

Evento: XXV Jornada de Pesquisa
ODS: 11 - Cidades e comunidades sustentáveis

SHOULD ANIMALS BE BLAMED FOR THE PANDEMICS? A CONTEXT ANALYSIS¹

DEVEM OS ANIMAIS SEREM CULPADOS PELAS PANDEMIAS? UMA ANÁLISE DE CONTEXTO

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Abstract

This investigation is on whether animals should be blamed for the worldwide pandemics. Its aim is on answering this inquisition with a denying initial hypothesis. Animals have been contaminating humans, but only as a corollary of human intervention upon their natural habitat. Animals therefore are pushed to do so, mostly because of deforestation, urbanism and hunting. With their habitat filled with people, wild animals tend to dive deeper into civilization. The method is the hypothetical-deductive, through which it seeks to confirm or deny an initial hypothesis using bibliographical research. An analysis of context is done for better addressing the initial question. Secondly, an exposition on demonization discourse towards the animals is fulfilled. The conclusion denies animals as culprits for the pandemics, pointing out that humans, through their ways of life, have expanded and imposed their will upon nature, being the responsible ones.

Keywords: Animals; Bat; Civet Cat; Disease; Pangolin.

Resumo

Investiga-se se os animais devem ser culpados pelas pandemias que ocorrem no mundo todo. O objetivo é responder a essa inquisição com uma hipótese inicial negativa. Os animais contaminam as pessoas, mas apenas como corolário da intervenção humana em seus habitats naturais. Portanto, os animais são pressionados a fazê-lo, principalmente pelo desmatamento, urbanismo e caça. Com seu habitat cheio de pessoas, os animais selvagens tendem a mergulhar mais fundo na civilização. O método é hipotético-dedutivo, através do qual se procura confirmar ou negar uma hipótese inicial utilizando de pesquisa bibliográfica. Pretende-se analisar o contexto para melhor abordar a pergunta inicial. Em segundo lugar, expõe-se um comum discurso de demonização em relação aos animais. Conclui-se negando os animais como culpados pelas pandemias, apontando que os seres humanos, através de seu modo de vida, expandiram e impuseram sua vontade à natureza, sendo os verdadeiros responsáveis.

Palavras-chave: Animais; Morcego; Gato Civeta; Doença; Pangolim.

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1 Introduction

Whether it came from a bat, a pangolin or a civet cat is not certain, but one thing is, the coronavirus outbreak that has killed tens of thousands of people and turned the world upside down comes from the animal world. Should animals be blamed for the pandemics? The article's aim is at answering this question, and it starts with a denying hypothesis.

Even though animals have contaminated humans, they have been pushed to do so because of deforestation, urbanism and hunting. Out of place, wild animals have been introducing themselves nearer people every year, and so epidemic and pandemic diseases tend to flourish. People's context explains the pandemic, and the many more to come.

Additionally and throughout the text, it is explained the importance of bats, pangolins and civet cats to the well-being of the ecosystem and to human life. The context of the environment people live in is analyzed, and in the end, a reflection upon a world without human domination nor the vision of animals as property is proposed.

The methodology is the hypothetical-deductive through bibliographical research. This means that, by creating a problem, the next step is confirming or denying it by bibliographical reasoning and, in a minor degree, with empirical assertions.

Human activity has enabled the virus to jump to people. The expectation is that, if nothing changes, many other pandemics of this nature could follow. The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is zoonosis, based on the Greek words for animal and sickness. This disease is not new, nor the demonization of animals. To name just a few, there has existed already tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis and malaria, all of them of the zoonosis type.

2 Animal demonization: bats, pangolins and civet cats in peril

From looking at the factors that lead to a virus jumping from a non-human animal population to people, it is clear that though animals may be the original natural host for these viruses, the drivers of a spillover are all human. The most frequent locations of transmission are in and around human dwellings and in agricultural fields, as well as at interfaces with occupational exposure to animals, like hunters, laboratory workers, veterinarians, researchers, wildlife management, zoos and sanctuary staffs (HITCHENS; JOHNSON, 2020).

A spillover event occurs when a pathogen is transferred from its host species to a new species, typically through unnatural contact such as occurs in a wildlife market. The historical host species may have evolved some immunity to the pathogen, while the newly affected species would likely have no natural resistance, making it susceptible to an outbreak (YATES, 2020).

Among threatened wildlife species, those with population reductions due to exploitation and loss of habitat (this includes some species of primates and flying foxes) share more viruses with humans. This means that in situations like the one people now face with Covid-19, the blame should not be deposited on the animals. People's interactions with them include habitat destruction, severely affecting them all around the world in an irreversible way (HITCHENS; JOHNSON, 2020).

The president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, likes to refer to the coronavirus as the Chinese virus. In so doing, he popularizes an image of the pandemic as a foreign invasion. He is not the only one. Many people have unwittingly bought into a particular paradigm for understanding pandemics. Call it the paradigm of invasion: the idea that humans are under attack by foreign pathogens that come from animals. This discourse, in the end, makes humans look like passive victims instead of dominators of destruction, while the animals seem to be the villains instead of peaceful helpless creatures (SAMUEL, 2020).

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Perhaps it is not the case of animals invading the worlds of men, but of people invading theirs. The paradigm of invasion fails to explain why a microbe that has existed for ages suddenly turns into a pandemic-causing pathogen. Human activities play a huge under recognized role in this. People's environmental and social policies, like cutting down forests and failing to address a housing crisis, make it much likelier that a previously harmless microbe could cause a devastating outbreak. They are not true environmental policies, but merely exploration policies (SAMUEL, 2020).

The One Health (2020) movement, an interdisciplinary way of thinking espoused by global public health authorities, emphasizes the connections between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. All these elements contribute for the pandemic humans experience now. The One Health is a collaborative, multisector, and transdisciplinary approach, working at the local, regional, national, and global levels with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes.

The Center of Disease Control of One Health leads the agency's efforts around the world. Part of its idea is that there is a need to be multidisciplinary and bring all different kinds of experts together in order to solve complex and interdisciplinary matters. This institution does not see pandemics and epidemics as isolated cases, but as part of a complex whole yet to be understood (ONE HEALTH, 2020).

In accordance with Sonia Shah (2016), the reigning narrative in many people's minds is that wild animals are to blame for the coronavirus crisis; that they are dirty and infested with tons of pathogens that just cannot wait to kill people. What these narratives lack is the conscience that every person has many microbes inside them. Humans give animals microbes that turn into pathogens all the time, so people are also the source of disease for other species.

Species everywhere are full of microbes, but if they stay in the bodies in which they have evolved, they do not cause disease. Ebola does not cause disease in bats and neither does coronavirus. They cause disease in human bodies because they are new to them; they are exploiting a new habitat, and the reason is that people are building roads between wild animals and human bodies. As well as using a lot of land for cities, mines, farms, and while doing that, the wildlife habitat is destroyed with many species going extinct. Moreover, the species that are remaining have to squeeze into these tiny fragments of wildlife habitat that humans leave for them (SHAH, 2016).

Luiz Fernando de Novaes Vianna (2020, p.115, our translation) observes that, "in order of controlling nature, men, considering themselves external from it, have started fighting it." When people cut down the forest where bats live, they do not just go away; they come roost in the trees in someone's backyard or farm. That means it is easier to have casual contact with their excretions and saliva. If someone goes outside and plays near a tree where there are bats sleeping, a fruit that has some bat poop or saliva on it may be picked and put in their mouth. Then you have created an opportunity for the microbes that live in the bat's body to enter into a human body (SHAH, 2016).

The dominant conception for a long time has been the one that sees men as superior beings, the so-called measure to all things. In this view, men are above everything else; above all other creatures, which makes it rational to defend their domination towards nature. "The separation between humanity and the surrounding world" (ALENCASTRO, 2015, p.53, our translation) is very common in occidental thought.

Mario Sergio Cunha Alencastro (2015, p.53, our translation) points out that, "the roots of the dominant conception, that would mark the renascence, are very old; it is possible to find references of men's supremacy upon nature in the tradition Judeo-Christian," as the following biblical passage: "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (BÍBLIA SAGRADA, 2005, p.25, our translation).

This base idea is of dualism between reality and spirituality. In this approach, the dominant

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men receive a special status in the creational process, and the reason is that men have gained “a position of superiority when compared to the other creations. Therefore, if nature is not spiritual, it does not deserve great considerations.” (ALENCASTRO, 2015, p.54, our translation). Following this logic makes it very easy to blame animals for any epidemic or major pandemic, as it is the current case.

René Descartes’s (2016) vision of I think, therefore I am indicates merit upon human thinking actions, but not so much on those beings that lack such faculties. Rationality, therefore, relates itself towards a superior ground, legitimizing, in the end, the domination from those that can think against the ones incapable of doing so. With Descartes (2016), thinking is what makes man special, which tends to justify domination over nature through the We are better than they are argument (ALENCASTRO, 2015).

Once men is the center of the universe, they are capable of acting, by the use of science, upon the natural world with the aim of ruling over it. “In conclusion, the universe must be evaluated in conformity with the perspective of human society” (ALENCASTRO, 2015, p.54, our translation), such is the tendency. This is the rationalistic logic of men taken as superior towards nature.

According to the UN Environment Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (THE STATE OF THE WORLD’S FORESTS, 2020), forests cover just over 30% of the global land area, yet they provide habitat for the vast majority of the terrestrial plant and animal species known to science. Unfortunately, forests and the biodiversity are under constant threat from actions of exploitation to convert the land into agriculture.

Ebola’s first case happened when a 2-year-old child in West Africa was playing near a tree where bats lived. How did that happen? Because of people dominating nature and pushing animals away from their natural habitat. Bats did not just appear out of nowhere there, they were pushed far away from their place of origin. These are accidents waiting to happen. Fast urbanization exposes people to each other’s waste. There is not a lot of infrastructure in many of the places that are rapidly urbanizing. All these factors combine to increase the risk that a microbe could spill over into human bodies and then start to spread diseases (SHAH, 2016).

These animals blamed for disease transmission tend to be forgotten upon their importance to human existence, be it bats, pangolins or civet cats. Deforestation and the wild animal trade prey directly on animal population and their habitat, but they are an essential part of the world’s biodiversity. As the loss of biodiversity continues, there has been a decrease in numbers of diversified wild animals, and this affects humans directly (ORJOLLET, 2020).

Bats are not harbingers of death, but actually hold an incredible importance in the ecosystems they inhabit. In these precarious times, animals should not suffer further at the hands of humans because of paranoia. They eat insects taken as pests to humans. Insects make up two-thirds of bats’ diets and they are able to consume at least a quarter of their body mass in insects nightly (YANG, 2020).

This ferocious appetite is important in protecting crops, making bats an essential part of the global food system. Without them, insects would eat many of the crops meant for us instead. It is as if bats acted as natural pesticides. Additionally, they devour those pests that harm our health. While mosquitoes do not directly kill humans, they are hosts for many diseases such as Malaria, Dengue fever and Zika virus (YANG, 2020).

While some bats prey on insects, others feast on fruits and nectar. In many cultures, they are seen as agents of death. To the many plants that rely solely on bats to pollinate their flowers and disperse their seeds, this is the polar opposite. Such plants include agave, durian, wild bananas, breadfruit and mango. Not only do bats increase the quantity of fruits, they can also influence its quality (YANG, 2020).

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Are bats a danger to humans? Generally, no, they do not endanger people. Bats can be carriers of diseases such as coronaviruses and rabies, but these diseases are not a danger to humans unless people are exposed to bat blood or saliva, a rare occurrence in the U.S. Most bats try to stay as far away from humans as possible, but this has become more challenging as people continue to take away their habitat (YATES, 2020).

Many bat species in the Midwest prefer to roost in the shaggy bark of dead trees, but as there are fewer trees available, they may find their only shelter in people's attics, sheds and garages. This puts them in close proximity to humans where unwanted interactions may occur (YATES, 2020).

Bats are a very diverse group of organisms. Their evolution of flight, echolocation and adaptations for being nocturnal are all very much intriguing. Many species of bats are very long-lived considering their size. Species such as horseshoe bats have unique immune systems that allow them to survive infectious diseases that are detrimental to other species (YATES, 2020). This immune system is why a bat virus is strong against humans. In humans, fever is a defense mechanism designed to raise the body temperature to kill a virus, while if the virus has evolved in a bat, it will not be of much help (YANG, 2020).

Pangolins, a dragon-like creature, has been a lot demonized lately. The suspicion that pangolins were to blame originated from similarities in one coronavirus the animals carry. Now the Media has pangolin advocates fearing the long-term consequences for their already critically endangered species. Little is known about these strange-looking, nocturnal, secretive critters also called scaly anteaters (WAYMER, 2020).

They could go extinct before scientists figure out what makes them tick, the victims of hunting pressure and habitat loss. The pangolin's reduced amount of genes for immunity, specifically linked to development of their unique scales, makes them susceptible to succumbing quickly to viral infections. These peculiarities play an important role when talking about human transmission. Their sale in wildlife markets could portend a future virus hopping from pangolins to humans (WAYMER, 2020).

Pangolins live in burrows and hollowed trees and eat mostly termites and ants. They face threats from habitat loss and ever-increasing poaching. The Covid-19 virus originated in a Chinese market. Its focus was selling live and dead animals for human consumption. There, pangolins were sold for soup. There are eight different species of them, four Asian and four African (SULLIVAN, 2020).

According to the PETA institution, it is because of these unique scales that people hunt and traffic pangolins, making it the most trafficked animal in the world. Like tigers for their bones and rhinos for their horns, pangolins are poached, traded, and killed for their scales and flesh (SULLIVAN, 2020). Pangolin Conservation (2020), an organization dedicated to promoting the conservation, education, and research of endangered mammals, has documented pangolin products in 13 states of the U.S. and on several major selling platforms.

The expression Revenge of the Pangolin was used by the Media a few times, as to address their revenge against human nature for the pandemic. However, when not exploited by humans, pangolins lead peaceful private lives. There is only one thing that brings pangolins together in their natural habitats: mating. When not reproducing, these scaly mammals prefer to be alone. When they feel threatened, pangolins curl up into tight balls, just like armadillos (SULLIVAN, 2020).

Some people in Asia eat pangolin meat as a way to boast status, believing consuming an endangered species is proof of success. However, the biggest threat to this animal comes from the unproven belief that their scales have healing properties in traditional Chinese medicine. The scales are made of keratin, the same fibrous protein found in hair, fingernails, horns, hoofs, as well as the outermost layers of the skin (WAYMER, 2020).

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There are groups of people that believe the powder from the ground-up scales cures anxiety, eases malarial fever, calms children from crying, or even can exorcise women possessed by devils and ogres, whatever that means. Traditional Chinese medicine falsely believes dried pangolin scales could stimulate lactation in women, correct menstruation problems, reduce swelling, increase blood circulation, and even cure cancer. All of these are incorrect, and the scales hold no true medical value (WAYMER, 2020).

In Africa's tradition, pangolins are offered in the bush meat trade. In some African cultures, pangolin meat is consumed to encourage a long and healthy life. Promoters of the Juju and Voodoo cults often use pangolins believing they have magical properties (WAYMER, 2020)

The same rationality was applied to civet cats. These mammals resemble a mongoose more than a cat. It is a culinary delicacy in China and believed to have health benefits. They are shy creatures and avoid humans and other animals. Urbanization and deforestation contributed towards putting them and the horseshoe bats in closer contact, propagating the SARS virus (BREIMAN, 2020).

Human beings have affected these creatures in more ways than poaching them. As human populations grew, people's incursion into a variety of habitats expanded even as the appetite for certain animals remains unabated. As with civets, deforestation has dramatically affected the areas available for pangolin's well-being, putting them in closer contact with other animals including bats, which are reservoirs for other dangerous viruses like Nipa virus and Ebola. This has facilitated the spread of many diseases (BREIMAN, 2020).

3 Analyzing the environmental context

How far is the impact of context upon people? Technological progress not only is changing man's environment, his culture, his ways of life, but it is changing man himself. For a human being is in large part a product of the conditions in which he lives. In other words, the dominant circumstances toward nature people live in not only prey upon the environment, but upon humans as well (GARVEY, 2010).

Wildlife markets commonly have numerous types of animals harvested from the wild and are kept in very close proximity to one another. These animals would not naturally meet each other if it were not for these markets. Sometimes live and dead animals are stacked on top of one another, making the transfer of blood and saliva commonplace. People who work in these markets or who purchase animals for the wild animal trade and for culinary uses are at high risk of exposure to a multitude of diseases (YATES, 2020).

Some factors that influence the potential for spillover in a wildlife market include the level of infection, sanitary conditions, food preparation methods and the pathogen's compatibility with the newly exposed species. Another interesting factor that influences whether an exposure will turn into an outbreak is how deadly the pathogen is. Diseases that quickly kill their hosts have reduced opportunities to infect new individuals, while less deadly diseases can spread to more individuals (YATES, 2020).

The origins of pandemics are an environmental and social problem rather than an arbitrary exception: it is how people live. Humans often look at an outbreak as a foreign problem, as if Ebola, SARS and Zika were coming from outside and encroaching upon them. That is the traditional narrative of a germ invading from outside. These things, on the other hand, are happening everywhere, a product of human intervention in a field they cannot control (SAMUEL, 2020).

Facing with the actual context of threats to many forms of life, combined with scientific incertitude, to consider the well-being of future generations

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may be related to the own survival of the species, actual and future. The society of risk, in which there are threats of many ways, is also the result of a moment of technological innovation. Therefore, it is necessary the existence of limits to the unsure and dangerous human intervention. (SOUZA; MACIEL, 2018, p.96, our translation).

People's behavior, interactions with these animals and their environments, are responsible for the dangers that increasingly threaten not just animal species, but also our own. If humans do nothing, outbreaks like Covid-19 would continue to occur, and likely accelerate in number. Clearing land for human activities leads to contact with animals and their secretions at an unparalleled intensity (BREIMAN, 2020).

Some animals may be tolerant of organisms to which humans have not previously been exposed, and to which people do not have protective immune responses. Occasionally, as in the case of the current pandemic, genetic characteristics make it harmful for humans. Hunting and marketing of wild, environmentally threatened animals have often been the final blow, providing a path for pathogens to be transmitted to susceptible humans (BREIMAN, 2020).

So for example, the West Nile virus is a virus of migratory birds from Africa. They have been landing in the United States for hundreds of years, but there has never been a West Nile virus until 1999 there. The reason is that the existence of diversity of birds contributes to the prevention of the disease. What happens now is that, as over the last 20 years there has been a loss in avian biodiversity, the disease has come back (SAMUEL, 2020).

Woodpeckers and rails became rare in many environments. Instead, there is a lot of birds like crows and robins, which are generalist species that can live in any kind of degraded environment, and they are really good carriers of West Nile virus. Lyme disease follows the same rationality. When there were intact forests over the northeast of the United States, there was as well diversity of woodland species that lived in those forests, like opossums and chipmunks, which helped control the tick population. However, over the past 50 years, suburbs have expanded into the forests, so opossums and chipmunks have become rare, making it propitious for Lyme disease to prevail (SAMUEL, 2020).

In the end, deforestation has a major impact upon preventing disease contamination. When dengue broke out in South Florida in 2009, it was immediately considered an invasion from some foreign place. Insecticide was used and a military-style assault on the mosquitoes were staged. However, it turns out the mosquitoes that do carry dengue have been in South Florida for a long time. People say dengue outbreak was unprecedented, but not really, it was a corollary of social factors (SAMUEL, 2020).

Up to 75% of human infectious diseases that have recently emerged are known or are suspected to have originated from animals. Resilience to habitat changes brought on by humans is not the only factor that increases zoonotic virus spillover. Certain causes of decline in wildlife populations have also facilitated spillover of animal viruses to humans. Amplification of disease transmission is also likely in intensive animal production facilities that dictate close contact (HITCHENS; JOHNSON, 2020).

This decline of wild population is a big result of urbanistic policies and the crisis of overpopulation. "Urbanism seeks, in truth, a rational logic, architectonic, and the city is seen as an agent of wealth and efficacy." (GARBOSSA; SILVA, 2016, p.166, our translation). Societies have been urbanizing very fast, and even though the aim is to address the overpopulation issue, the environment suffers with it. In the end, people suffer as well through pandemic occurrences (GARBOSSA; SILVA, 2016).

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“Therefore, one of the biggest challenges of today’s time is to consolidate *urban sustainability*, which is associated to the development of public policies.” (GARBOSSA; SILVA, 2016, p.166, our translation, author’s emphasis). Technology comes up as a way to improve people’s lives, but that does not mean it is here without a cost, and this cost is paid by the environment crisis (LEVES; CENCI, 2018).

It is noted that the ample conjunct of technological and industrial information conditions the optics of political and economic systems, as well it amplifies the collective and individual well-being through countless facilities this advance proportionate. On the other hand, as well as they may improve the possibilities of access towards everything better and most modern that exists in the world, there is also many negative aspects derived from this modernized development, in which: [...] environment degradation [...]. (LEVES; CENCI, 2018, p.11, our translation).

The wild animals that transmit diseases do not choose to interact with humans, while people on the other hand, by urbanizing fast and without sustainable planning, do. Humans put themselves at risk when they take animals from the wild and bring them into contact. People also endanger themselves when they do not think carefully about how they source animal-derived products, when they destroy habitat, when they live in close proximity to wildlife and when they feed and habituate wildlife to humans (YATES, 2020).

While this adaptation does not happen, the numbers of zoonotic disease-transmitted cases are increasing, according to the UN Environment Programme (FOR BETTER OR WORSE, 2020). A review of the global trends of emerging infectious diseases since 1940 confirms their outbreaks have been increasing with time. About 60% of these diseases are zoonotic, and over 70% of them are caused by pathogens originated in wildlife.

Some of the reasons why the frequency of the diseases is on the rise is because of the increased close contact between wildlife and humans, encroachments of land, urbanization and socio-economic development. As the human population increases and economies are developed, the demand for food and other goods ascends. Industries like agriculture are intensified. Land use, climate change, economic development, population growth and people living in densely populated areas are all contributors to zoonotic emergence, making it easy for diseases to spill over from animals to humans (FOR BETTER OR WORSE, 2020).

According to INRAE (LERAYER; GUÉGAN, 2020), a French public research institute, the fault is upon human activity for the crossover between species as the number of infectious disease epidemics is growing very fast. Given the growth of the human population and its ever more intense use of planetary resources, the destruction of more and more ecosystems multiplies contacts (ORJOLLET, 2020).

A key area of concern is deforestation taken as means of making way for agriculture and intensive livestock farming. The widespread use of antibiotics in the livestock industry has also led to bacterial pathogens building up immunity to front-line drugs. Urbanization and habitat fragmentation are also highly disruptive of the balance between species, while global warming can push disease-carrying animals into new territory as well. The only sure thing is that human activity facilitated transmissions (ORJOLLET, 2020).

When people think about some wild animals like bats, they tend to demonize them because of the way they look. Their image also exposes the deeply ingrained problems of speciesism, creating the perception bats are spreading diseases to humans instead of people catching diseases from bats.

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However, this could not be further from the truth. Humans are not the victims, but the instigators (YANG, 2020).

Vampire bats were killed in Peru during the 1970s to control the transmission of rabies, an act driven by fear and a lack of knowledge about the disease. However, eliminating tends to target the adult vampire bats, who are immunized to the disease, as compared to juvenile ones, who are not immunized. Such events highlight the prevalence of speciesism, the idea that being human is a good enough reason to have greater moral rights than non-human animals (YANG, 2020).

During the pandemic of Covid-19, people can finally analyze how it would be a world without human domination. In Helen Macdonald's (2020) article in The New York Times, she explores the videos and powerful advances of wild animals towards entire cities during the quarantine period. They are reclaiming what is theirs, she says, and indeed seems to be just about it. However, most importantly is the ability of reflection generated. These images are living proofs of what would it be if a dominant conception of humanity would not be acclaimed by societies all over the world.

At the end of March, humans were spending many hours each day on the internet watching different graphs of projected deaths, maps of infection hot spots and photos of masked travelers huddled in subway cars. Then, new images appeared, and they were quite unlike the others. There were maps showing improvements in air quality, photographs of deserted streets, squares bathed in sunlight and, most surprisingly, videos of wild animals thriving in newly deserted towns and cities (MACDONALD, 2020).

Science does not deny anymore that human activity has altered the substantial form of every natural aspects of the Planet, creating a situation of extreme risk not only for other species, but also for human beings themselves. All these geological and climatically alterations, as well as those in the fauna and flora, were motivated much more by hedonist desire of productivity and commodity than for the necessity of auto realization of our species (CAMPELLO; AMARAL, 2020, p.38, our translation).

The idea proposed by Macdonald (2020) is of a reflection on life without humans. Human progress upon nature, traditionally seen as a movement outward from cities to conquer the wild, seems to have not only halted but also turned back on itself. Humans cannot go anywhere; they are stuck in their own homes, and it is the animals, suddenly, that are coming towards them. The Earth is healing with everyone quarantined.

The pandemic crisis seems like an intensification of a growing series of emergencies: warnings of unstoppable climate breakdown, a terrible increase in forest fires and rapid Arctic ice-melt (MACDONALD, 2020). "We must rethink our place in the universe under the weight of the degradation of nature in virtue of the impoverishment of human conscience under its common patrimony, the planet Earth." (ALENCASTRO, 2015, p.54, our translation).

"The most efficient way to distort reality is by denying it; if people say even to themselves that the problem does not exist, they would never have to worry about what to do with it." (JOY, 2014, p.41, our translation). The suggestion is that of the possibility of embracing the problem derived from human domination aiming at better addressing the long-term damages, amplified with the current pandemic.

4 Final considerations

The way people behave plays an immense role with which dangers they face and will face in

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the future. Such is the impact of context upon life and the way things happen, but there are a couple of choices. First, to accept that outbreaks like Covid-19 will continue to occur and likely accelerate in number as human populations grow, their incursions into a variety of habitats naturally expand, so will their encounters with different animal diseases. Secondly, there is the decision on whether the threat to humans is too great and whether there should be an intentional effort on changing things.

For instance, environmental experts and public servants should deliberate and decide the best way governments could tightly control the harvesting of trees and expand use of land while considering the impacts on animal habitats. They may do this by aiming at reducing the risk of animal-to-human transmission of diseases. The first step as a civilization is to recognize that there is a problem. The second is to act responsibly. Rather than blaming the creepy bat, the anteater or the civet cat, it is time to stop demonizing animals and listen to the experts on animal matter.

Humans are the only animals to be blamed for the state of life they live. It should not take a global health crisis to change the way animals are treated. Whether a dog or a child, every animal is worthy of compassion. No one belongs in a wet market, on a plate, in a closet, nor anywhere else besides the natural habitat. Restricting the trade of wildlife sure is a step in the right direction. There must be focus on minimizing interactions between wildlife and humans.

Blaming animals is just a way as to avoid on reflecting the real perils caused by many epidemics and pandemics. This demonization of animals tends to create propitious conditions for a State of exception, in which the rights and freedoms of its citizens are suspended, and regimes of quarantine and solitude imposed. World cooperation and acceptance towards international pacts on environment tend to be the most urgent need for the survival of Earth.

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