

## THE EMERGENCY AS THRESHOLD

by

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Born in Asmara but trained in the United Kingdom, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is the first African to become General Director of the World Health Organization (WHO). He starts his public career in Ethiopia, where he holds important institutional positions: Minister of Health from 2005 to 2012 and Foreign Minister from 2012 to 2016. But just at that time he is accused of covering up a cholera epidemic to avoid fallout on the Ethiopian economy. Despite this, he runs for driving WHO and in July 2017 he takes the lead even if, unlike his predecessors, he's not a doctor but a biologist.

Behind his election, in addition to the great diplomatic work done by African Union (coincidentally based in Ethiopia) there is direct support from China. Precisely on Chinese indications many African countries vote for him, so that he is elected with 133 votes out of 183. Moreover, in recent years Beijing has invested tens of millions of dollars in the black continent. And if it is calculated that China not only owns half of the Ethiopian external debt, but recently President Xi Jinping has promised to multiply investments in Ethiopia, it's easy to understand why Ghebreyesus did nothing but praise the behavior of the Chinese during the Covid-19 pandemic.

So January the 14<sup>th</sup>, while doctors check the complete opposite, he declares that there is no proof of transmission "from human to human"; two weeks later he appreciates the transparency of the Chinese government while those who sound the alarm are arrested. Then, in mid-February, he praises Beijing for deploying "a gigantic containment effort". Only on March 11<sup>th</sup>, in the face of world evidence, he resigns himself to declaring the pandemic.

The story is not only serious but also instructive. For a long time, in fact, trade was thought of as the most important geopolitical affair, as there are no borders, limits or devastations capable of stopping trade relations between countries. Today, however, this role is taken on by health (and the turnover it represents) since viruses know no frontiers and, on the contrary, they are strengthened precisely by globalization. The problem then is: how to manage this paradigm shift?

Whatever our opinion on Covid-19 (a necessary consequence of capitalist development, Earth's revenge against the offenses caused by *homo sapiens*, a simple contingency due to human error and so on), the fact remains that the aftermath will no longer be the same. Because to get out of the emergency it will not be enough to simply make new economic choices, but it will be necessary to set up a "new life economy", meaning by this a (not only economically) sustainable life.

It's not by chance that intellectuals expressed themselves even before economists. Few are those who maintain continuity, denying the evidence of the fracture caused by the coronavirus; more numerous are than those who recognize the event as a trauma that will forever change our relationship with the disease. But with different shades. In his excessive and provocative style, Slavoj Žižek speaks of contagion as a historical turning point, that will hit capitalism hard by bringing out a new community spirit. In this sense, Giorgio Agamben explains, the emergency represents an opportunity to challenge the authority of "scientists". Arundhati Roy believes instead that the epidemic, especially in the United States, brings out the injustice of a health system that excludes the poorest.

In short, for all Covid-19 works as a threshold, or a door, something that marks the transition between two worlds: the one before the epidemic, and the one following the epidemic. However, it is to be hoped that as an emergency, passage does not function like a revolving door. Because if we are not careful with the revolving door, we can lose orientation, and risk going back to where we came from.

