

# Torture, that recurring nightmare. Social crisis and pandemic

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The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the inevitable and essential debate on the civilizational model that humanity is undergoing. It is a set of world-systems that hegemonizes at a planetary level an indisputable transit towards self-destruction, not only of human life but also of all forms of life and the biosphere. Social scientists concerned about this issue have agreed that it is a global problem with characteristics of social tragedy, which calls upon States to assume an urgent change of course if we want to save the planet. This crisis places the “economy-health” relationship at the centre of the critique since the accelerated accumulation of capital has led the workforce to an undermined position due to the precarious conditions of their material and spiritual life, and above all, of their health. The countries of the Global South are the most affected by this crisis, where inequalities, not only of social class but also ethnic, gender, generation, territorial and environmental, are exacerbated.

What is critical is what the Ecuadorian epistemologist Jaime Breilh (2013) calls the “society-nature metabolism”; this concept refers to the fundamental balances that allow the harmonious flow of life, the conservation of ecosystems, the protection of the planet and its resources. The depredation of the biosphere and the overexploitation of the subaltern classes make neoliberalism what the Camer-

onian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2020) calls “necro-neoliberalism”; this concept denounces the thanatic power of the dominant economic system, its annihilating force and its contempt for human life. This idea is enriched, among others, by Naomi Klein’s (2014) “shock theory” and by Sayak Valencia’s (2010) idea of “gore capitalism”. Both perspectives point to the description of mechanisms of wealth production that are based on the application of dehumanized forms of social violence, of the subjection of the human person. A necroeconomy that is at the same time a psycho-biopolitics in the sense given by Byung-Chul Han (2016) and Maurizio Lazzarato (2013); the latter adds an exciting reflection on another dominant characteristic of this capitalism of death in his recent text, “*Capital hates everyone*”: the irruption of neo-fascism, of fascism with a friendly, mystifying and enveloping face, which favours its incrustation in everyday life (Lazzarato, 2020).

The practice of torture today cannot be read outside this socio-historical, political, economic and cultural context; it is an instrumental part of the civilizing pattern. It fulfils extreme functions in the battle for the conservation of power in the centres of concentration of financial capital. The Chilean experience of these last two years is a good laboratory of thanato-politics and necro-economics; we are experiencing the confluence of two dra-

matic events: the social crisis, which debuted on October 18, 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic, with the first case registered on March 3, 2020.

The popular uprising, a process still in full swing, was the culmination of a series of massive social mobilisations generated from the so-called “penguin revolution”. High school students put the issue of public education on the table. From then on, a series of marches took place that brought together millions of people throughout the country, denouncing various social problems: the privatization of education; the public health crisis; the sexual and reproductive rights of women and gender-diverse people; the self-determination and territorial demands of indigenous peoples; social security, undignified pensions and the end of pension fund associations, etc.

October’s misnamed “social outburst” was nothing more than the result of the progressive confluence of claims against the injustices, inequalities, and inequities generated by neoliberalism in our country. Messages written on the walls, such as “It wasn’t depression, it was capitalism”, show a popular imaginary capable of inscribing personal suffering in the complex scenario of social determinations. New social actors emerge with the social movements they have brought to the streets of the country; young people, women, indigenous people, housing debtors, sexually and gender diverse people, the elderly, along with workers and civil servants. The first success of this movement has been the launching of a constituent process with a view to overcoming the illegitimate political constitution imposed by the dictatorship; a process underway and presided over by a representative of the Mapuche people, whose mission is to design and propose to Chilean citizens a new fundamental charter, based on the doctrine of human rights. A multivariate process and at the same time capable

of converging in great demand: the end of the current system of domination.

We understand the Covid-19 pandemic as being structurally linked to the social crisis. It is a specific expression of the contradictions generated by the neoliberal economy. The management of the pandemic in our country is immersed in a necropolitics that has put the population at serious risk by privileging the protection of economic macro-indicators over the population’s health needs. The hegemony of an economic policy for the pandemic has had deleterious effects on the population, expressed in the emergence of vulnerable groups, physical and mental illnesses, the collapse of the public system, high mortality, increased social inequalities and poverty, etc.

All of this has been added to the social crisis that precedes it; the very tannin of this psycho-biopolitics comes from how the State has confronted both the social mobilizations and the effects of the virus on the health/illness process. The political repression and the massive and systematic violations of human rights had resulted in a devastating reality, denounced by national and international human rights organisations. More than 11,000 people were detained; 2,500 imprisoned; more than 400 were mutilated due to ocular trauma; an undetermined number of people tortured; close to 30 deaths in different circumstances; states of emergency and military patrols in the streets and towns; intimidation and persecution. Tragic repetition of the practices of State terrorism, not unknown to the generations that lived during the dictatorship. Moreover, there has been the same climate of impunity for these crimes: of 3,072 complaints filed by the National Institute of Human Rights, only four have led to convictions as of October of this year.

The experiences of extreme traumatization and re-traumatization behind these figures

reveal another bloody reality: the absence of comprehensive reparation policies for victims, disregarding the international commitments signed by the Chilean State. At the same time, it incorporates into society a new generation of victims of social trauma, which is added to the hundreds of thousands of people harmed by the military dictatorship. We are referring both to the first generation, which is in the *exitus letalis* stage and to the second and third, in which a relatively new phenomenon materializes as a public health problem: transgenerational harm/trauma.

The Programa de Reparación y Atención Integral en Salud [*State's Programme for Reparation and Comprehensive Health Care*] (PRAIS) currently has about 900,000 users, all of them directly affected and descendants of people who were tortured or affected by attempts on their lives. Being PRAIS a vanguard experience in the region, the integral reparation is a pending debt; in terms of health, it has many insufficiencies, and its possibilities of success collide irremediably with the failure in the integrity of the reparation processes, especially in the battle against impunity, the longing for truth and justice, the recovery of the historical memory and a culture of human rights, the demand for a dignified economic reparation, etc. The superposition of the new violent acts of this social crisis shows an essential characteristic of the social trauma: its historical *continuum*, its recurrent and cyclical character, whose origins are not on September 11, 1973. They were inaugurated in the colony and were constantly repeated throughout the formative period of the Nation-State, transformed into a structural strategy of domination with the neoliberal project. This has transformed Chile into a world laboratory of experimentation of

capitalist modernisation. This is recognised by Chilean historians and social scientists such as Gabriel Salazar (2006), Patricio Manns (2001), Sergio Grez (2007) and others.

Thus, the battle against torture in Chile is entirely situated in the constituent process, since it is imperative to resonate with the global debate for a new project of human society, based on the values and principles of human rights, on social justice, on balance between diversity and equality, between redistribution and recognition, on an ethic for life and nature.

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