

Notes on the Pandemic and the Pandemonium in Brazil

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When the pandemic and social distancing became a reality in the beginning of March, I wrote a text entitled 'O que será?'^[1], a direct reference to Chico Buarque and the unknown. At that point, the words of Svetlana Alexandrovna Alexievitch – Belarussian writer and journalist and 2015 Nobel Prize laureate in Literature – made sense. In her book, *Voices from Chernobyl: the Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, Svetlana explains that the term 'war' was used to define the fight against the radiation and its consequences. However, she questions this wording: which war had ever contaminated the soil and the waters of a whole country for one or two thousand years? The Chernobyl disaster had made a territory completely dead, although plants and animals have insisted in living and progressing. The word 'war' was unable to encompass these events. It took the writer more than 20 years to write about the nuclear tragedy. She lacked words. She lacked grasp. It was necessary to wait for the shock to decant.

When the social distancing measures started in March, São Paulo's habitual frenzy slowed down. Rare were the vehicles, low and sparse were the noises. Closed commerce, empty streets. Urban slowness prevailed, as opposed to the usual hustle in the streets.

Online sessions and the virus put psychoanalysts in a state of alertness and under the domain of the unknown. Analysts who, at first, were contrary to non-presential appointments, when faced with the long duration of the social distancing measures, promptly accepted the new norm in the name of their patients' needs – and of their own need to work too. Never before a technical matter had been so quickly dismissed – the libido is plastic. Psychoanalysis is more than a setting; it is, above all, a method. Fear, exhaustion, and so many new elements to control amid the transformations in the way we live and work. Mourning to work through; dreams, projects, trips, and conferences disappeared; adaptations to the new reality, the confrontation of the danger. Creativity sprouted on us. Psychoanalysis made us strong and flexible!

Trauma treads a long path before the working through can somewhat tame it, civilize it. Practice has taught us that some experiences acquire such a magnitude and cause so much damage that the working through never seems to be over. In this sense, I believed that Covid-19 had come to stay. In a biological sense, I wished the virus a short life.

After three months, I observe crowds parading at Avenida Paulista, in São Paulo, the country's most important avenue. Coffins and skeletons exhort death, while furious people symbolically inter São Paulo's governor and his social distancing measures. For such fanatics, to fear death is a sign of weakness and cowardice. Dressed in green and yellow, they do not hide their pleasure in stopping ambulances on the way to hospitals. They want the re-opening of the commerce, some sort of freedom to expose others (always others) to death in the name of their own survival. They take chloroquine and anti-flea pills to shield against the virus, refuse to follow social distancing, and follow the president against the governors who adopted public health measures. The virus is a lie, a Chinese invention. The pandemic has liberated insane colonial and slaverist demons, prejudices, and delusions – the nation's general sanatorium runs at full steam! The idea of considering the poorest as rats and lice – a feeling of revulsion that had been shallowly submerged – easily surfaced with the

election of the Nazi-fascist president. The police forces seem even more brutal. Fascist groups organized by the government attack the Supreme Court with fireworks in what they call a prayer, a biblical act of love – the corruption of words is the most expensive crime! The Minister of the Economy, in a government meeting, states that the plan is to let small businesses go bankrupt – this would be better for the country's economy. And no one contested him! The spirit of eugenics prevails in Economics and Health. The poorest – almost half of the country – with no assistance in terms of work, habitation, internet network, and computers, let go of social distancing. They only resisted for a few weeks, which is understandable, given their precarious life conditions and minute resources. The richest, for whom nothing lacks, gave up. Social distancing demands renunciation and creativity. It speaks of a certain consideration toward the other. It requires the ability to work through losses. The pandemic is revealing. Deprived of their routine – an important medication against daily madness – people start an irascible movement for the return of normal life. Tired of the pandemic and bored by social distancing, they snub 45 thousand deaths. They have assassinated fear itself. Negationists attack health professionals. Hospitals work with crammed ICUs and exhausted professionals. Two Ministers of Health fired and, in their place, a general whose plan is to let die. The country's wounds are exposed: disorganization and incompetence; the favoring of the private health sector; disinvestment in public health; governors buy ICU beds, but do not propose prevention strategies – to prevent is cheaper and does not offer the same marketing returns; governors also gave up on social distancing, although 40% of the population are still heroically following it.

The opposition still has no counterproposal, since social distancing is only a health measure. There is no plan for the national reconstruction, for the economic recovery, nothing. In the last few weeks, the civil society organized manifestos, and the judiciary power confronted some of the various crimes committed by the nation's leaders. The country remains adrift – run for your lives! Notes of delusion, tones of coprophilia, aroma of autism, flavor of cruelty, aftertaste of lie, and pinches of Nazi-fascism.

I remember the words of Fabio Hermann about trauma: 'As with any traumatic response, here the contradiction between the means and the ends shows itself openly' (2004).

What may it be? Covid-19 feasts on the poorest, accompanied by the sound of military trumpets; the collective trauma is buried alive; language is corrupted; truth is cynically crushed; pandemoniums terrorize more than the pandemic, which, free as a bird, may end one day – whereas the pandemoniums, we know, will not. Reason lost its sense. Absurd is omnipresent.

Lucid psychoanalysis resists, sessions continue, and clinical and one-off appointments multiply. The Brazilian society seems curious about what psychoanalysis has to say – unsurprisingly: the country urgently needs analysis. The psychoanalytical models are capable of bypassing crises and learning with experience. Long live psychoanalysis!

References

Herrmann, F. (2004). 'Despite regrets' [Apesar dos pesares]: unpublished text presented as a conference at the SBPSP in April 2004.

[1] The text references the homonymous song by Brazilian composer Chico Buarque, especially its first verses: 'What may it be that that they are sighing for in the alcoves? That they are whispering in verses and ballads? That they are scheming in the dark burrows? That is in the heads, runs on the mouths? That they are lightning candles for in the alleys? That they are saying loudly in the bars? That they scream in the markets? That which is certainly in the nature. May it be, may it be? That which is not sure and will never be. That which has no repair and will never have. That which has no

size.'

Translation: Gabriel Hirschhorn