American, society. This unsatisfactory condition significantly affects the majority of ordinary people: «Freedom has much brighter prospects than those offered by neoliberalism» (Harvey, D., 2007, p. 250). According to Harvey, alternative pathways must be sought for the development of modern society, as the erosion of democratic freedoms in all their dimensions risks leading to highly negative societal trends — where the boundary between democracy and totalitarianism is exceedingly thin, elusive, and unpredictable.

An even more radical view was held by the English philosopher and political theorist Mark Fisher. In his opinion, all previous exploitative systems first required an ideology — a deliberately distorted worldview — but the true nature of neoliberalism as a form of modern capitalism goes further: it fills all horizons of the thinkable and surpasses all its predecessors in masking its simultaneously predatory and perverted nature. In one of his works, he writes: «The role of capitalist ideology is not to defend anything, as propaganda does, but to hide the fact that the actions of capital do not depend on the subjectively accepted opinions» (Fisher, 2009, p. 15). Thus, he is unsurprised by the fact that «ultra-authoritarianism and capital

are entirely compatible: *detention camps and network cafés* coexist without contradiction» (Fisher, 2009, p. 3).

Interestingly, the perspective of the aforementioned British scholars stands in contrast to the findings of renowned Canadian writer and political activist Naomi Klein. In her bestselling book, Klein argues that the erroneous adoption of neoliberal ideology as the foundation for capitalist society lies in its very origins — in the classical liberal ideological doctrine embraced in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus, the ideologists of neoliberalism — such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and other founders of the «neoliberal school of economic thought» — bear direct responsibility for this trajectory (Klein, 2008, p. 720).

An even more radical critique of neoliberal ideology across multiple aspects of public life is offered by contemporary philosopher and psychoanalyst Jorge Alemán. He asserts: «No matter how we may characterize capitalism, its neoliberal mutation is markedly distinguished by one thing — its unlimitedness. Capitalism is an acephalous force that penetrates into the most remote corners of life. This is the novelty of neoliberalism. It is capable of producing subjectivities that conform to its existential paradigm of entrepreneurship, competition, and management. Today, neoliberalism creates a «new human» < > an individual without symbolic heritage, without history, without unique or irreplaceable traits» (Alemán, 2023). What most concerns Alemán is the dire condition of the modern human being: their vulnerability, social inequality and injustice, the totalitarian nature of governance exercised by both transnational and local powers, the failure of social institutions to fulfill their intended roles, and the overwhelming levels of corruption.

In the 21st century, the proponents of neoliberal ideology have acquired a highly effective means of governance and control in the world — in particular ordinary citizens — the digital networked space. Indeed, today's elites, through rapid digitalization and the increasing mediatization of society, as well as the constant communication of individuals via social networks, have significantly enhanced the forms and effectiveness of ideological influence. This elite influence is reinforced by global media and information corporations such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, Twitter, and others. These corporations not only collect vast amounts of data and continuously monitor the full spectrum of individual behavior, but also closely cooperate with state authorities, providing personal data on every individual — a phenomenon previously analyzed in the work of (Palahuta, 2024).

The overview of the scholars and researchers from various schools and approaches about the meaning and characteristics of neoliberal ideology (presented above) has predominantly taken a descriptive form. However, the mechanisms and tools for implementing neoliberal ideology have not yet been sufficiently explored, in particular, from the perspective of social ontology. Preliminary analysis, particularly the work of T. Piketty, indicates that neoliberal ideology in modern society is embedded in the economic, political, and social processes and, by its very nature, invariably exhibits features of *antagonism* and *hegemony* — characteristics inherent in power relations. Drawing upon the key principles of the theory of hegemony of financial and political elites, as articulated by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1991), one may interpret its relevance for contemporary society in the following way: ruling must be carried out invisibly and implicitly, through a dynamic equilibrium of various dominant social groups or factions that alternate in power over time. In other words, power is exercised skillfully through the use of so-called «soft power» in the interests of the minority — the elite — which possesses all capital and means of power at both global and national levels. This form of governance ensures a «non-violent coercion» and enables the continual control over subordinate groups — the masses — on a seemingly voluntary basis.

Modern hegemony, aided by the ideology of neoliberalism and its manifold instruments, must guarantee a dynamic and ongoing process of establishing an adequate level of «consent» between the majority and the ruling minority — that is, the elite of contemporary

society. In this regard, E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe emphasized that the socio-political discourse — which is inherently ideological — is «a real force that contributes to the formation and constitution of social relations» (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.110). Developing the idea that the social is always both ideological and discursive, E. Laclau arrives at the conclusion that all traditional conceptions of ideology are premised on the assumption of a «totality of the social». Laclau decisively rejects, first, the concept of society as an organic unity — a view that underpins all previous models of society. This notion is also challenged by Deleuze's theory of assemblage with its rhizomatic and nomadic structure, as well as by actor-network theory (Callon & Law, 1986; Latour, 1996), theories of community (Blanchot, 1983; Nancy, 1991; Agamben, 1993), among others.

Second, Laclau rejects essentialism in social ontology, wherein, for example, the Marxist model of base and superstructure played an ambiguous role. While it asserted the relative nature of the base and the superstructure, it simultaneously endowed this relative system with a center and a structure through which social organization could be determined. This center served to fix the meaning of individual social elements, thus forming the foundation for societal construction. In this framework, generality functioned as a primary principle for ensuring and comprehending social order. «The status of this generality was the status of the essence of the social order, which had to be recognized behind the empirical fluctuations observable on the surface of social life» (Laclau, 1991, p.25).

In contrast to this essentialist conception, Laclau seeks to acknowledge the infinity and boundlessness of the social as simultaneously ideological and discursive. That is, any social system is inherently unlimited, always surrounded by an «excess of meaning» that defies control. Therefore, «society» as a unified and comprehensible object — upon which its internal processes are based — cannot, in principle, exist. At the same time, the infinity of the social does not imply a completely chaotic play of signs and meanings. Laclau argues that the social is not merely an infinite play of differences; it is also an ongoing but *futile attempt* to constrain this play, to tame the infinite and enclose it within the boundaries of a social order. «Structure... no longer assumes the form of the essential foundation of the social; rather, it is an attempt — uncertain and unstable by definition — to grasp the 'social,' to establish hegemony over it» (Laclau, 1991, p.26). And this hegemony, by its very nature, is entirely ideological.

Ultimately, according to Laclau, the traditional understanding of ideology is inverted. Ideologies are no longer deviations from an expected, fixed social order; rather, they are attempts to embrace the play of differences — a persistent denial of the impossibility of establishing wholeness and harmony in a society divided between the elite and ordinary individuals conceived as a bio-mass. «The ideological would consist of those discursive forms through which society seeks to constitute itself as such — based on hermetization, fixation of meaning, and the denial of the infinite play of differences. <> Since the social is impossible without some fixation of meaning, without a discourse of hermetization, the ideological must be seen as the very foundation of the social» (Laclau, 1991, p.27), — concludes E. Laclau. Thus, the recognition of the infinite and uncontainable nature of the social — as simultaneously ideological and discursive — requires fundamentally new tools, means and instruments from the elite in the process of governing and controlling ordinary individuals who comprise the vast majority of the population.

It must be added that modern processes of digitalization and visualization have almost entirely virtualized reality — merging the virtual and the real into a practically indistinguishable continuum in which most ordinary individuals are immersed. This opens up new possibilities for the text of virtual reality, which refers only to itself in its visual-symbolic design. However, the existence of virtual reality is a profoundly textual phenomenon. It is self-referential and therefore self-sufficient: it requires no reference to external sources. It is

characterized by autonomy, ambiguity, and infinity — features emphasized by Laclau when linking ideology, sociality, and discursivity in his ontology of the social (Laclau, 1991, pp. 24–27). Hence, virtualization significantly facilitates the implementation of neoliberal ideological constructs in contemporary society.

This phenomenon was anticipated in the works of the prominent French postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard, particularly in his influential book *Simulacres et Simulation* (Baudrillard, 1981). Among the central theses of this work is the assertion that a simulacrum is an imitation of something that does not exist. «To simulate is to feign to have what one does not possess» (Baudrillard, 1981, p.14), thus giving rise to a space of total simulation. In such a space, the boundaries between the real and the imagined are dissolved; reality is superseded by hyperreality, which is characterized by the dominance of pure, non-referential simulacra, the precession of models, and the replacement of the real by signs of the real.

Baudrillard further asserts that with the death of transcendence in the modern world and its replacement by immanence, we have entered a qualitatively new stage — one of overwhelming manipulation of social relations. In the context of our discussion, we are particularly interested in how simulacra facilitate the implementation of neoliberal ideology. Drawing on the Latin term *medium* (meaning «in the middle» or «intermediate»), from which both the concept of «mass media» and the term *media* itself are derived, Baudrillard highlights the scope and character of the function of all forms of mass communication: the function of mediation and of being a carrier of information. He conceptualizes the medium as a technical and productive force that continuously generates simulacra.

Language itself, as a comprehensive symbolic system, is materialized in the medium through a continuous flow of signs and diverse discourses. From the perspective of the incessant production of simulacra and pervasive simulations — what we now often refer to as «fake news» or «half-truths» — the media sphere appears to be the most grandiose and expansive domain. In the present digital networked environment, this sphere has acquired powerful new capacities through digitalization. When appropriated by structures of power, the networked media system becomes a means of control over virtually all spheres of public life. It penetrates the political, economic, social, religious, scientific, psychological, and other domains.

Thus, Baudrillard assigns a central role to the medium in his theory of simulacra. Crucially, he also emphasizes that media-generated information no longer bears any connection to the «reality» of facts. What is presented as reality is, in fact, already pre-tested and pre-constructed. «We are entering a world of pseudo-events, pseudo-history, pseudo-culture, and so forth» (Baudrillard, 1981, p.44). This astonishing mechanism of construction has now become a universal form of influence on both public and individual consciousness. It is actively and fully exploited by mass media under the ownership and control of elites and those in power.

Conclusions

The consideration of the topic's aspects in the context of analyzing the current state of civilizational society leads to the following conclusion: on the one hand, modern society signals a profound crisis within neoliberal ideology. This ideology today is undergoing devaluation and is entirely discrediting universal human values — particularly various democratic and legal freedoms, human dignity, equality, and justice.

Currently, neoliberal ideological reality is transforming into a continuous process of indulgence in various forms. It is oriented toward an industry of endless mediatized political scandals and legal proceedings, entertainment, and visual performances. In other words, the

contemporary globalized world of neoliberal democracy is rapidly shedding the remnants of its own genetic liberal foundations — its imagined equality, communicative openness, and competitiveness, which once took the form of various partnerships.

Now, a new and sophisticated ideology of half-truth (post-truth) is emerging — where even the concept of deliberative (consultative) democracy is no longer viable. In its place, various refined forms of manipulation over people dominate, based on distorted types of coercion and violence, temptation and pleasure. These modern forms of refined control — enabled by the principles of neoliberal ideology and previously noted — are expanding through total digitalization and visualization. In the future, this may lead the world toward a new form of totalitarian regime — a digital concentration camp, the so-called totalitarian neoliberalism, which civilized humanity has never known before.

On the other hand, there is an urgent need for the immediate modernization of neoliberal ideology — or its deliberalization — which would necessarily involve the search for and implementation of new types of worldviews. These worldviews must be based on principles oriented toward pluralism, equal dialogue, and partnership relations within society.

Currently, prominent contemporary researchers, who consider the modern world in an expanded context, are focused on finding and implementing such modernization or alternatives to neoliberal ideology. In our view, the reorientation of antagonisms into agonism — as a competition between equal rivals or partners, similar to sports contests — is currently unachievable. This is because the dominant global financial and economic elite will never relinquish power, not even at the level of simulation.

Undoubtedly, these new worldviews must not be mere forms of atopia or dystopian projects. Overcoming today's antagonisms — present both in global politics and within national institutions of individual societies — must rely on the creation of effective modern international institutions. These institutions should monitor the current dynamics of neo-globalist processes and be entirely free of corruption.

There is no other path for humanity, as only such a strategy of globalist ideology can prevent the approach of a global catastrophe.

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