

# Beyond the Necropolitics Principle: Suicidal State and Authoritarian Neoliberalism

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to discuss a possible exhaustion of the necropolitics paradigm in favor of the emergence of new forms of management of violence and disappearance by sovereign power within authoritarian neoliberalism. Such form of management finds its roots in the concept of “suicidal state” mobilized in the seventies to deal with certain fundamental aspects of the fascist regime of violence. This will force us to address the paradigmatic character of anti-pandemic “anti-policies” developed in global laboratories of authoritarian neoliberalism, such as Brazil.

**Keywords:** necropolitics, suicidal state, fascism, authoritarian neoliberalism, sovereign power, pandemic

*And the body became a plant,  
and stone,  
and mud,  
and nothing.*

**Machado de Assis**

Through the global impacts of the pandemic, it is possible that fundamental changes are taking place in social management structures. One concerns transformations in the exercise of sovereign power through ways of managing death and disappearance. As has occurred on more than one occasion, such changes begin at the periphery of the global capitalist system to gradually serve as models for the central countries, especially in times of chronic intensification of social struggles like the ones we are now entering.

Such changes are pressured by the contemporary evidence of the profoundly authoritarian dimension of neoliberal management models and their inability to produce macro-structures of social protection and redistribution in a scenario of worsening inequalities and concentration. In this sense, if we want to understand certain trends immanent to the neoliberal model in its new phase, we must turn our eyes to authoritarian neoliberalism laboratories, such as those that are developing in peripherally inserted countries, such as Brazil.

We can begin to describe such changes from the notion of paradigm shift. For, in fact, we are seeing a shift outside the paradigm of what is conventionally called “necropolitics.” We know how such a discussion on necropolitics arises from the reflection on sovereign power as an exercise of: “generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations.”<sup>1</sup> We should talk

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<sup>1</sup> Mbembe, 2003, p. 14

about power not only as the management of life and the administration of bodies, as Foucault preferentially describes, but mainly the decision about death and extermination.<sup>2</sup>This understanding of sovereignty made great use of the way in which Nazism and its forms of death management were based, among others, on the integration of technologies of social subjection and destruction whose roots refer to colonial logic and its constituent racism. As if Nazism should also be seen as part of the history of the transposition of technologies of colonial domination to European soil, to the soil of central countries of global capitalism.

In fact, the colonial dynamic is based on an “ontological distinction” that will prove to be extremely resilient, preserving itself even after the demise of colonialism as a socio-economic form. It consists in the consolidation of a sharing system between two subjectivation regimes. One allows subjects to be recognized as “person”, another takes subjects to be determined as “things”<sup>3</sup>. Those subjects who reach the condition of “person” can be recognized as having rights linked, preferably, to the protection offered by the State. As one of the consequences, the death of a “person” will be marked by deceit, by mourning, by the social manifestation of loss. It will be the object of narrative and commotion. On the other hand, subjects degraded to the condition of “things” (and the structural degradation occurs within slave relationships, although it normally remains even after the formal decline of slavery) will be the object of a death without mourning<sup>4</sup>. Their death will be seen as bearing the status of object degradation. This death will have no narrative, but it will be reduced to the numerical quantification that we normally apply to things. Those who live in countries built from the colonial matrix know the normality of such a situation when, even today, they open newspapers and read: “9 dead in the last police intervention in Paraisópolis”, “85 killed in the rebellion of prisoners in Belém”. The description usually boils down to numbers with no history.

It is not difficult to understand how this naturalization of the ontological distinction between subjects through the fate of their deaths is a fundamental device of government. It perpetuates an undeclared civil war dynamic through which those subjected to maximum economic plunder, to the most degraded conditions of work and remuneration, are paralyzed in their revolt by the generalization of fear in the face of state extermination. Such ontological distinction is thus the armed wing of a class struggle to which converge, among others, clear markers

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2 See Foucault, 1976

3 About the ontological distinction between “person” and “thing” proper to slave relations, see also Esposito, 2015.

4 “Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)” (Mbembe, idem, p. 21).

of racialization. For it is a matter of passing on such an ontological distinction within social life and its daily structure. The subjects must, at all times, understand how the state acts from such a distinction, how it operates explicitly and in silence.

In this sense, let us note how such necropolitical dynamics responds, after the end of explicit colonial relations, to strategies for the preservation of class interests, in which the state acts, before certain classes, as a “protective state,” while it acts before others as “predatory state.”<sup>5</sup> In short, it must be insisted that necropolitics thus appears as a device for the preservation of structures of paralysis of class struggle, normally more explicit in territories and countries marked by the centrality of colonial experiences.

### The genesis of the suicidal state

But we must be attentive to the consolidation of socio-historical contexts in which the state abandons its protective nature, constituting itself from the discourse of “letting die”, of indifference in relation to the deaths that occur in all sectors of the populations under its jurisdiction. That is, there are situations in which the logic of the predatory state is generalized to the integrality of the social body, even though not all sectors of this body are at the same level of exposure to vulnerability. In these circumstances, as I would like to defend, a phenomenon of a different nature occurs, which cannot be read completely within a necropolitical logic.

Paul Virilio, in a discussion about the specificity of the regimes of violence in the fascist state, coined the term “suicidal state.”<sup>6</sup>This was an astute way of going against the liberal discourse of equality between Nazism and Stalinism by insisting on the structuring regimes of violence as a differential feature between the fascist state and other forms of so-called totalitarian states, and even between other forms of colonial states. The term “suicidal” will prove fruitful because it was a way of remembering how a state of this nature should not be understood only as the manager of death for specific groups, as we see in the necropolitical dynamics. It was the continuous actor of its own catastrophe, the cultivator of its own explosion, the organizer of a thrust of society out of its own self-reproduction.<sup>7</sup> According to Virilio, a state of this nature was materialized in an exemplary way in a telegram. A telegram that had a

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5 About the figure of a “predatory state”, see: Chamayou, 2010.

6 Virilio, 1976

7 “We have then, in Nazi society something that is really quite extraordinary: this is a society that has generalized biopower in an absolute sense, but which has also generalized the sovereign right to kill (...)The Nazi State makes the field of the life it manages, protects, guarantees, and cultivates in biological terms absolutely coextensive with the sovereign right to kill anyone, meaning not only other people, but also its own people (...) We have an absolutely racist State, an absolutely murderous State and an absolutely suicidal State.” (, 2003, p. 260).

number: Telegram 71. It was with it that, in 1945, Adolf Hitler proclaimed the fate of a war then lost. He said: "If the war is lost, let the nation perish." With it, Hitler demanded that the German army itself destroy what was left of infrastructure in the battered nation. As if that were the real ultimate goal: that the nation would perish by its own hands, by the hands of what it itself unleashed.<sup>8</sup>

The discussion about the "suicidal" nature of the fascist state will be resumed in the same year by Michel Foucault, in his seminar *// faut défendre la société* (in an unjustified and deeply mistaken approach to the violence of real socialism) and years later, more systematically, by Deleuze and Guattari, in *Mille Plateaux*. Faced with the regime of destructiveness immanent to fascism and its permanent movement, Deleuze and Guattari will suggest the figure of an uncontrolled war machine that would have appropriated the State, creating not exactly a totalitarian State concerned with the extermination of its opponents, but a suicidal state unable to fight for its own preservation. Hence why it was the case to say:

Unlike the totalitarian State, which does its utmost to seal all possible lines of flight, fascism is constructed on an intense line of flight, which it transforms into a line of pure destruction and abolition. It is curious that from the very beginning the Nazis announced to Germany what they were bringing: at once wedding bells and death, including their own death, and the death of the Germans (...) A war machine that no longer had anything but war as its object and would rather annihilate its own servants than stop the destruction. All the dangers of the other lines pale by comparison.<sup>9</sup>

In deepening this point, Guattari will take one step further and will see no problem in stating that the production of a line of destruction and a pure "passion for abolition" would be related to: "the tuning fork of the collective death drive that would have been liberated of the ditches of the First World War."<sup>10</sup> This allowed him to affirm that the masses would have invested, in the fascist machine: "a fantastic collective death drive" that allowed them to abolish, in a "phantom of catastrophe,"<sup>11</sup> a reality that

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<sup>8</sup>The major role of the logic of self-sacrifice in the production of fascist social body unity is a topic present in many authors as: Ziemer, 1941; Marcuse, 1998; Neocleuous, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 230

<sup>10</sup> Guattari, 2012, p. 67. The use of the psychoanalytic concept of death drive in this context is not without raising problems due to the multiplicity immanent to the Freudian use, which describes processes of destruction, destiny, strangeness (*Unheimliche*), children's play, among others.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, p. 70. "All fascist meanings bounce off a composite representation of love and death. Eros and Thanatos becoming one. Hitler and the Nazis fought for death even and for the death of Germany.

they detested and that the revolutionary left would not have known how to provide another answer.

Leaving aside the problems raised by such use of the concept of death drive, let us remember how, according to this reading, the left would never have been able to provide the masses with a real alternative of rupture, which necessarily passed through the abolition of the state, of its immanent processes of individuation and its repressive disciplinary dynamics.<sup>12</sup> This is Guattari's way of following statements by Wilhelm Reich such as: "Fascism is not, as is commonly believed, a purely reactionary movement – it represents an amalgam between rebellious emotions and reactionary social ideas."<sup>13</sup> The question could not be summed up only in what fascism forbids, but one must understand what it authorizes, the type of revolt it forms, or even the libidinal energy that it would be able to capture.

This reminds us of how there would be various ways of destroying the state and one of them, the counterrevolutionary form proper to fascism, would be accelerating towards its own catastrophe, even if it costs our lives. The suicidal state would be able to make the revolt against the unfair state, against the authorities that excluded us, the ritual of liquidating itself in the name of the preservation of an "outlaw" leadership that must stage his ritual of omnipotence even when his impotence is already clear. In this way, we see the link between the notion of a preventive counter-revolution and a form of pure and simple abolition of the state through the call to self-immolation of the people linked to it.<sup>14</sup>

In a way, this discussion about the suicidal state converges with analyzes made decades ago regarding violence specific to the fascist state, coming from the Frankfurt School. Let us remember, for example, what Theodor Adorno says in 1946:

At this point attention must be paid to destructiveness as the psychological basis of the fascist spirit. The programs are abstract and vague, the fulfillments are spurious and illusory because promise expressed by fascist oratory is nothing but destruction itself. It's hardly accidental that all fascist agitators dwell upon the imminence of catastrophes of some kind. Whereas they warn of impending dangers, they and their listeners get a thrill out of the

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And the German masses agreed to follow them until their own destruction" (idem)

<sup>12</sup> Such diagnosis is in line with Marcuse's statements as: "National Socialism has done away with the essential features which characterized the modern state. It tends to abolish any separation between state and society by transferring the political functions to the social groups actually in power. In other words, National Socialism tends toward direct and immediate selfgovernment by the prevailing social groups over the rest of the population." (Marcuse, 1998, p. 70)

<sup>13</sup> Reich, 1993, p. XIV. In the same year, this point was discussed by Bataille, 1970.

<sup>14</sup> On the subject of fascism and preventive counterrevolution, see Marcuse, 1972.

idea of inevitable doom, without even make a clear-cut distinction between the destruction of their foes and of themselves (...) This is the agitator's dream, an union of the horrible and the wonderful, a delirium of annihilation masked with salvation.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, it is a question of talking about destructiveness as a "psychological basis" of fascism, and not just as a characteristic of immanent dynamics of social struggles and processes of conquest and subjection. For if it were only a matter of describing the violence of the conquest and perpetuation of power, it would be difficult to understand how it gets to this point where it would not even be possible to clearly differentiate between the destruction of their foes and of themselves, between annihilation and salvation. In order to account for the singularity of this fact, Adorno will also speak, in the sixties, of a "desire for catastrophe," of "fantasies of the end of the world" that resonate typical structures of paranoid delusions.<sup>16</sup>

Statements like these by Adorno aim to expose the singularity of the patterns of violence in fascism. For it is not just a question of generalizing the logic of militias directed against vulnerable groups, a logic through which state power rests on a para-state structure controlled by armed groups. Nor is it just a matter of leading individuals to believe that the impotence of ordinary life and constant plunder will be overcome through the individual strength of those who at last have the right to take the authorized production of violence for themselves. In this regard, we know how fascism offers a certain form of freedom, it has always been built out of the vampirization of revolt.<sup>17</sup> Nor is it just a junction between indifference and extreme violence against historically violated groups. As necropolitics theorists remind us, such articulation did not have to wait for fascism to appear, but it is present in all countries of colonial tradition with its technologies of systematic population destruction.<sup>18</sup>

However, if Adorno speaks of "psychological basis" it is because it is necessary to understand violence, mainly, as a device of psychic mutation. A mutation whose developmental axis would be the generalization of the destructiveness to the forms of relation to oneself, to the other and to the world. In this horizon, psychology is called to break the economic illusion of individuals as agents that maximize interests.

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15 Adorno, 1946, p. 137

16 Adorno, 2019, p. 26, Adorno and Horkheimer already presented fascist as a paranoid social pathology in Adorno, and Horkheimer, 1992.

17 "The rebellion against institutionalized law changed into lawlessness and release of brute force in the service of the powers that be." (Horkheimer, 2007, p. 81).

18 It is not by chance that technologies for the management of social violence, such as concentration camps and urban segregation, were initially developed in colonial situations. See, for example: Roubinek, 2016

On the contrary, it would be necessary not to ignore libidinal investments in processes in which individuals clearly invest against their most immediate self-preservation interests.

This diagnosis of a race towards self-sacrifice, in a process in which the figure of the protective state seems to give way to a predatory state that even turns against itself, a state animated by the unstoppable dynamics of self-destruction and the destruction of the social life itself, was not exclusive to the Frankfurtians. It could also be found in Hannah Arendt's analysis. Just remember how, in 1951 (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*), Arendt spoke of the astonishing fact that those who adhered to fascism did not falter even when they became victims, even when the monster began to devour its own children.

These authors were sensitive, among others, to the fact that the fascist war was not a war of conquest and stabilization. It had no way of stopping, giving us the impression that we were facing a "perpetual movement, without object or target" whose impasses only led to an ever greater acceleration. Arendt will speak of: "movements which can remain in power only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion."<sup>19</sup> There is an unlimited war that means the total mobilization of the social force, the absolute militarization towards a conflict that makes it permanent.

Still during the war, Franz Neumann will provide a functional explanation for such a dynamic of permanent war. The so-called Nazi "state" would, in fact, be the heterogeneous and unstable composition of four groups in perpetual conflict for hegemony: the party, the army and their Prussian aristocratic high command, the monopolistic industry and the state bureaucracy:

Devoid of any common loyalty and concerned solely with the preservation of their own interests, the ruling groups will break apart as soon as the miracle-producing Leader meets a worthy opponent. At present, each section needs the others. The army needs the party because the war is totalitarian. The army cannot organize society 'totally'; that is left to the party. The party, on the other hand, needs the army to win the war and thus to stabilize and even aggrandize its own power. Both need monopolistic industry to guarantee continuous expansion. And all three need the bureaucracy to achieve the technical rationality without which the system could not operate. Each group is sovereign and authoritarian; each is equipped with legislative, administrative, and judicial power of its own; each is thus capable of carrying out swiftly and ruthlessly the necessary compromises among the four.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Arendt, 1951 p. 306

20 Neumann, 2009, p. 397-398

In other words, only the indefinite continuation of the war allowed this chaotic composition of sovereign and authoritarian groups to find a certain unity and stability. The war wasn't, therefore, a war of expansion and strengthening of the State, but a strategy of indefinite postponement of a State on the path of disintegration, of indefinite postponement of a collapsing political order. And to sustain such continuous mobilization with its monstrous demand for effort and incessant losses is necessary that social life be organized under the specter of catastrophe, of the constant risk invading every pore of the social body. A social body based on the increasing violence necessary to allegedly immunize itself from such a risk of catastrophe.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the only way to postpone the breakdown of the political order, the tacit fragility of the order, would consist in managing, in a continuous flirtation movement with the abyss, a junction between calls for self-destructiveness and systematic reiteration of hetero-destructiveness.

It will not be by chance that, some decades later, we will find some analysts suggesting the figure of the fascist state as a social body marked by an autoimmune illness: "the ultimate condition in which the protective apparatus becomes so aggressive that it turns against its own body (which is what it should protect), leading to its death."<sup>22</sup> The systematic presence of the topic of protection as immunization against the degeneration of the social body would, in fact, be an expression of the profound antagonisms that are going through a radicalization of class struggles and revolutionary sedition, as was the case of German society 1920s. Since Hobbes, we know how the use of the topic of immunization against the "diseases of the social body" is mobilized in situations of revolutionary upheaval.<sup>23</sup> It would be no different in a preventive counterrevolution such as fascism. This immunization will require the acceptance, by all the actors of the order, of the militarization of society and the transformation of war into the only possible situation for producing the unity of the social body and for producing an imperialist economic expansion on a planetary scale.

### Neoliberalism and the stabilization of the collapse

But we must ask ourselves whether this notion of a suicidal state should be restricted to fascism and, in particular, to German Nazism. Would it have any explanatory power to describe the logic of violence in other political forms? And, if the answer is affirmative, what could mean such

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21 Hence the meaning of statements like these by Goebbels: "In the world of absolute fatality within which Hitler moves, nothing makes sense anymore, neither good nor evil, neither time nor space, and what other men call 'success' cannot be used as a criterion (...) Hitler is likely to end in catastrophe" (Apud in Heiber, 2013).

22 Esposito, 2008, p. 116

23 See Thomas Hobbes about "the diseases of a commonwealth" in the chapter XXIX of Hobbes, 2017.

symmetry with the fascist suicidal state? If we accept, with Wolfgang Streeck,<sup>24</sup> that contemporary capitalism, with its link between continuous low growth, chronic indebtedness and an explosion of inequality, entered into an irreversible process of decomposition, unable to guarantee any form of systemic stability, without however existing for while some other consolidated alternative to replace it, could we not argue that such a terminal horizon would require some form of generalized mutation in the relationship between protection and government, in order to allow a certain possibility of stabilization in the decomposition? Would it not be necessary some form of "normalization" of the decomposition of social macro-structures and, consequently, of disinvestment in the expectations of protection directed at the state, which implies tacit acceptance of the exponential increase in the generalized level of risk in the face of death? And, finally, such divestment would not require a certain form of mutation in the affects that sustain the social body, as the implosion of all generic solidarity, in addition to a certain structural psychic mutation from the generalization of identification to figures or processes that legitimize the violence of such an implosion?

Taking these questions into consideration, it would be the case to defend that there is something paradigmatic in the notion of suicidal state that seems to return today in global laboratories of authoritarian neoliberalism, such as Brazil. Everything is happening as if the suicidal state returned as a model of "normal functioning" of a situation in perpetual crisis. For it is a case of defending the thesis that humanitarian catastrophes like that produced by the Brazilian government in the face of the pandemic (second country in the world in number of deaths, even in the face of evident underreporting; total absence of federal protection policies; complete absence of mourning and social commotion for the deaths) work as part of a policy of pressure towards paradigmatic changes in the exercise of power. Such changes may indicate deeper global recompositions aiming at adapting to the socio-economic processes led by the neoliberal horizon and its reduced horizon of expectations. In turn, they indicate a consolidation of indifference and disaffection as a fundamental social affect, as fundamental elements for the generalization of psychic mutations such as those described, each in its own way, by Adorno and Guattari.

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24 Streeck, 2015. Note that Streeck's argument does not require that social macro-structures have, in fact, functioned as a device for social stabilization and limitation of impoverishment. They just need to preserve the belief that political struggles that respect institutional frameworks can, at some point, produce conditions for general principles of redistribution. The so-called "welfare state" produced its alleged limitation of impoverishment only in certain central countries of capitalism, preserving logics of colonial domination until the end of the sixties and transferring precariousness to masses of poor immigrants. But it managed to lead significant sectors of the organized working class to believe that political struggles within the institutional horizon of liberal democracy could lead to structural changes in income and wealth sharing. In turn, those, at that time, linked to processes of revolutionary transformation shared clear and hegemonic horizons of collective action, a fact that begins to decline effectively with the historical end of the cycle of revolutions (the last being in Nicaragua in 1979).

Lets initially insist on some specificities of the Brazilian situation in order to understand its privileged position to analyze this phenomenon. As Celso Furtado will recall, Brazil was a country created from the implementation of the economic cell of the primary-exporting slave plantation on American soil.<sup>25</sup> Before being a settlement colonization, it was a question of developing, for the first time, a new form of economic order linked to export production and the massive use of slave labor. Let us remember how the Portuguese empire will be the first to engage in the transatlantic slave trade, reaching a quasi-monopoly position in the middle of the 16th century. 35% of all slaves transported to the Americas were directed to Brazil. As the slave plantation is the elementary cell of Brazilian society, as Brazil was the last American country to abolish slavery, it will not be strange to conceive of the country as the greatest colonial necropolitics experiment in modern history.

These characteristics allowed the Brazilian state to develop a technology for the disappearance, extermination and execution of vulnerable sectors of the population (original people, poor, blacks) that will prove resilient within its history, creating the technical conditions for the management of a “permanent counterrevolution.”<sup>26</sup> This technology will be exponentially developed in the military dictatorship (1964-1984), through the systematic use of “forced disappearance” techniques against opponents of the regime, in an adaptation of the practices of “revolutionary war” developed in the colonial struggles in Indochina and Algeria.<sup>27</sup> As Brazil was one of the rare cases in Latin America of a country without transitional justice and judgment of crimes of the military dictatorship, such devices could remain in the normal practices of the State's police apparatus during the post-dictatorship period to the present day.<sup>28</sup> As an example of the impact of such permanence, Brazil will be the only country in Latin America where cases of police torture will increase in relation to such cases during the military dictatorship.<sup>29</sup>

It should therefore not be seen as a fluke that a country with such social structures serves as a laboratory for the development of authoritarian neoliberalism, now no longer under a dictatorial layer, as occurred in Pinochet's Chile, but in an allegedly “democratic” environment.<sup>30</sup> We know how the reconstruction of social life by neoliberal

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25 FURTADO, 2020

26 See Fernandes, 1987

27 Ver Duarte-Plon, 2016; Franco, forthcoming

28 See Safatle and Telles, 2010

29 Sikkink, Kathryn & Marchesi, Bridget. 2015

30 About such development and the relations between fascism and neoliberalism, see Chamayou, 2018.

rationality requires the reconfiguration of social relations based on a very peculiar concept of “individual freedom.” Such freedom requires a society that imploded all its relations, current and potential, of generic solidarity. This implosion will see no problem in defending a conception of freedom that, in certain “exceptional” circumstances, will take place as a complete disengagement from protection facing the imminent death of expressive sectors of the population marked by historical relations of spoliation. The soil for the flowering of such a conception of freedom needs to be marked by repeated violence and systematic indifference.

Let us remember some fundamental features of freedom within the neoliberal ideology. We know how neoliberalism is not just an ideology of economic policies, but also an kind of ethical horizon (organized in a violent way through the massive intervention of the state in the depoliticization of social life) that aims to subject all demands of justice to imperatives of freedom. In fact, freedom appears as a fundamental axis for legitimizing both government actions and ways of relating to oneself. Demands of justice, whether they are demands for redistributive justice or social reparation justice, must be submitted to the uncompromising defense of freedom. In a way, we can even say that the rationality of economic actions is not analyzed in terms of growth production of wealth and goods to a bigger number of people, neither in terms of social security, of equity, but in terms of their ability to achieve freedom. And if we ask about what is meant by freedom in this context, we will find freedom as an expression of proprietary individuals, as an exercise of self-ownership.

It is with such articulation in mind that we should read, for example, the beginning of the text that presented the objectives of the *Mont Pélérin Society*, the first group formed in the forties to spread neoliberal ideals:

The central values of civilization are in danger... The group holds that these developments have been fostered by the growth of a view of history which denies all absolute moral standards and by the growth of theories which question the desirability of the rule of law.<sup>31</sup>

Whence the exhortation to explain the alleged current crisis from its “moral and economic origins.” This double articulation is extremely significant. The aforementioned view of history that would deny any absolute moral standard and that would be growing would be the collectivist and socialist ideologies that refuse the primacy of private property. We are in the forties, communism is expanding and even capitalist countries adopt hybrid models, such as the Scandinavian model, or characterized by strong doses of state interventionism of a Keynesian nature.

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31 Apud Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015, p. 25

The above excerpt is interesting because it shows how the refusal of the primacy of private property and competitiveness is not only understood as an economic mistake that could bring inefficiency and backwardness, but mainly as a moral lack capable of endangering the central values of western civilization. For this reason, its defense must not only be based on its alleged economic efficiency in face of the imperatives of wealth production. It must take place through the moral exhortation of values imbued with free enterprise, “independence” in relation to the State and the alleged individual self-determination. We must carry out the moral obligation of a society of individuals free from the tutelage of anyone, capable of enjoying their property as they see fit and certain that violations of this fundamental right will be promptly punished. For the right to private property would be: “the most important guarantee for freedom,” as Hayek will say. This explains why in the “free society” the individual would always have the possibility of (economic) choice, in contrast to the so-called “collectivist” models, where “the individual is exempt from responsibility”, models that will fail for being “antimoral in its effects, however lofty the ideals to which it owes its birth”<sup>32</sup>. As we see, decisions are justified in terms of “responsibility,” “majority,” “independence.” That is, the terms are all moral, not economic.

### **The freedom that realize itself as genocide**

“Much important than life itself, it is our freedom.” This statement is not from Hayek, but from the current president of Brazil, justifying his analysis that the policies to restrict circulation and activities developed to combat the pandemic would be an “attack on freedom.” Leaving aside the elementary contradiction that freedom without life is not freedom at all, there is the realization, more or less consequential, of the neoliberal conception of “responsibility,” “majority,” and “independence.” We saw something similar when American protesters took the streets with posters that showed a mask inside a prohibited sign with the inscription “my body, my rules.” The same reasoning served as a basis for German protesters to demand the “right to be infected.”

The logic is clear and there is no denying a certain consistency. Since “freedom” is something that some understand as the property I have over myself, over my body, no one could compel me to wear a medical mask, to stay at home, to take care of my body, unless he has my consent for this. After all, as Mr. Bolsonaro said on another occasion: “if I get infected, it's my problem.”

We could counter-argue by saying that, even admitting freedom as self-ownership, we should relativize it stating that: “the exercise of my self-ownership must be limited by the risk concerning other's life.” However, there will always be those who will ask (and, again, with some consistency): but who decides what are the “relevant risks” to the other? Why should I

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32 Hayek, 2007, p. 217

admit that the state or scientists who pose themselves as oracular sages have decided what is a “relevant risk”? That is, who has the recognized authority to define what affects my body without I having consented to recognize that authority myself?

Let us note how the generalization of a logic of this nature accounts for the perception that the macro-structures of social protection are in decline and that a possible way out would be the massive shift of responsibility and action towards micro-structures, such as families and individuals. Wasn't that, after all, Margareth Thatcher's biggest slogan: “There is no such thing as society, there are just individuals and families”? But if this is the case, how can we demand protection from the state at exceptional times, such as those produced by pandemics? Is it not, in fact, a “moral lack” that indicates a lack of courage and a willingness to work and struggle? It would be better, then, to describe the practices of confinement and isolation as “cowardice”, as was systematically the case in Brazil.

Thus, in the name of defending freedom and decomposing social protection macro-structures, the state can subject populations to a suicidal dynamic, as it is based on indifference to the brutal increase in the risks of “violent death,” to speak like Hobbes. Of course, this risk is lessened by access to the market, that is, access to private health and protection systems. The certainty of privileged access to such systems establish a differentiated sharing of risks, although it cannot cancel out the general increase in exposure to the risk of death. It defines a different impact of risk according to social classes, creating completely different curves of contagion and death, between the wealthy and the poor classes.<sup>33</sup> However, it does not eliminate the naturalization of a new level of social exposure to death for the entire population and the acceptance of such an increase by significant sections of the population, and this is the fundamental fact here.

Such a process requires dynamics of disaffection that cannot occur if society is engaged in public mourning and civic commotion. Therefore, it is necessary to produce the systematic disappearance of dead bodies. This happens through counter-information (systematic government work to discredit the numbers of dead, already underreported), simple denial (claiming that the dead classified as dead by COVID-19 are, in fact, victims of other diseases), refusal explicit in raising awareness of the dead (continuous statements by federal authorities, mainly by the president of the republic, that “life goes on”, “everyone dies”), among other strategies. The military tactic of “forced disappearance” returns as a general policy in the government populations.

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33 According to studies carried out in the city of São Paulo, between the months of May and June, the seroprevalence of infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus is 2.5 times higher in the poorest districts (Projeto SoroEpi MSP: [https:// www. monitoramentocovid19.org/](https://www.monitoramentocovid19.org/))

Let us note how we come back to a situation that we saw earlier with Neumann's analysis of the Nazi state. At the time, we saw how the use of permanent war, with its constant calls for sacrifice and catastrophe, appeared as a response to a state in disintegration, which arises after the impossibility of liberal democracy to account for the social struggles that were becoming more radical. What appears in its place is an apparatus crossed by continuous struggle between groups, in a completely unstable balance and which needs internal and external war as a condition for survival.

In our present case, the diagnosis of loss of the capacity for conflict mediation by the institutional apparatus of liberal democracy is increasingly evident. This loss is not due to some form of "populist regression" proper to the alleged mobilization of identity affects. It is the result of the immanent limitations of liberal democracy and its unfulfilled redistributive promises. In this horizon, one possible and seductive path is the acceptance of the collapse of the entire macro-structure of protection and the strengthening of micro-structures as a horizon of support. In the Brazilian case, this process was driven by the constitution of financial aid for the direct transfer of income, a transfer financed, in fact, by the systematic decomposition of budgets destined to universalist public policies (public health system, public universities, pensions). The logic follows the principle that the state has already done its part by transferring emergency aid, now each individual must exercise their individual ability to survive.

The complement of this process can be the radicalization of the logic of self-ownership, without the increased risk in relation to death by disengagement from the state being able to stop this process. Thus, we can say that we entered into a suicidal logic without the need for a direct war. If it proves to be effective, such logic may tend to be the norm in other horizons of application of neoliberal policies. But perhaps, in this way, neoliberalism has shown us what many of us already knew, namely, that the economy is nothing more than the continuation of war by other means.

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