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PANDEMIC (TV) (2007): CORRUPTION PROCESSES DURING A VIRAL EPIDEMIC IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES, USA

Amenaza Letal (TV) (2007): Procesos de corrupción durante una epidemia viral en la ciudad de Los Ángeles, USA

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Abstract

A health crisis caused by the H3N7 virus that arrives in the city of Los Angeles, California, from Australia, is the trigger for a crisis that includes acts of corruption. As during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Pandemic (2007)* by Armand Mastroianni shows sequences of lack of political decision, micro and macro corruption, as well as a lack of social responsibility that causes thousands of deaths in a few hours. Corruption in the response to a health emergency is a serious problem that requires urgent attention as it can dramatically undermine public health efforts, exacerbate inequality, and erode trust in institutions. Here we seek to describe a brief analysis of corruption during the H3N7 epidemic, addressing the effects of corruption on health activities, exacerbating the impact of the disease, and showing the lack of social and moral commitment of citizens. Likewise, the health system is affected by political decisions and acts of corruption, reducing its response capacity.

Keywords: Corruption; healthcare system; public procurement; Covid-19 pandemic; combating corruption.

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Resumen

Una crisis sanitaria causada por el virus H3N7 que llega a la ciudad de Los Ángeles, California, procedente de Australia, es el desencadenante para una crisis que incluye actos de corrupción. Al igual que durante la pandemia por COVID-19, *Amenaza letal / Pandemic* (2007) de Armand Mastroianni, muestra secuencias de falta de decisión política, micro y macro corrupción, así como una falta de responsabilidad social que ocasionan miles de muertes en pocas horas. La corrupción en la respuesta a una emergencia sanitaria es un problema grave que requiere atención urgente ya que puede socavar dramáticamente los esfuerzos de salud pública, exacerbar la desigualdad y erosionar la confianza en las instituciones. Aquí buscamos describir un breve análisis sobre la corrupción durante la epidemia por H3N7 abordando los efectos de la corrupción sobre las actividades sanitaria, recrudesciendo el impacto de la enfermedad y mostrando la falta de compromiso social y moral de los ciudadanos. Asimismo, el sistema de salud se ve afectado por las decisiones políticas y los actos de corrupción reduciendo su capacidad de respuesta.

Palabras clave: corrupción; sistema de salud; contratación pública; pandemia COVID-19; combatir la corrupción.

Technical data sheet:

Original title: *Pandemic*

Other Titles: *Amenaza letal, Pandemic: Virus fatal, Pandemic - Il virus della marea.*

Country: United States.

Year: 2007.

Director: Armand Mastroianni.

Script: Bryce Zabel, Jackie Zabel.

Music: Hallmark Entertainment Opening.

Photography: Amit Bhattacharya.

Montage: Jennifer Jean Cacavas.

Actors: Tiffani Thiessen, French Stewart, Faye Dunaway, Eric Roberts, Bruce Boxleitner, Vincent Spano.

Color: color.

Original language: English.

Duration: 180 minutes.

Genre: action, drama, horror.

Producer: Hallmark Entertainment.

Synopsis: The movie depicts the transmission of a deadly virus, possibly originating from Australian wildlife, to Los Angeles, California. The epidemiologists, Dr. Kayla Martin and Dr. Martin, take the decision to quarantine all passengers of the flight before they arrive at LAX. Despite the severity of the situation, the decision sparks fear and resistance as the virus has no known cure. As the outbreak intensifies, the government

imposes emergency and population control measures, resulting in vandalism and criminal activity throughout the city.

Links:

<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v399758>

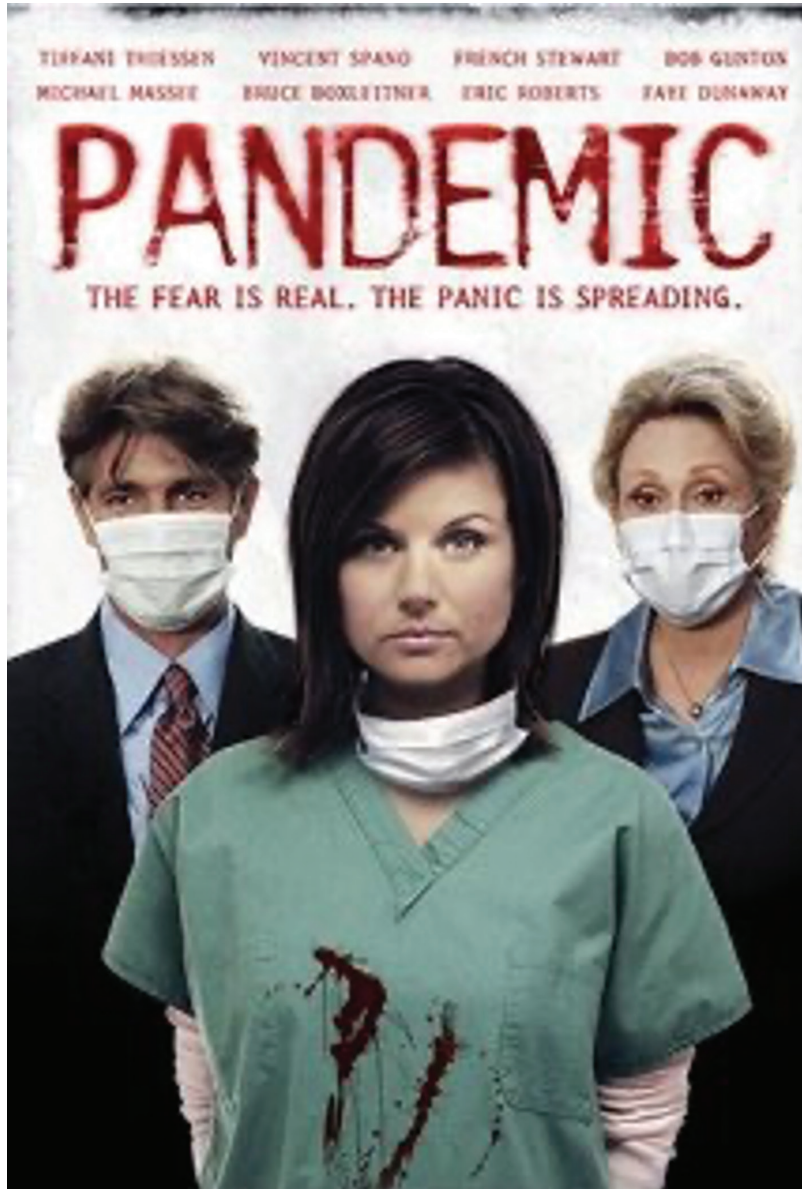
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0802821/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycTBH_ejnfHo

Introduction

Just as journalistic reports have kept us in touch with reality for centuries, cinema has done the same since its birth at the end of 1895¹. Nowadays, all postmodernity can be transmitted in films that not only tell the dreams of producers and writers, but can reflect actions inherently tied to the human being. In fact, cinema as conceived from neurosciences is a particular event, of inner enjoyment of each human being, and in which its previous and future histories are drawn on the canvas of the frames of Cinematic Transit². Just as cinema can go to medicine, and tie it up to see with other eyes the scenes of each film, each character, each event, even the moments we see that can give us hope or take it away^{3,4}, we believe cinema can also transgress the big screen and tie to other human, social and mathematical areas.

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Original poster

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Since first spreading in 2020, COVID-19 has shaken the social structures at all levels, creating a state of emergency in every country^{5, 6}. By taking subtle steps to reduce cases and flatten the epidemiological curve of deaths, they corrupted many health centers and governments worldwide⁷. The scandals surrounding the management of the COVID-19 pandemic have been varied and alarming, ranging from the procurement of substandard medical equipment, expired supplies, and exaggerated costs of oxygen cylinders, to corrupt allocation of vaccines, price gouging, and the manipulation of patient admissions to critical care units in hospitals^{8, 9}. These unethical and illegal practices have had a devastating impact on the ability of countries to effectively respond to the pandemic.

Although corruption has been rampant in Latin American countries during the pandemic, there has been limited exploration of its impact on medicine by the scientific and technological communities¹⁰. This disconnect could be due to a lack of understanding of how corruption affects clinical practice, and how it influences political decisions related to healthcare. Recognizing and addressing the issue of corruption in the healthcare system is crucial in mitigating its negative effects on the pandemic response¹¹. Cinema can serve as a powerful tool for communication and can help shed light on corrupt practices that arise from decision-making in crisis situations, as has been seen in other contexts^{12, 13}. Therefore, in this manuscript, a brief analysis of corruption is presented in the midst of a health crisis caused by a foreign and Cosmopolitan virus that reaches the city of Los Angeles, California.

Beginning of the epidemic

Pandemic (2007), a film by RHI Entertainment Production produced in two parts by Larry Levinson and Robert Halmi Jr., and directed by Armand Mastroianni, talks about a virus that is gradually tracked by the epidemiologists Kayla

Martin and Carl Ratner from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and becomes a lethal threat, the name given to the film in Latin America.

In this film, a respiratory virus is brought from Australia through a flight that just landed in the Californian city with patient zero deceased. After a very high-grade fever, cough, strange convulsions, and haemoptysis, the patient infects more than one hundred flight crew members: *"All I know is that there are passengers who would not like to breathe the same air"* - Flight Captain.

Epidemiological indications are then followed to isolate patients and diagnose them, but one of the crew members escapes, becoming the main viral mobiliser of the city. Political decisions are made on how to inform the city about the event, how to ensure safety and avoid contagion, what has to be and not to be done, and which measures are being taken by both the mayor of Los Angeles and the Government of California to confront this epidemic that is causing thousands of infections and deceases within hours that the virus is spreading.

Besides, there was a federal prisoner travelling on the flight, who despite the guard of the FBI manages to escape the CDC isolation camp, and causes several infections and the seizure of a medicine that improved the disease profile of the infected people. This situation generates a splintered dialog between the CDC, the mayor of Los Angeles (Richard Dellesandro), and the governor of California (Lillian Schaefer) about how the current situation should be handled and what measures are more beneficial for the city, rather than the citizens. This journey through the film allows us to capture some frames and present the cases where we believe that corruption events are chosen, in view of the emergency, anguish, chaos and fear caused by not knowing the viral enemy well.

The place of corruption during the epidemic

Corruption has become a widespread and multifaceted problem during the COVID-19

pandemic. It has taken on various forms such as the misappropriation of public funds, nepotism, bribery, and fraud in the procurement of medical supplies and equipment. These acts of corruption have significantly hindered efforts to contain the spread of the virus and have had a detrimental impact on clinical practice. For instance, a study by Aljadeed et al. (2021) revealed that corruption in the procurement of medical supplies and equipment during the pandemic has resulted in shortages and exorbitant prices, ultimately impeding efforts to control the spread of the virus¹⁴. Furthermore, Ali et al. (2021) found that corruption in the distribution of vaccines has led to unequal access to the vaccine, with vulnerable populations being left behind¹⁵. Despite these alarming findings, there seems to be a lack of awareness about the effects of corruption on clinical practice, and there is a need for greater recognition of corruption in healthcare decision-making. One way to address this issue is through the use of film as a means of communication, which can help raise awareness about corruption and its impact on healthcare systems.

Corruption has also had an impact on the behavior of inhabitants. These effects are evident among health professionals who, seeing their own convenience, often choose to engage in dishonest activities in patient care, selection of key units, use of equipment and resources, and hiring of personnel¹⁶⁻¹⁸. These dishonest human actions can be shown in sequences in *Pandemic* (2007). As a first example, we can see the case of Jack Hender (Photo 1), the crew member who escapes from the plane and, in an act of little civic responsibility, becomes a viral spreading machine (of the so-called respiratory virus H3N7), throughout its journey. This act can be described as the Genesis of human corruption, since, without a collective idea, it generates a manipulation of the biosecurity rules set out by the governments and the CDC to safeguard public health, but a single case can be the concomitant of many deaths.

Then, a newscast reports the decease of the patient and reports that it may be bioterrorism or infection. *"They wore a level four protective clothing that applies to bioterrorism; even so, the CDC has not said anything,"* the reporter informed. Then, the journalist calls a direct officer of the mayor of Los Angeles asking for the scoop on the case in exchange for the friendship that they have previously had. We are presented here a possibility of corruption and influence peddling in view of the eventual scoop of the media.

Subsequently, while the viral crisis is already causing 14 deaths in Australia, 4 cases in Japan, and a number of suspected patients in Europe, the governor who is in Sacramento calls the mayor to avoid changing the following speech by Max Sorkosky, director of the CDC: *"People in the media have us hoping that it is avian flu, but there are many other diseases, believe me (...) vaccines require months of study; if this is something new, the opportunity for a vaccine to be available now does not exist, I do not want you to write that we are helpless, as you like (...) if this is a new influenza the first action is to avoid the spreading, and then contain it using antiviral drugs like Tanaflu"* (Photo 2a).

"I do not want this shameful attitude to be perceived as our position, our leadership always has a firm stand" the governor said in the telephone communication with the mayor, who without hesitation gave statements to calm the population: *"I know that the flight situation is complicated (...) I will meet with the CDC, and as your friend I will consider your welfare and trust as sacred"* This dialog is also an example of how corruption can break in and change an explanatory and fair scientific message about the current situation for a populist message that continues the collective link on the current government policies (Photo 2b).

Nevertheless, corruption opportunities can also break into the medical and scientific act. Let us see the following case where, after 124 hours

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Photo 1. Initial actions to prevent contagion. A. Arrival of the flight from Australia with the index case deceased during the trip. The CDC keeps the crew members in safekeeping until the infectious disease is elucidated. B. Jack Hender escape. C. and D. Jack Hender spreads the disease by manifesting respiratory symptoms.



Photo 2. Epidemiological control actions and political decisions against the infectious disease. A. Max Sorkosky gives an informative speech on the disease. B. Coordination between the governor's office and the mayor's office to reduce the media impact of the disease. C. Decision making on the use of *Tanafllu* and *Cotoxil* in patients with the disease

of the first infection, 71 cases and 3 deaths, the possibilities of treatment are discussed between Dr. Max Sorkosky and Dr. Keyla Martin (Photo 2c).

Dr. Sorkosky: *"The mutated virus moves faster than the avian virus."*

Dr. Martin: *"We already lost people with the use of Tanafllu."*

Dr. Sorkosky: *"Well, it will not work for everyone, but there are others who have not taken antivirals and are not sick."*

Dr. Martin: *"We cannot wait. We are talking about more than 200 people that we know were exposed, it is not a matter of supply."*

Dr. Sorkosky: *"If they all start now, we split them between Tanafllu and Cotoxil."*

Dr. Martin: *"We treat them like guinea pigs, I do not understand why we should not give them both medicines."*

Dr. Sorkosky: *"Because we have to know what works and know it for sure."*

Dr. Martin: *So, what do I say to the family of the deceased? That we were wrong with the medicine?*

Dr. Sorkosky: *"That is the only way and we both know it."*

Clinical trials, mainly in cases of health emergency, follow a protocol to establish appropriate treatment guidelines among patients and know what decisions based on evidence can be made. Therefore, scientists have the responsibility to continue with scientific methods and to establish these treatments in welfare of society. As we discussed previously, during the COVID-19 emergency in Peru, the guidelines of the Sinopharm BBIBP-CorV clinical trial were not correctly

followed and the confidentiality of the patient groups (arms of the study) on the use of vaccine or placebo has been violated, as well as the Vacunagate case⁶, so the results have not been reliable despite the safeguard of international organizations. This has diminished the role of researchers and participating universities.

In another dialog between the Governor and the mayor, the axis of power is discussed again: *"Mr. Mayor, Los Angeles might be your city, but the whole state of California is my responsibility."* There is a competition for decision-making in the management of the pandemic, corrupted by the power and political support of each one. While these (dis)agreements occur, infections continue to spread (map on the left, contagions marked in green) and the measures taken are inadequate and riots arise within 149 hours after the first contagion (Photo 3). These social problems include overloading patients in hospitals, the theft of the entire *Cotoxil* lot, which had no police shelter and was shot down by the mafia of Edward Vicente, lootings throughout the city due to the shortage of products and desperation over the contagion situation, and the illegal trade of *Cotoxil*.

Regarding these situations, the following acts that have little transparency and are opportunities for corrupt actions are proposed.

Edward Vicente's lawyer blackmails the mayor's office, requesting that he be granted a permanent release and his charges be released, in exchange for returning the *Cotoxil* lot, after knowing that it is effective against the disease. Since no agreement was reached, he plans to make an illegal business, which is, from the one million doses he had, he places 50 thousand in trade at 200 Dollars a dose, in order to obtain 10 million dollars within the illegal trade (Photo 4). This results in a string of acts of corruption in order to access the medicine, which begins to be sold in Beverly Hills.

Likewise, in the political environment here are attempts among officers that arise, as

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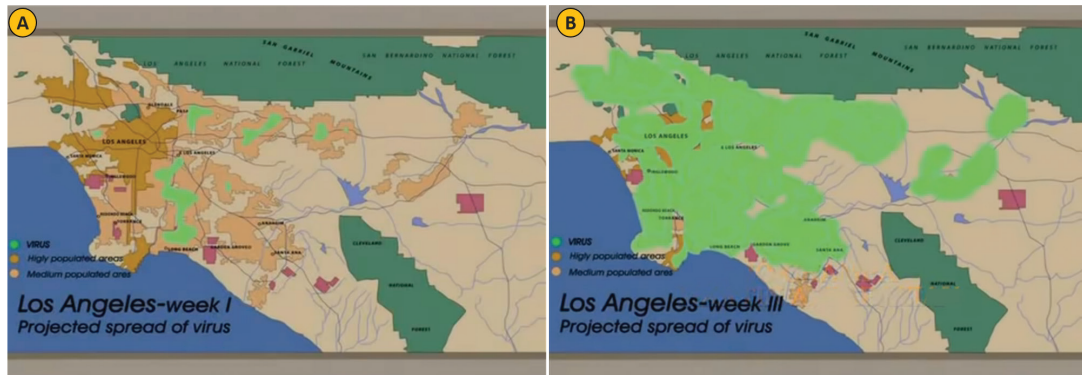


Photo 3. Distribution of the disease and georeferencing of the cases of the disease (green dots) at the beginning of the disease (A) and 149 hours after the first contagion (B)



Photo 4. Consequences of the H3N7 epidemic. A. Vandalism and theft of *Cotoxil* in transit to the city of Los Angeles. B. Black market and acts of corruption in the sale of *Cotoxil*. C. Use of the ice-skating room for the storage of corpses during the peaks of contagion of the epidemic. This is due to the saturation of the morgue in hospitals

indicated in the following conversation between the mayor and the governor:

Governor: *“I hope we can put our political differences aside and work together on this”*

Mayor: *“What I am about to say to you is between us, and if you quote me, I will come after you with everything I have. I can have an unmarked at your house in 15 minutes*

and I can have you and your daughter out of the county in 30 minutes.”

Governor: *“Well, thank you, that is kind, but this is where I belong”*

Conclusions

In *Pandemic* (2007) we see how the lack of political decision, micro and macro acts of corruption, as well as a lack of social responsibility

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cause thousands of deaths in a few hours of the spread of the H3N7 virus. As with the COVID-19 pandemic, the H3N7 epidemic presents an unprecedented challenge to the community and governments, both in terms of public health and economic stability.

Regrettably, the crisis has created a breeding ground for corrupt practices, with numerous reports of individuals and organizations exploiting the situation for their personal benefit. Such corruption has the potential to undermine the response to the pandemic and intensify its adverse effects on society. It is crucial that governments give utmost importance to transparency and accountability in managing the pandemic response and utilize the available technological tools to improve the healthcare system's response to the disease.

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