

Covid-19: A Total Social Phenomenon. Occult Biopolitic Logics Supporting the Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 can be considered an epocal event, a total social fact whose implications have to be analyzed by a multidimensional perspective. Apparently, the crisis is accelerating entangled trends and dynamics that in a regressive way affect in parallel policy, economy, society, environment confirming the unsustainability of a system ontologically suicide. Among the collateral damage of the covid we include the crisis of democracy and sovereignty, while by mean of the convergence of biopower, biopolitics, medicalization, digitalization the masses of video addicted hype medicalized citizens become a precious source of big data to be manipulated and marketed. In a sense, by vaporizing the last shreds of solidarity in my opinion the covid marks the transition of liquid society towards a chaotic post-human anomic condition and risks to bring us again towards an era of (technocratic) totalitarianism. The present problematic position paper proposing a critical reading of the covid phenomenon focuses on some occult dynamics and logics making capitalism extremely resilient to crises and “black swans” in general, that indeed are exploited for the recovery.

KEYWORDS: Biopower; Nosopolitics; Necro politics; Digital capitalism; Cyber-surveillance; Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 can be considered an epocal event, a total social fact whose implications have to be analyzed by a multidimensional perspective. Apparently, the crisis is accelerating entangled trends and dynamics that in a regressive way affect in parallel policy, economy, society, environment confirming the unsustainability of a system ontologically suicide. Among the collateral damage of the covid we include the crisis of democracy and sovereignty, while by mean of the convergence of biopower, biopolitics, medicalization, digitalization the masses of video addicted hyper medicalized citizens become a precious source of big data to be manipulated and marketed.

In a sense, by vaporizing the last shreds of solidarity in my opinion the covid marks the transition of liquid society towards a chaotic post-human anomic condition and risks to bring us towards a new era of (technocratic) totalitarianism [1]. The present problematic position paper proposing a critical reading of the covid phenomenon focuses on some occult dynamics and logics making capitalism extremely resilient to crises and “black swans” in general, that indeed are exploited for the recovery [2].

Nullius in Verba

Premise that reality is something socially constructed, media representations intend to be spectacular and emotional, scientists are naturally inclined to conflicts, critical sociological theory, marxian thought and even the motto of the England Royal Society “nullius in verba” invite us to “trust no one’s words”. Namely that nothing is as it appears and we should not believe everything that who governs tells us. Therefore, the reading of official narratives must necessarily be skeptical and critical so as to grasp the dispositifs by which power literally grafts the cultural values into the social body [3].

In the case, although science also proceeds thanks to doubts and controversies making truth provisional, the official representation of covid expresses autocratic and dogmatic drifts that drag both science and politics. In particular the ongoing pandemic highlights how politics and medicine are now con-fused, so that we are no longer able to distinguish the boundary between the medicalization of politics and the politicization of medicine. It’s quite easy to suspect that huge interests lead to conceal controversial and inconvenient

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studies and manipulate, distort, bias the epidemiological data in order to oversize the covid phenomenon [4].

Not by chance the scientific discourse is quite similar to other kinds of context, time and place-related discourses. Sometimes it also happens that governments even exploit the expertise to feel empowered in making unpopular despotic choices. Usually the technical advices strictly depend on whether the narrow elite of experts collaborate with the government or with the opposition, and in times like these we witness a full lack of tolerance and constructive confrontation which is passed off as the monolithic compactness both of the medical and political world.

The current dogmatic autocratic closure of the establishment, by deliberately ignoring the social relevance of the cognitive diversity, prevents from to make the best in matters of collective health, and in the decision-making process in general. More than 50,000 non-homologated independent scientists around the world signed the Barrington Declaration which foresaw from liberticide measures and massive vaccination obligation collateral damage far worse than the disease itself in terms of public wellbeing. As usual the system prefers to ignore, indeed condemn, the minority positions, imposing unquestionable assumptions and unique solutions, although the current populist technocratic governance appears quite incompetent in matters like public health, health economics, health policy.

Covid, What Else?

Actually, covid crisis has simply accelerated regressive trends that have been operating for some time. In particular the acceleration of the digitalization processes functional to social distancing while is destined to radically change work, education and healthcare practices, supports biopolitics aimed to optimize control, surveillance, obedience [5].

At the same time paradoxically, the system has to prevent the hyper-technological McDonaldized healthcare systems from collapsing and if neoliberalist health policy prove to be even incapable to cope pandemics and emergencies in general, the covid represents a huge opportunity for the economic recovery. For this reason, I suspect, the crisis is oversized and overdramatized. A critical reading of the WHO statistics, which are strategically publicized without scrutiny, out of context, in absolute terms because never compared with other health trends, the mean infection fatality rate (IFR) of covid is 0.15% (0% <45 y.o.; 1% > 70 y.o.) at a global level.

In Italy the average age of patients who died from interstitial pneumonia is 82 years; in 67.7% of cases these elderly patients are affected by at least three debilitating diseases. Below the age of 50, lethality is 1.2%; hospitalization of children and young people under 19 is rare; almost zero mortality [6]. According to Joffe the lockdowns, "which can only delay the inevitable", result at least 5-10 times more harmful than covid in terms of collective wellbeing, primarily hitting people with poverty, food insecurity, loneliness, unemployment [7].

In addition we have to face a considerable amount of counterproductive side effects related to school closures; interrupted, inappropriate, remote healthcare; spreading of mind disorders, drug overuse, family violence, suicides. In countries like Italy, France, Spain, Joffe states, "an underfunded, understaffed, overstretched, increasingly privatized fractured healthcare system contributed to higher mortality rates. In particular Lombardy has long been an experimental site for healthcare privatization".

Ultimately, if for the groups most at risk they are lacking adequate territorial and home care plans for a targeted protection, power decided to hit just the healthy citizens, who are, even obligatorily, prevented from being naturally immunized themselves through the most frequent silent infection [8].

Traces of Nosopolitics In History

For the purposes of this paper the notions of biopower, biopolitic, nosopolitic, necropolitic are given for grant, by referring the deeping of these issues to a vast literature. Going to the core of the Foucault's theory we can say that by mean of (bio)policy the power acts in parallel on two processes. On the one hand it aims to dominate the citizens in terms of physicality, corporeality, bodily performances, work efficiency in order to control, optimize, integrate forces and capabilities in the system.

On the other hand State acts on population scale by monitoring socioeconomic factors affecting public health, including demographic trends, life expectancy, longevity. HIV-related AIDS epidemic occurred in 1983 is a good model for unmasking hidden biopower dynamics [9]. Initially thought to be limited to certain risk groups, the authorities decided to take measures to protect the healthcare system while a massive media bombing spread panic. Homosexual communities were stigmatized and ghettoized; homophobic and racist right-wing movements triggered a severe political crisis (while curiously nowadays these groups protest against the "medical dictatorship") [10]. In parallel, the scandal of transfusions with HIV-infected blood was long covered up, just like the iatrogenic outbreak of Guillan-Barre syndrome in 1976, while President Gerald Ford sponsored the anti-flu vaccine. But in 2003 was the exceptionally torrid summer that put the healthcare system in crisis [11]. On the contrary, in 1918 the flu pandemic allowed USA government to exorcise collective fear with patriotism and to divert the attention on the world war, while a decade earlier a draconian quarantine was adopted to persecute the chinese community of San Francisco [12].

In covid times blacks and ethnic minorities are undergoing in USA a new wave of unprecedented police violence. The hygienic and genetic reasons that justified the nazi-fascist hatred of Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, Slavs and communists are sadly known [13]. In 1968, to stop the "moral infection" universally spread by the deideologized pacifist beat generation, the septic metaphor was used by the Italian police to justify the spraying of disinfectant on the camps occupied by the hippies, while the police hydrants reject those who courageously demonstrate against the covid vaccination obligation and even sacrifices the salary in order not to give in to occupational blackmail. Summerizing, the focus of biopower is the control of the differential vulnerability: by controlling class and racial distribution of socio-economic health determinants, governments decides which groups should be most exposed to deadly risks and who can enjoy good health. Not by chance covid mortality rate correlates with variables like poverty, marginalization, discrimination, poor welfare protection, such as the ethnic minorities are overrepresented in intensive care units [14].

Meanwhile, if the covid aggravates the gap between Global North and South, in the richest countries "a magic money tree was suddenly (re)discovered and found to bear fruit quite vigorously": we are now witnessing unprecedented increases in public spending, large fiscal expansionary programs, massive purchases of government bonds by the central banks. Financial markets, Big

Pharma and ICT companies are going to face a new boom [15]. In parallel, according to Lhetinen and Brunila, in comparison with the previous pandemics of AIDS, H1N1, SARS, MERS, Ebola, spanish flu, plague, we register a new strong revival of nationalism, and just as I write spectacular dramatic images of a new war for the domination of oil rigs and gas pipelines begin to overlap the “war bulletins” concerning the viral invisible enemy [16].

Towards a Political Economy of “Bare Existence”

The covid involves every sector, indeed fragment, of the social system, extending from geopolitical to microsociologic and subjective sphere. On a relational level the acceleration of desocializing and de-humanizing tendencies make us imagining the evaporation of the residual attractive bonds between the monads still present in liquid society. And we know that social chaos combined with populism create ideal conditions for the rise of totalitarianism [17]. But even if the political regimes vary, for the Capital shocks, black swans, wars and disasters in general allow the economic recovery [18]. In this scenario the covid enhances the economic value of the “bare existence”, New anthropomorphized forms of capital prefigure new prospects for huge profits [19]. The hypermedicalized, patophobic, video addicted but consenting subjects, eager of much more state biosecurity, are prone to transform own body into a “self-producing company, to be placed on the financial market”, because in liquid modernity the body represents the extreme resource to be exploited to make sense of own bare existence [20].

In parallel modern biopower strategies focused on the body take benefit from more and more pervasive technologic advances including sensory assemblage, cloud computing, omics [21]. But without renouncing the traditional war-like fear-based strategies to obtain obedience, homologation, national identification, spirit of sacrifice. Not by chance, according to Valderrana, just the digital platforms business has taken the maximum benefits from the covid crisis [22]. Because of lockdowns and social distancing measures millions of users around the world send own private data to cloud servers and algorithms managed by gigantic ITC companies who increased of 75% their profits in these two last years, while their ecological footprint is projected to reach 14% of global carbon emissions by 2040.

In addition digital capitalism exponentially increases extraction of minerals and materials, accumulation of toxic e-waste in Africa and South America, levels of electromagnetic pollution, exposure of the human brain to bioactive signals. Digital capitalism driven by the covid aims to “convert human beings of flesh and spirit into data sets; everyone of us is reduced to data bits in order to be processed by artificial-intelligence softwares”, says Cohen [23].

CONCLUSION

Summerizing, for the system wars, pandemics and other unforeseen and unforeseeable exogenous shocks represent a precious opportunity to recover a long stagnant economy: “being economical with the truth has always been the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of the power, that is of the dominant class”, Alexiou states [24]. Riding the crisis or surrender to a perfect enemy like the coronavirus, according the “white flag principle”, can be more profitable than winning a difficult war [25]. In a sense the vaporization of the concept of health accelerated by the covid, now including a fluctuating condition between well-being and potential disease to be tested perpetually, increases dramatically

health consumerism and big data market [26]. But, lacking a strong courageous social criticism, unknown effects emerging from interactions between sensors, chips incorporated into things (embedded), self-learning robots, nanotechnology (i-drugs), wireless biometric devices (wearables), cryptography, holography, etc. etc. integrated into universal platforms by mean of internet of things (IoT) and 5G networks, it's easy for me to speculate about somewhat dystopian scenarios [27-29].

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