

Viropolitics and capitalistic governmentality: On the management of the early 21st century pandemic

Viropolítica y gubernamentalidad capitalística. Acerca de la gestión de la pandemia de comienzos del siglo XXI

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«Jamás, señor ministro de salud, fue la salud más mortal».

César Vallejo, *Poemas humanos*, 1939

ABSTRACT

This text offers an analysis of the power apparatuses (*dispositifs*) employed in the management of the early 21st century Covid-19 pandemic. The paper is divided into two sections. The first part is oriented both towards a characterization of the mode of government that preceded the onset of the viral disease and towards an exposition of the power apparatuses it instrumentalized. This mode of government is referred to in the text as «capitalistic governmentality», a practice combining regimes of knowledge, economically encoded materialities, subjective formations and power apparatuses in order to maintain the valorization of private capital. The second part exposes the ways in which the apparatuses of capitalistic governmentality are modified and articulated in the context of the pandemic,

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through a phenomenon given the provisional name of «viro-politics».

KEYWORDS

Pandemic, Covid-19, 21st century, apparatus, governmentality, capitalism, capitalistic, viropolitics

RESUMEN

El presente texto tiene como objetivo analizar los dispositivos de poder utilizados en la gestión de la pandemia del siglo XXI causada por la enfermedad COVID-19. Este artículo se divide en dos apartados. El primero se orienta tanto hacia una caracterización del modo de gobierno que precede a la aparición viral de la enfermedad como hacia una mostración de los dispositivos de poder que instrumentaliza. Esta forma de gobierno es denominada en el texto como «gubernamentalidad capitalística», en tanto práctica que combina regímenes de saber, materialidades codificadas económicamente, formaciones subjetivas y dispositivos de poder a efectos de mantener la valorización privada del capital. El segundo apartado, finalmente, explicita cómo se actualizan y articulan los dispositivos de la gubernamentalidad capitalística en el contexto de la pandemia, actualización y recombinación que recibe el nombre provisional de «viropolítica».

PALABRAS CLAVE

Pandemia, COVID-19, siglo XXI, dispositivos, gubernamentalidad, capitalismo, capitalístico, viropolítica

RESUMO

Este texto tem como objetivo analisar os dispositivos de poder utilizados no manejo da pandemia do século XXI, causada pelo COVID-19. Este artigo está dividido em duas seções. A primeira parte é orientada tanto para a caracterização do modo de governo que precede o início viral da doença, quanto para a demonstração dos dispositivos de poder que aquele instrumentaliza. Essa forma de governo é referida no texto como «governamentalidade capitalística» enquanto uma prática que combina regimes de saber, materialidades economicamente codificadas, formações subjetivas e dispositivos de poder, a fim de manter a valorização privada do capital. A segunda seção, finalmente,

explica como os dispositivos da governamentalidade capitalística são atualizados e articulados no contexto da pandemia, atualização e recombinação que recebem o nome provisório de «viropolítica».

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Pandemia, COVID-19, século XXI, dispositivo, governamentalidade, capitalismo, capitalístico, viropolítica

Introduction

In human history, incidences of mass disease, with high morbidity and/or mortality rates, are not uncommon or improbable events. However, the Covid-19 pandemic of the early 21st century exhibits its own unprecedented character: the singularity of the SARS-CoV-2 virus² and the response on the part of government in an attempt to manage the outbreak.

It would be a mistake to reduce this early 21st century pandemic to a mere biological fact, to a clinical dilemma, to a natural question, for it is also a political phenomenon, in the strictest sense. The Covid-19 pandemic is political insofar as it requires extraordinary government intervention in order to manage it, and also because those actions must be inserted into an existing mechanism of governmentality that affects human, non-human and natural biological life.

The aim of the following text is to discuss the *dispositifs* of governmentality used in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as government apparatuses' reorganization and rearticulation into what I am calling here «viropolitics».

1. Capitalistic governmentality and government apparatuses

According to the official history, it all started in a city in China at the end of 2019, from where it spread to the entire world during the first months of 2020. The consequences were as follows: exponential spread of contagion, millions of patients, the collapse of health systems, thousands of deaths, and prolonged, even cyclical, restrictive measures, including social distancing, national, local and individual lockdown. By the time the disease has been epidemiologically contained, it will have claimed victims among a significant part of the population, particularly the most fragile and vulnerable, while the economic debacle produced will plunge huge

2 Viruses, of course, are «entities» that conceptually challenge dualistic metaphysics. Indeed, because they go beyond the distinction between organic and inorganic matter, fluctuating somewhere between the living and the non-living, they do not admit limitation, contrast, or dialectic.

numbers of people into poverty. However, there is another issue at the heart of the immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic: a form of government that preceded the onset of the virus and which, in the post-virus world, will undergo continued rethinking, a mode of government whose temporary measures to control the health crisis mark the most immediate, sensitive and conjunctural aspect of this way of government.

I am calling this form of government *capitalistic governmentality*³. By this, I do not mean a merely economic structure to which a correlative ideological superstructure is added, to create what we know by the name capitalism. On the contrary, what I am addressing is *a historically determined form of government, oriented to maintain and increase the private possession of capital, and in which are intertwined, in their irreducible heterogeneity and autonomy, regimes of knowledge, economically encoded materialities (in the circuits of production, circulation, consumption and investment), power apparatuses and processes of subjectivation*. Capitalistic governmentality is not carried out in isolation. It is interwoven with other types of governmentality. Capitalistic governmentality does not develop without the incorporation of the colonial concept of race, which is imbricated with the nature and role of work, thereby enabling the eurocentricity of world capitalism, through articulation between the governance of capital and the colonized governance of race. Capitalistic governmentality is also bound up with gender governance, since it is founded upon the precariousness and invisibility of women's work. And capitalistic government is not limited to governance of the human species, since it also defines non-human animals, non-animal species and the entire organic, transorganic and inorganic reality of the planet as objects of a process of exploitation designed to increase capital.

3 Clearly, this terminology is inspired by an understanding of the exercise of power as *governmentality (gouvernementalité)*, that is, as a set of actions on possible actions (Foucault, 1982) and a conceptualization of World-Wide Integrated Capitalism as a *capitalistic (capitalistique)* mode of production whose surplus-value is not only based on living labor and crystallized labor in the means of production, but also on the set of social relationships *overcoded* by capitalist power (Guattari, 2012); in other words, this mode of production not only involves material economic processes, but also structures of social segmentation and semiotic systems that act upon the mental, affective and libidinal life (Guattari & Alliez, 1984): «The general market of values deployed by Capital will at once proceed from within and from without. It will not only be concerned with economically identifiable values, but also mental and affective values. It will be up to a multicentered network of collective equipments, State, para-State, and media apparatuses to make the junction between this «without» and this «within». The general translatability of the local modes of semiotization of power does not only obey central commands, but «semiotic condensators» which are adjacent to State power, or directly indentured to it. One essential function is to make sure that each individual assumes mechanisms of control, repression, and modelization of the dominant order» (Guattari, 2009, pp. 257-258).

In order to support the stated concept, and with the aim of specifying the power techniques employed in managing the 21st century coronavirus pandemic, in this first part of my article I will offer a schematic characterization of the mechanisms used in the governance of capital. Through the term apparatus (*dispositif*), the aim is to highlight, in the context of the exercise of power, a set of heterogeneous, discursive and non-discursive elements which fulfill an essentially strategic function while at the same time responding to a specific emergency:

The nature of an apparatus is essentially strategic, which means that I am speaking about a certain manipulation of relations of forces, of a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them, and to use them (Foucault, 1980, p. 196)⁴.

What, then, are the apparatuses employed in capitalistic governmentality?

It is the legal apparatus which establishes a set of laws that, in their turn, determine the binary system of licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden, in society, while establishing the sanctions for non-compliance (Foucault, 2009). It is an archaic *dispositif*, the predominance of which can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries; however, its use continued into later centuries (Foucault, 2009). Naturally, such laws may be explicit, implicit, suggested, exceptional, variable or multiform, but they always influence the social fabric through their determining of the permitted and forbidden. The capitalistic form of government involves, at the very least, the legal naturalization of private property, as well as the attendant fiction of norms, duties and rights consistent with such a system.

And then we have the disciplinary apparatus that emerged in the 18th century. Discipline is defined as that which takes as its object the body of individuals and subjects them to permanent vigilance in order to make

4 The *dispositif*, however, as Deleuze (1992b) has pointed out, also establishes a relationship with lines of subjectivation; that is, processes through which subjects are constituted. This text analyzes the non-discursive elements of the apparatuses related to the exercise of power in the management of the early 21st century pandemic, while offering only occasional references, which will have to be developed in other works, to the regimes of knowledge (*savoir*) and formations of subjects —multiple and polymorphic (Foucault, 2017)— that are constituted simultaneously. Furthermore, according to Guattari (2012 and 2016) and Deleuze (2006) not only the subjectivizations would have to be evidenced, but in general the *assemblages* (*agencements*) of desire that, despite all state apparatuses, do not cease to flow in various lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). My text does not discuss the possible war machines and micropolitical alternatives that could emerge during the pandemic (an aspect that would require a different type of investigation and, above all, political practice rather than merely a piece of paper), but instead merely describes the stratified dimension of power.

them docile and useful (Foucault, 1977). This force is centripetal, insofar as it circumscribes, concentrates and encloses a space in order to facilitate the exercise of power; it regulates all individual behaviors down to the smallest detail; it prescribes acceptable actions, implementing artificial regulations that complement reality (Foucault, 2009). In this sense, discipline connects with the anatomopolitics of the human body (Foucault, 1978 and 2003), which «produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that must be rendered both useful and docile» (Foucault, 2003, p. 249). What is the relationship between discipline and capitalistic governmentality? According to Foucault:

the technological mutations of the apparatus of production, the division of labor and the elaboration of the disciplinary techniques sustained an ensemble of very close relations [...]. Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other (Foucault, 1977, p. 221).

A specifically capitalist mode of production focused on the valorization of capital produced by abstract labor (Marx/Engels, 2017) «gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power» (Foucault, 1977, p. 221).

However, it is not only the disciplinary apparatus that is articulated through capitalistic governmentality; the security apparatus is also articulated in the same way. This last mechanism functions by seeing the population as a whole which can be regularized and normalized (Foucault, 2009). It creates a milieu in which possible events are prevented; it is centrifugal because it expands spaces and incorporates new elements; «it lets do» in the sense that it is based on the given of natural processes; its response to reality is neither prohibitive nor prescriptive, but rather regulatory; and works only with elements of the real (Foucault, 2009). The population, however, is seen not as a natural fact, but rather as an element of government that must be modified and regulated. Hence the importance of statistics, which offer data on this reality that can be standardized. Furthermore, there exists a thematic convergence between the *dispositifs* of security and biopolitics⁵. Indeed, since the 18th century the latter has had as its objective the regulation of the biological life of the population, giving itself the power to 'make' live and 'let' die (Foucault, 1978 and 2003). Under such an order, phenomena such as birth, fertility, longevity and

5 Biopolitics has developed in different directions, from a search for its foundation in patent western thought in the *zōnē/biōs* split (Agamben, 1998) to the search for the elaboration of an affirmative biopolitics through reflection of the immunological paradigm that supports it (Esposito, 2008). Discussion of such positions, and with a greater multiplicity of authors, is avoided in this text, where a discursive clarification of the concept of biopolitics is not the author's focus.

mortality become relevant, as does the public hygiene function of medicine (Foucault, 1978 and 2003). In biopolitics, «security mechanisms must be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life» (Foucault, 2003, p. 246).

In the government of capital, the security apparatus involves not only the normalization of economic processes, but also the elimination of risk through the implementation of a range of pacification and social defense strategies (Boukalas, Neocleous & Serfati, 2017). Capitalistic governmental practice connects with the *dispositifs* exerted on the population through the governmentality known as liberalism. Such governmental reason is characterized by the prescribing of the autonomy of the economic process, the limitation of state exercise, the proposition of the irreducibility of the individual interest of subjects, the elaboration of the concept of civil society, and the assumption of the market as a place of truth (Foucault, 2008). Its name derives from the fiction of freedom, as a relationship between rulers and ruled, which it must express in every moment in order to govern: «It consumes freedom, which means that it must produce it. [...] Liberalism formulates simply the following: I am going to produce what you need to be free» (Foucault, 2008, p. 63). Under it, security strategies (biopolitical) and coercion procedures (anatomopolitical) are the very condition and the counterpart of the exercise of such freedoms (Foucault, 2008); so, with regard to capitalistic governmentality, it can be affirmed that: «For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological [...] that mattered more than anything else» (Foucault, 2001, p. 137). Clearly, liberal rationality is far from commensurate with capitalistic governmentality and its legal, disciplinary or security apparatuses; however, it should be noted that the components of the latter are relevant in the development of the former. In the globalization wars engendered by capitalistic governmentality, it is possible to see how biopolitics⁶ becomes necropolitical when the concept of race is used to define individual lives as disposable (Mbembe, 2011).

Another *dispositif* is the algorithmic apparatus. The decline of the disciplinary apparatus heralded the replacement of an analogue language with a numerical one (*numérique*), where computing machines and

6 In this regard, Lorenzini (2020) has this to say: «with the emergence of biopolitics, racism becomes a way of fragmenting the biological continuum—we all are living beings with more or less the same biological needs—in order to create hierarchies between different human groups, and thus (radical) differences in the way in which the latter are exposed to the risk of death. The *differential exposure* of human beings to health and social risks is, according to Foucault, a salient feature of biopolitical governmentality. Racism, in all of its forms, is the «condition of acceptability» of such a differential exposure of lives in a society in which power is mainly exercised to protect the biological life of the population and enhance its productive capacity» (para. 6).

computers serve to express social transformation (Deleuze, 1992a). The development of the internet and virtual technologies in the 20th century led to a greater digital articulation of society. Through such electronic crosslinking, analysis of each behavior of the user connected by technology to the network, and the compiling of data, was made possible⁷. Based on this information, algorithms and the artificial intelligence associated with them model behavior patterns and regulate the behavior of subjects through a series of personalized suggestions (Sadin, 2015 and 2018). The emergence of this digital apparatus was coupled with the advent of a new «episteme», with its roots in the 18th century, which reconfigures the conceptual assumptions of modernity, with the processing of information standing as the fundamental component of knowledge (Rodríguez, 2019). Strictly speaking, algorithmic apparatus is not permanent digital surveillance or personalized electronic regulation, but rather an exercising of power that increasingly consists of the *programming of subjects*—in this regard, Koopman (2019) uses the term «formatting of informational person»—, guiding behavior through the fiction of free personalization. The uniqueness of this *dispositif* resides, therefore, in the prediction and orientation of behaviors; *while the law prohibits and sanctions, while discipline encloses and watches, while security regulates and normalizes; the algorithmic apparatus predicts and programs.*

Capitalistic governmentality uses algorithmic apparatuses both for capital valorization (Pasquinelli, 2014) and for the regulating of subjective interests—where electoral political orientation (Kaiser, 2019) is merely one superficial yet radical example of such power—. Algorithms modify the dynamics of capital not only by implementing generalized and permanent surveillance, but also by capitalistically planning the behaviors of subjects through surveillance, synchronous regulation, and personalization (Zuboff, 2019).

7 It should be added that in many cases algorithmic apparatuses are employed in what is commonly called «entertainment». Entertainment is not limited to splitting and inverting reality in appearance and essence to assign subjects to mere passive acceptance, but, expressed in an abstract way, it establishes distracted subjects. In this regard I propose the term *spectacle apparatuses*. These are techniques characterized not so much by the concentration of attention, but by *the fragmentation of the subjects' praxis through the experiencing of activities assumed to be contrary to coercion and heteronomous work*—notwithstanding the notion that «entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism» (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 109). In this sense, Debord's (1970 and 2010) work on spectacle can be interpreted not as a ceremonial and liturgical apparatus associated with an arcane theological paradigm of economic government (Agamben, 2011), but rather as a set of phenomena that can be interrelated with other apparatuses in the context of capitalistic governmentality. In any case, what is required is a clear distinction between algorithmic apparatuses and entertainment apparatuses. Lazzarato (2006), by contrast, encompasses both apparatuses through the term «noopolitics», while pointing out that they are exerted on the public's brain/mind.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen not only the rise of this programming apparatus, but also the affirmation of neoliberal «rationality», in tandem with the government of capital. Neoliberalism, in effect, is a governmental reason that promotes the fiction of the freedom of the market, the concept of pure competition, the assumption of the subject as human capital, as well as the expansion of an economic approach to non-economic phenomena (Foucault, 2008). It holds that the State should never intervene in the economic reality but in its conditions; that is, in the population, using regulatory measures to do so (Foucault, 2008). These neoliberal measures attempt to transform the human species under the imperative of adapting to changes in the social environment, thus reconnecting this new rationality of government with biopolitics (Stiegler, 2019). Likewise, neoliberalism implies not a breakup, but rather a reconfiguration of colonialism (Narsiah, 2002; Webber, 2017) and of the multiple «wars» that capitalistic governmentality engages in against race, gender, and the environment (Alliez & Lazzarato, 2018), connecting, through the rhetoric of innovation and entrepreneurship, with the expansion of algorithmic apparatuses (Sadin, 2016). Naturally, just as used to occur with liberalism, capitalistic governmentality and neoliberalism do not overlap or subsume each other, but nevertheless they combine to establish strategic and complex articulations, in which historical circumstances and material demands determine neoliberal uses of capital⁸.

2. Viropolitics and capital management of the early 21st century pandemic

This schematic account of capitalistic governmentality and government apparatuses helps us to analyze the handling of the early 21st century pandemic.

The current management of the viral outbreak can be divided into two components: social confinement and social distancing. The first component consists of domestic seclusion where access to the world beyond the home is limited exclusively to activities associated with basic needs; the second is founded upon a reduction in community contiguity that goes beyond actions related to primary needs, and which reconfigures the

8 Furthermore, neither the algorithmic apparatus nor the rationality of neoliberal government can be understood independently of the transformations of the economically encoded materialities of capitalistic governmentality such as the non-exclusive displacement of an industrial, Taylorist and Fordist model (Coriat, 1979) by a post-industrial, (bio)cognitive and immaterial model (Fumagalli, Giuliani, Lucarelli & Vercellone, 2019) of debt (Lazzarato, 2012 and 2015) and finance (Marazzi, 2011) which, far from homogenizing working conditions or blurring the notion of capital, enhance its valorization. Algorithmic apparatuses imply transformations of the material conditions of production, increasing the value of capital (Dyer-Witheford, Mikkola & Steinhoff, 2019).

social dynamic in order to facilitate the avoidance of individual contact. Naturally, both are posited upon notions of complementarity, succession, or mutual overlap. I am grouping them under the term «social adensification».

This reduction in social density has a legal component. The legal apparatus functions to the extent that it is sanctioned in laws, supreme decrees, ordinances, regulations, etc. These determine the scope of prohibitions and, at the same time, revoke certain provisions. Without such legal components, it is not possible to give a strictly normative, or legal, character to proposed confinement and distancing. In themselves, none of these legal mechanisms clash with the legality of private property. Indeed, they may well contribute to protecting it by preventing street protests and dissent that might lead to specific expropriations of private means of production.

Social adensification involves a disciplinary apparatus. In effect, it defines the enclosure of a space: the physical limitation of the exclusively domestic sphere. The home—for those who own one—is, literally, a confined space where the strict maintenance of social adensification is monitored. Working from home and homeschooling—for those privileged enough and those who have not yet fallen victim to mass dismissals or furloughing as a result of the pandemic because they constituted a cost for capital appreciation⁹—are also subject to a disciplinary component: they exercise coercive control over the subjects' daily activities. For the indigent, and for informal workers—particularly in neocolonized countries—, disciplinary surveillance is conducted openly, with compliance with distancing rules seen as more important than the maintenance or improvement of living conditions, resulting in an increase in deaths from starvation, rather than by disease¹⁰. On the other hand, the relaxation of measures of social adensification, the progressive return to social norms, or simply the permitting of journeys beyond the home in order to obtain basic products—for those who are able to do so—is governed through regulation of the smallest details of individual behaviors: the maintaining of specific distancing rules, the wearing of facemasks and gloves, use of

9 «Low» scenario where GDP growth drops by around 2 percent: Global unemployment would increase by 5.3 million, with an uncertainty of 3.5 to 7 million. 14 • «Mid» scenario where GDP growth would drop by 4 percent: Global unemployment would increase by 13 million (7.4 million in high income countries), with an uncertainty of 7.7 to 18.3 million. • «High» scenario where Covid-19 has serious disruptive effects, reducing GDP growth by around 8 percent: Global unemployment would increase by 24.7 million, with an uncertainty ranging from 13 million to 36 million» (International Labor Organization, 2020, p. 13).

10 It is at this precise point where the discussion about the character of the State comes to the fore. In some countries, measures such as social bonds, universal income or wealth taxes have been proposed (*El Peruano*, 2020; Fariza, 2020; *Página 12*, 2020). However, these measures, although absolutely necessary, merely address the question of redistribution of wealth, which does not, by itself, imply a direct questioning of capitalistic governmentality.

regulated spaces; in short, submission to an anatomopolitics of the sick body. Such restrictions contribute to the development of capital by preventing the production chains from stopping altogether, while intimacy and privacy are reduced to moments of capitalistic valorization. And in workplaces that continue to operate, a redoubling of discipline is introduced, both occupational and epidemiological, for the sake of both hygiene and productivity. For, in general, only in the historical determination of work by the capitalistic mode of production is it possible to assume as a natural element the massification of precarious, underemployed or unemployed workers, in whose economic dynamics, in addition, complex factors are involved, such as gender and race.

Confinement and distancing are the preserve of the security apparatus. They are intended as methods to flatten the statistical curve of the SARS-CoV-2 event and reduce mortality figures to those commensurate with normal social conditions and local health systems. In such a context, daily reports of health, morbidity and mortality figures become relevant, with death becoming a number and life a quantity devoid of any quality¹¹. In this way, human biological life —already mediated by government based upon species, gender or race— becomes the object of government administration. Security, however, is nothing other than the reduction of risk for the government of capital: without a minimum quantitatively and qualitatively healthy population, the economic cycle of production, circulation, consumption, indebtedness, and investment would become untenable.

Social adensification also requires an algorithmic apparatus. Indeed, in both the most privileged and impoverished countries, throughout the globe, clinical use of technological devices has been proposed: digital control of population, facial recognition and geolocation of the infected, electronic regulation of healthy and sick people; in short, massive use of big data, adapted to the technological conditions of each country, in order to employ them epidemiologically in the government of capital. Algorithmic programming, across any of its degrees of effectiveness, allows under the guise of epidemiological necessity not only real-time surveillance and regulation of the biological and psychological conditions of individuals, but also the capitalistic valorization of personal data in order to program actions¹².

11 The evolution of Covid-19 cases is monitored by Johns Hopkins University (2020).

12 Also, as noted previously, there exists a connection between algorithmic apparatus and spectacle apparatus. The most obvious example is the massive use of social networks during the pandemic, involving the gathering of functional personal data by algorithmic devices. These spectacle apparatuses are employed, in many cases, as a counterpart to the affective

Clearly, the four power technologies employed to manage the pandemic are efficient in the government of capital. I give the name «viropolitics»¹³ to this updating and repurposing of such power technologies in the context of a global viral pandemic; however, this does not mean that social adensification can be equated with apparatuses of power (currently articulated through what I have called viropolitics). It should be noted that such apparatuses have not emerged merely as a result of the pandemic. That would be an oversimplification. Indeed, the *dispositifs* of power and their intermeshing have existed for a long time. Social adensification is merely a moment in history, just one of many both past and future, which have seen or will see the reconfiguring and expansion of such apparatuses.

Nevertheless, the contemporary intermeshing of these four *dispositifs* reflects not only the functional and efficient relationship with the government of capital; in point of fact, viropolitics is, first and foremost, materially possible, pertinent, under capitalistic governmentality.

In effect, capitalistic government is conditioned by the private ownership of capital and its appreciation. There are those who do not possess such capital, and this is translated into material inequality; currently just 2,153 individuals hold more wealth than 60% of the global population (Oxfam, 2020b). Under such conditions, rather than a biological condition, health is transformed into a means of enrichment. Hence the existence of clinical patents, health monopolies, pharmaceutical lobbies, exclusive insurers and the precarious health systems of neocolonized countries: in short, the privatization of health¹⁴. This reality is intensified still further when capitalistic governmentality adopts a neoliberal discourse. Indeed, the fiction of market regulation and the illusion of individual freedom sanction the privatization of health in the guise of an idealized framework of competition, under the promise of common benefit and the pretext of economic growth. However, competition is not a natural datum and nor does it imply a balanced starting point; the market is regulated by monopolies and financial speculators —where supply and demand, which function by virtue of the greed of the seller and the specific precarity of the buyer are elevated to the epistemological rank of law, resulting not

dispositions that predispose, or exacerbate, the pandemic: stress, panic, anxiety, depression; however, these «psychopathologies» do not exist in a fortuitous or conjunctural way: they are part of the codifications operated by the government of capital (Berardi, 2009 and 2015).

13 The correct term is *viruspolitics* (despite the conjunction of Latin and Greek words). «Viro-politics» has been chosen, for convenience, as a homophone of the canonical term *biopolitics*.

14 Authors who have written about the relationship between health and capital in the context of the pandemic include: Berardi (2020), Badiou (2020), Butler (2020), Wallace, Liebman, Chaves & Wallace (2020) and Lazzarato (2020).

only in the naturalization of such social relations, but also their standardization—. In the specific case of health, the interests of private companies fly in the face of the interests of the uninsured and destitute, whose shared «interests» are nothing more than disease and death. In the final analysis, economic growth is nothing more than a mirage based on the abstraction of GDP, which serves only to express the private valuation of capital based on a general homogenization of the value produced. Only under the conditions of the government of capital is there an insufficiency of medical supplies, overvaluation of clinical supplies, and monopolization of epidemiological treatments. In the richest nations, governments have no qualms when it comes to the commercial exclusion from health mechanisms of countries disadvantaged by the government of capital (The Guardian, 2020).

Therefore, the full definition of viropolitics is: *The updating and rearticulation of legal, disciplinary, security and algorithmic apparatuses, in the context of the management (social adensification) of the early 21st century pandemic; and this current combining of dispositifs is only materially pertinent under capitalistic governmentality, as well as being collaterally efficient for such government.* This does not mean, however, that viropolitics is a by-product of, or exclusive to, capitalistic governmentality. As a technique for governance it can be used in different forms of government. Even where it does not dominate, capitalistic governmentality implements variants of viropolitical adensification, because capital has permeated the global *so-cius*. Viropolitics, with its accompanying power apparatuses, is expedient, in its massive and programmatic application, for a world dominated by the government of capital¹⁵.

Consequently, the critique of viropolitics cannot be reduced to an attack on individual freedom and the excessive exercise of power that totalizes the human spheres (in the end, freedom thus understood, intimidated by a power as indeterminate as it is abstract, is but an element of the (neo)liberal rationality of capitalistic government). On the contrary,

15 Capitalistic governmentality is not only related to the viropolitical approach to the pandemic, but also to the «natural» conditions of its emergence. Indeed, zoonotic diseases are generally caused by ecological imbalance produced by the government of the human species (Quammen, 2012); a speciesist government that does not exist in isolation, but is intertwined with the government of capital, since the exploitation and depredation of non-human species only acquires a massive and systematic character by inscribing itself in an inflexible dynamic of capital appreciation. In any case, whether Covid-19 originated from zoonosis or not, the epidemiological reasons for this are minimally inscribed in the concrete and effective interrelation of speciesist governmentality and capitalistic governmentality, as both predispose not only an excessively unbalanced natural environment, but also social health inequities, creating conditions in which any disease outbreak is likely to lead to high morbidity.

beyond the superficial questioning of viropolitical technique, the goal must be to radically question capitalistic governmentality. Understanding the apparatuses involved in managing the pandemic without connecting them with capitalist government is nothing more than self-complacency, subverting radical and critical discourse into a tool that can be used by the power of capital. The most blatant example of this error is that of the notion of «state of exception» (Agamben, 2020)¹⁶ or «authoritarian digital surveillance» (Han, 2020), where opposition to private capital is, at best, minimal, or, worse still, totally non-existent.

Clearly, without social adensification, human lives would have been put in greater danger and the number of sick and dead would have increased exponentially. But we should not kid ourselves on this point. For capitalistic governmentality, avoiding the death of the population merely follows the logic of private property: avoiding a drastic decline in the productive force that would make it impossible to reproduce the cycle of capital. In fact, in many cases, the government of capital opposed the freezing of economic activities: «the running of the economy is more important» was heard in different parts of the world (Reuters, 2020; Financial Times, 2020). Finally, the aggressive spread of the disease was such that they saw the impossibility of continuing as normal, and sanctioning the consequent decrease in both the workforce and consumers. Strictly speaking, the objective of social adensification is not so much the minimizing of death rates, but rather the epidemiologically controlled maintenance of the government of capital.

The gradual lifting of social adensification does not imply an abandonment of the viropolitical technique, but only its reconfiguration and updating under post-pandemic conditions by capitalistic governmentality. Following the strictest measures of social isolation and social distancing, once the epidemiological curve has been flattened capitalist government proposes only a return to (a new) «normal». What normality are we talking about? One that, does not leave the geopolitical conditions of the world intact, codifying the real into a cycle of production, circulation, consumption, indebtedness and financing. One that will cause, as a «side effect», the descent into poverty of half a billion people (Oxfam, 2020a; CEPAL, 2020). In short, the viropolitical technique, together with other components of government, is to be reconfigured in order to achieve more

16 In this regard, Mohan (2020) has this to say: «It is impossible to avoid the fact that the «normal conditions of life» to be guarded from «biopolitics» were, and are, dependent on colonial, capitalistic, and other exploitative processes which all these families of thoughts including the theory of «bio-politics» seek to criticize» (para. 2).

efficient capital appreciation. The imperative of this «new normal» is a return to a (more) productive, (more) consumerist and (more) indebted world order. Nonetheless, under these conditions the extension, recombination and regrouping of multiple, molar and molecular struggles are also deployed against the government of race, gender, species and capital; struggles that cannot be easily predicted, where what is written cannot be viewed as a preface, but only as a corollary.

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