

REVIEW: THE CRUEL PEDAGOGY OF THE VIRUS

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ABSTRACT: While world communities and their leaders worked to find some paths (or deviations) for coping and living with the uncertainties of a new and unknown virus, the book *A cruel pedagogia do vírus* (The cruel pedagogy of the virus) was published by Boaventura de Sousa Santos to problematize the reality experienced and to make an invitation to analyze the consequences that the virus has had on the world, reaching different areas, with influences still unknown on social, cultural and political matters.

KEYWORDS: Corona virus. Social living. Education and society.

RESUMO: Enquanto as comunidades mundiais e suas lideranças trabalhavam para traçar alguns (des)caminhos para o enfrentamento e a convivência com as incertezas de um novo e desconhecido vírus, o livro *A cruel pedagogia do vírus* foi lançado por Boaventura de Sousa Santos para problematizar a realidade vivenciada e fazer um convite para analisar as consequências que o vírus imprimiu no mundo todo, atingindo diversos setores, com influências ainda desconhecidas nas questões sociais, culturais e políticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Corona vírus. Convivência social. Educação e sociedade.

RESUMEN: Mientras las comunidades mundiales y sus dirigentes trabajaban para esbozar algunas (in)maneras para afrontar y coexistir con las incertidumbres de un virus nuevo y desconocido, el libro *La cruel pedagogía del virus* fue lanzado por Boaventura de Sousa Santos para problematizar la realidad vivida y hacer una invitación a analizar las consecuencias que el virus ha planteado en el mundo, llegando a diversos sectores, con influencias aún desconocidas en las cuestiones sociales, culturales y políticas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Coronavirus. Convivencia social. Educación y sociedad.

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Introduction

As part of the collection “*Pandemia Capital*” (Capital Pandemic), the book by Boaventura Souza e Santos, “*A Cruel Pedagogia do Vírus*” (The Cruel Pedagogy of the Virus), was published at the apex of the Corona virus pandemic, while world communities and their leaders worked to chart some (miss)paths for coping and living with the uncertainties of this new unknown. Starting from this reality and from all the consequences that the virus has printed worldwide, in different sectors, the author discusses social, cultural and political issues through concerns that start from everyday life.

Addressing the current political and economic aspects, the author presents the daily life and points out that the way of life and the servitude to capitalism face the power of the virus and proposes a difficult choice for those who are in a less favored sociocultural location: protecting themselves from the virus and expect hunger or fight against hunger and be at the mercy of the virus? These issues are pointed out as a historical process that has unfolded over time, indicating, above all, the challenges of maintaining the economy.

Considering these issues, in the five chapters we find consistent arguments that lead us to reflections about the human being, about attitudes, choices and behaviors and, above all, the relationship with our larger home.

In the first chapter, “*Vírus: tudo o que é sólido desmancha no ar*” (Virus: everything that is solid crumbles in the air), the author points out that since the 1980s, the world has been living in crisis due to the scandalous concentration of wealth and the imminent ecological catastrophe. And, when confronting this reality with the current pandemic, habits and rhythms of life that previously were not allowed in the capitalist world we live in now, are necessary and present, such as staying at home and spending time with children, or retreating in the incessant search of consumerism and the pleasure of having the luxury of reading a good book. For the author, therefore, this can be a process of (re)discoveries and worsening the crisis that already existed.

In the midst of this process, the viral outbreak, as said by the author, shows the fragility of the human being, because, although in a certain way, such insecurity can be mitigated by insurance companies or medical insurance, democratization is present, reaching the whole people, inciting solidarity, even if this from an economic point of view be a tragedy. While recognizing this reality, the author shows how much this reduction had a positive effect on air pollution, for example.

In the second chapter, “*A trágica transparência do vírus*” (The tragic transparency of the virus), the author presents the invisible enemy that embodies the chaotic fear arising from the pandemic, as omnipresent as so many invisible others, such as the god or the stock exchange markets that govern lives of people in a way that makes it unpredictable. Drawing on the symbolism highlighted by Leonardo da Vinci of a kingdom composed of three unicorns, the author points out that since the 17th century, capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy have been the main modes of domination that prevail over society, beginning in Europe and reaching the whole world that we know. He points out that in a cunning way, they act by appearing and disappearing as they see fit. For the author, both the issues of the pandemic and the issues that derive from it, social, economic, and other, contribute to the exposure of the weaknesses inherent to the neoliberal economic model.

The third chapter, “*Ao sul da quarentena*” (South of the quarantine), has notes that show the marginalization of certain groups. In presenting these notes, the author highlights the discriminatory process of the pandemic, raising the divergent social strata and making it impossible for a specific layer of the population called caregivers, that is, the people directly involved in health. However, there are also many vulnerable people who, due to the political, social and cultural situation are subjected to and had already been suffering too much before this unprecedented period and this reality that is now overwhelming. About these collectives, the author begins by mentioning women, who are caregivers in their homes and occupy most of the nursing positions, placing them on the front lines of the fight against the virus.

Informal workers are also specifically affected, with no employment ties, they are the first to be fired. In Latin America, they represent 50% of workers. As they depend on daily work for income, social isolation, so recommended for the prevention of Covid-19, becomes impractical. The same is true for street workers, who make a living from their actions (arts, etc.) and depend, basically, on the people.

Asking how the quarantine of those who have no home will be, the author draws attention to another group of people, those who are homeless. As well as citing UN data pointing out that 25% of the world population live without infrastructure and basic sanitation, where large families often live in agglomerations, making social isolation impossible, these are the residents of the peripheries. But for these citizens, this social emergency is just one more among so many others they already face.

It should also be noted the difficulty faced by those living in refugee camps, immigrants, those with physical disabilities, who are already burdened with an additional burden of adversity in life, added to this Pandemic their situation becomes even more

complex. Finally, one of the most vulnerable groups to this chaotic reality is our elderly people, who had to retreat to their homes, others in nursing homes or shelters. According to the author, it is worth noting that the quarantine makes visible and reinforces injustice, discrimination, social exclusion, and the suffering of so many, what is in fact undeserved.

As everything in life there is always learning, it would be no different with this tribulation, this deadly virus. In the fourth chapter, “*A intensa pedagogia do vírus: as primeiras lições*” (The intense pedagogy of the virus: the first lessons), the author presents us with at least six lessons, but points out that it is an unknown question as to whether or not they will be absorbed by people. Considering these lessons, it is relevant to consider that contemporary society perceives risks according to the political time that is exposed to it and mediated. This exposure has occurred with the Corona virus pandemic, but not with the same intensity and severity that we face the climate crisis. It is said that the pandemic does not kill so indiscriminately as it is assumed.

Pointing capitalism as a social model with no future, the third lesson shows that the consequences are even more evident in this moment in which the world lives in a pandemic, where the social areas are subject, highlighting health, to the capital business model, thus forsaking citizenship and human rights. The extreme right and the hyper-neoliberal right, according to the author, are completely discredited, as they have failed more than others in combating the pandemic.

However, colonialism and patriarchy are alive and strong, proof of this is that when the populations of the richest countries are affected by serious diseases as is happening with the Corona virus, the manifestation of global problems is present, unlike when it happens in less favored places in the world, like the malaria outbreak in Africa in 2016, which was not even reported. Finally, listing the last of the lessons, the return of the State and the community in the last forty years is pointed out as a result of giving priority to the market, in this outcome the society and the State itself started to be evaluated and only after this analysis of profitability, managed, following the logic of the market.

Concluding his work, the author envisions that all this reality that we experience from the Corona virus pandemic makes it possible to review the alternatives that are superimposed on the way of living, producing, consuming and living together. But, above all, the author leaves a question to be answered: which of these reflections will actually be concluded and taken to political action?

In the midst of questions like this, in the last chapter, “*O future pode começar hoje*” (The future can begin today), the author states that people are very likely to be anxious to

want to see the world as they once knew, to be able to move freely. However, many doubts about the post-quarantine return are still uncertainties. What is presented to us by the author is that, in fact, it will not happen equally easily for everyone. However, what every human life must realize is that living in full harmony with other lives on the Planet is imperative for its own survival, and that this quarantine that we live in today is inserted within another political, cultural and ideological quarantine of capitalism and only when we overcome it we will truly be free.

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