

Biopolitics, collective health and Kazakhstan: from the Declaration of Alma Ata to Borat Sagdiyev. An atypical view?

La biopolítica, la salud colectiva y el Kazajstán: de Alma Ata a Borat Sagdiyev. ¿Una mirada atópica?

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At the end of his beautiful, intense, and necessary text on biopolitics and collective health, Kaminsky mentions the “famous Alma Ata Conference (Kazakhstan),” where the goals of the (1976) utopian ideal of *health for all by the year 2000* are repeated, at the same time as:

True biopolitical view of the neoliberal world is plain to see: health, just like any other thing, is a source of financial investment.^(1 p.140) [Own translation]

If on the one hand, utopian ideals are heard to be more frail at present, it looks as if human hyper-longevity has become the only idea that resembles a utopia (even closer to a yet impossible immortality) as a biopolitical mission in the field of health.

But before developing these issues and in order to align with the immunological outlook presented by Esposito,⁽²⁾ used by the author of the article, it could be stated that our point of view may perhaps be criticized for addressing atopic areas, as if they were immunological expressions of reactivity or, more colloquially, of an allergy to the biopolitical *Zeitgeist* mentioned by the author of the text.

Perhaps there is no more room for utopias, and should the proposals for resistance to the present status quo be weakened,

in terms of expressive changes and not only of route adjustments toward a predetermined ideological and economic goal, a path can still exist even within our disagreement, bordering atopic reactions. However, it has to be clarified that these comments do not result from passive, merely reactive standpoints but from an allegorical rhetoric that brings stimulating issues for debate.

The image of Kazakhstan depicted by the famous Alma Ata Conference can be now associated with the cartoon-like “Kazakh” character, Borat Sagdiyev, created by the English comedian Sacha Baron Cohen for a TV show which was finally released as a film.⁽³⁾ This entanglement shows the vast sociocultural contrasts between Kuzcek, his native village in Kazakhstan, and the core of individualistic and globalized neoliberalism (US and A=USA) by means of a fake documentary, using an incisive type of humor, even extremely grotesque at times. It is right in this place where the objectionable biopolitical models emerge, predominate and spread, just as Kaminsky illustrates. For this hyper-grotesque era, hyper-grotesque humor.

Perhaps Borat may be interpreted as an atopic emblem of our time, living through a parody that produces a shocking Don Quixote of the third millennium. He is awkwardly immersed in a plot beyond his understanding,

and therefore his actions prove to be ineffective and produce an immune rejection as a foreign body, or rather, a foreign mind.

The entanglement refers to this character who leaves his country to shoot a documentary in order to show, upon his return, the cultural contributions that the American nation can offer. His partner, documentary producer Azamat Bagatov, would be the equivalent to Sancho Panza, though adapted to our times, in this case a disloyal squire who at a point abandons Borat after a terrible and obscene fight caused when dishonoring the image of Borat's beloved woman.

Because he has not been educated in a globalized individualistic environment, as shown by the reactions of American passers-by when faced with his buoyancy upon his arrival in the "US and A," Borat is rejected due to the typically congenial nature of his community life in Kuzcek, absurdly antiquated and prejudiced in many aspects. The "Kazakh" is a divergent element in a huge American metropolis with the customs and values of advanced capitalist democracies; at the same time, he fails to notice his unbecoming situation, before his embarrassing behavior, typical of his extreme *gauche* condition. This can be hilarious and at times even embarrassing or rude, but always powerful when participating in social situations that are usual in the immunological contexts of the globalized world.

Borat becomes hilarious in the "US and A" because he is an obscene alien out of control when confronted with the predominating sociocultural and technological values. Symptomatically, he is spellbound by a virtual Dulcinea he sees on TV, half-naked in a provocative swimsuit, the character of CJ (Pamela Anderson) in the outdated TV serial "Baywatch." While striving to fulfill his passion/impossible mission, he decides to travel through the American nation to meet her.

At the beginning of the film, when his hometown is shown, Borat introduces his mother, an aged woman who seems to be over 70 but who is actually 43, as he says. Upon his arrival in the "US and A," he

claims that he has brought some gipsy tears to protect himself from AIDS.

These two brief sequences may be considered suggestive illustrations of negative biopolitical thinking. It is plausible to state that, in schematic terms, individuals from the so-called powerful Euro-American nations are conditioned by the possibility of, in relation to the preservation of life, reaching a remarkable longevity. Therefore, they need to rely on technological products and sustainable health practices, if possible, due to the force of their "evidence," which result from sound empirical studies, systematic revisions and meta analyses.

Clearly enough, popular beliefs are not properly legitimized for consumers to exercise their right to choose their preferences, in an efficient and informed manner, in cost-benefit terms. Although they may exercise this right, they are compelled to loosen their qualified political performance to fully devote themselves to acting as players capable of acquiring goods and services in order to achieve the longest possible self-preservation. In this sense, we may say that within extreme individualism, we are the sole representatives of our own "species."

Agnes Heller⁽⁴⁾ criticizes the authoritarian regimes of these democracies that appear to have a dual facet: on the one hand, a political-liberal side which focuses on dealing with the injustices caused by the economic imbalance of capitalism at a national scale; on the other hand, an economic-liberal general side, which causes inequalities at a global scale. This setting is characterized by: its tendency to standardize individuals; its intolerance to the unusual and eccentric; its inclination toward a dictatorship of majorities and its preference for shaping a "right collective opinion."

In short, Borat embodies the subversion of all these standpoints with his singularly anomalous behavior, pathetically incompatible with predominating liberal values.

We are certainly not advocating those non-democratic tendencies which organize social and economic systems, even because

the *Boratian* proposal also humorously highlights several precarious, outdated and unfair systems. However, we do stress the persecution guideline followed by current (bio) politics of health promotion.⁽⁵⁾

They somewhat make a poor attempt to disguise the inexorable finitude of human life and set the greatest possible expansion of its limits as a goal. The Grim Reaper, with its inexorable sickle, is being replaced and fragmented by risk factors, in theory more manageable.⁽⁶⁾ At the same time, adopting healthy risk-avoidance behaviors cannot be seriously taken as a solution to the problem, as if the future of humankind depended exclusively on it, as public health authorities seem to vehemently preach at times.⁽³⁾ There is not sufficient ground for so many debates on the scientific reasons for these persecuting and totalitarian perspectives that introduce a feeling of collective guilt.

Risks would be negative images of utopias turned into objects, but only virtual.⁽⁷⁾ To gain total control and keep threatening risks at bay would be considered the new utopia. It is ultimately about defeating the passing of time and being as "immortal" as possible, controlling, utopically, all looming risks. All these objectifications make us wonder not only about how we want to live but also for how long and under what conditions. Could it be that we are no longer in

a utopia but trying to live in an uchronia (an imaginary idea of time in history)?⁽⁸⁾

In this context, should we still delve into the human quality of humanity? However, does it make any sense to ontologically discuss human subjectivity as founder of its condition? Does this matter become anachronistic, because subjectivity may cease to exist, once it is no longer identified by the empiricist devices of visualization, significance and valorization that will be submitted to the ultimate judges who establish the existence of things? What remains, as Agamben suggests,⁽⁹⁾ will only be found in museums?

At the beginning of the pilgrimage of Borat and Azamat in the "US and A," we can hear the song *Born to be Wild* by Steppenwolf ("Born to be wild" in the sense of "rebellious," from the soundtrack of Dennis Hopper's film *Easy Rider*, from the late 60s, a time that indicated that "the dream is over," referring to the utopian counter-cultural utopian biopolitical promises of that period). And this topic reappears in Borat as an atopic, cartoon-like allegory confronted with the present biopolitical models. Perhaps in this context, "wild" could now only mean something biopolitically "incorrect" because it is improper or unsuitable for the paranoid conservatism of this time. But it is essential for criticizing the predominating hard, single thinking, as Kaminsky does in his article.

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