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COVID-19 Pandemic in Peru: Reflections on Its Gravity and the Nation's Reaction

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ABSTRACT

On the 30th of January 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a global public health emergency of international concern, according to the International Health Regulations (2005). Against the rapidly evolving situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries are facing challenges in the health sector and the economy. This essay seeks to share some reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru. The central idea of this paper argues that both the Peruvian State and society did everything they could to the best of their ability and, despite the nearly 200 thousand deaths, the greatest humanitarian catastrophe in the country's history could have been avoided if the state-actors had (a) compare the COVID-19 epidemic with other events in our history; (b) talk about the strengths and weaknesses when handling the crisis; (c) estimate what would have happened had no action been taken.

Keywords: Pandemic; Peru; History; Social Sciences.

INTRODUCTION

This essay seeks to share some reflections on the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru. In this work, I ponder about what place this event could have in our national history if we compare it with other events. To answer this, I try to take a long-term look but keeping in mind that this involves lost lives and families suffering for their loved ones. In other words, the dead people are not just numbers and each one of the losses is a tragedy for each Peruvian family. Thus, I consider it important to know the

magnitude of the seriousness of the events to be very clear about what we are facing and to be objective to evaluate the actions taken by society. In that sense, I do this exercise as a testimony of the times that we have had to live.

My central idea is that everything possible has been done, and probably a lot has been possible. As a hypothesis, this pandemic has probably been the greatest challenge we had as Peruvians in our history. Nevertheless, taking into account the absence of a welfare state capable of satisfying the social rights of its citizens, the potentially greatest humanitarian catastrophe in our recorded history since the conquest of the Inca Empire was avoided. Thus, we were very close to having a human disaster of proportions only seen when the Spanish established their dominance in this part of the world (Contreras, 2020). So, the magnitude of the misfortune is so gigantic that it is unthinkable to imagine and perhaps it was avoided because the Peruvians did everything they could, despite not having a welfare society.

Because of this, I focus my arguments on trying to answer three different but sequentially logical questions. First, I make a comparison of the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic with other catastrophic events within Peruvian history known in terms of the number of deaths as well as highlighting that these events marked a before and after in Peruvian political history. Second, I wonder about what were the weaknesses and strengths when facing the spread of the disease, trying to be as objective as possible and considering that we are talking about a developing country without a significant industry. And third, I try to pose the worst possible scenario by putting myself in the case of not having done anything and invoking the reader to make the comparison between what would have happened and the reality that happened.

THE PLACE OF COVID-19 IN PERUVIAN HISTORY

If we look at the number of victims claimed by the epidemic in Peruvian history, the COVID-19 epidemic took a year to kill more people than Shining Path and the Armed Forces in the twenty years that the terrorism era lasted (1980-2000) (Berríos-Brown 2019). This can be seen both in the total number of victims and worse when we compare the annual average of victims of the COVID-19 epidemic with the average of the internal armed conflict. Although it could be argued that the events are different (one was an internal war motivated by political interests and the other a pandemic), it is evident that more Peruvians lost family members due to COVID-19 than due to the massacres perpetrated by the actors in the conflict. Therefore, when comparing events such as the Pacific War or terrorism, we get a much smaller number of people affected both in terms of victims and those affected by the catastrophe. That is, every Peruvian has suffered the consequences of the expansion of COVID-19 but there were areas where people's daily lives were not affected by the War of the Pacific (vast regions of the jungle and the mountains) or by incursions of Shining Path (north coast or the Amazon River basin). This already places the COVID-19 epidemic as one of the 10 main known catastrophes in our history, a year has passed since the arrival of the virus in our country.

If we review table No. 1, we can see that the conquest of Tahuantinsuyo took the lives of about 7 million people in a century. This includes both the diseases that reached the region (smallpox, measles, and plague) and the wars fought between the Incas themselves and the local lords who aligned with or antagonized the Spanish. As indicated by Contreras (2020), the demographic collapse of the Andean civilizations led to a reduction of about 80% of the total population before the arrival of the conquerors.

With a much smaller number of victims, the Putumayo genocide claimed the lives of more than 250,000 people (Cox 2017). This event is described as a series of abuses, forced slavery and massacres carried out by rubber businessmen against different ethnic groups that historically inhabited the area. Thus, the native peoples were the most affected; but the magnitude of the tragedy is little known because it is located in one of the most remote areas of Lima as well as in a period where racism was the ideology that legitimized power relations within Peruvian society.

Subsequently, and in just over a year, between 2020 – August 2021, the COVID-19 epidemic has killed more than 200,000 people across the country. These places it in third place of the largest catastrophes recorded in the history of Peru and motivated the application of a series of total quarantines throughout the national territory to stop the spread of the disease. This is how after two strong waves of contagion, COVID-19 has become a leading cause of death during this period of older adults and people with comorbidities. Then we have the earthquake that occurred on May 31, 1970, in the department of Ancash (Caruso & Miller 2015). In this disaster, nearly 100,000 people died as a result of the collapse of buildings caused by the earthquake throughout the north of the country, as well as a flood that destroyed the city of Santo Domingo de Yungay. Thus, Peru had to request international humanitarian aid to mitigate the damage and establish an air bridge to attend to all the victims present throughout the Callejón de Huaylas. Another catastrophe dates back to the end of the 18th century with the rebellion of José Gabriel Condorcanqui, better known as Túpac Amaru II. This was the first great revolution that took place in the Viceroyalty of Peru and it claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people in just two years (Thomson 2016). This is how this uprising ended up exceeding the number of deaths left by the terrorism era (69 thousand people) and all the civil wars of the first caudillismo (41 thousand people) in a country with 1.8 million people.

Lastly, there is the War of the Pacific between Peru and Chile that claimed the lives of about 20 thousand people. Ironically, the entire process of Independence ended up costing approximately the same number of victims. It should be noted that both were political processes characterized by the absence of a stable government and disputes between various leaders who ended up seeking to satisfy their personal interests (Quiroz, 2013). Taking these data into account, it is possible to infer that the catastrophes that claimed the greatest number of victims affected indigenous peoples with the greatest intensity (Contreras, 2020; Barclay and Santos, 2002; CVR, 2004). This shows that Peruvian society for much of its history has been characterized by racism and classism because the indigenous people suffered more in terms of the greater number of deaths. Thus, of the 10 main catastrophes recorded in the history of Peru (Table NO 1), 9 had as main victims indigenous people who lived in rural areas and did not speak Spanish.

Table No 1: 10 Main Known Catastrophes in the History of Peru (Since 1532) by the Number of Deaths.

Historical Events	Total fatalities
Conquest of Peru (1533-1572)	7700000
Putumayo Genocide (1879-1912)	250000
COVID-19 epidemic (2020 - 2021)*	200000

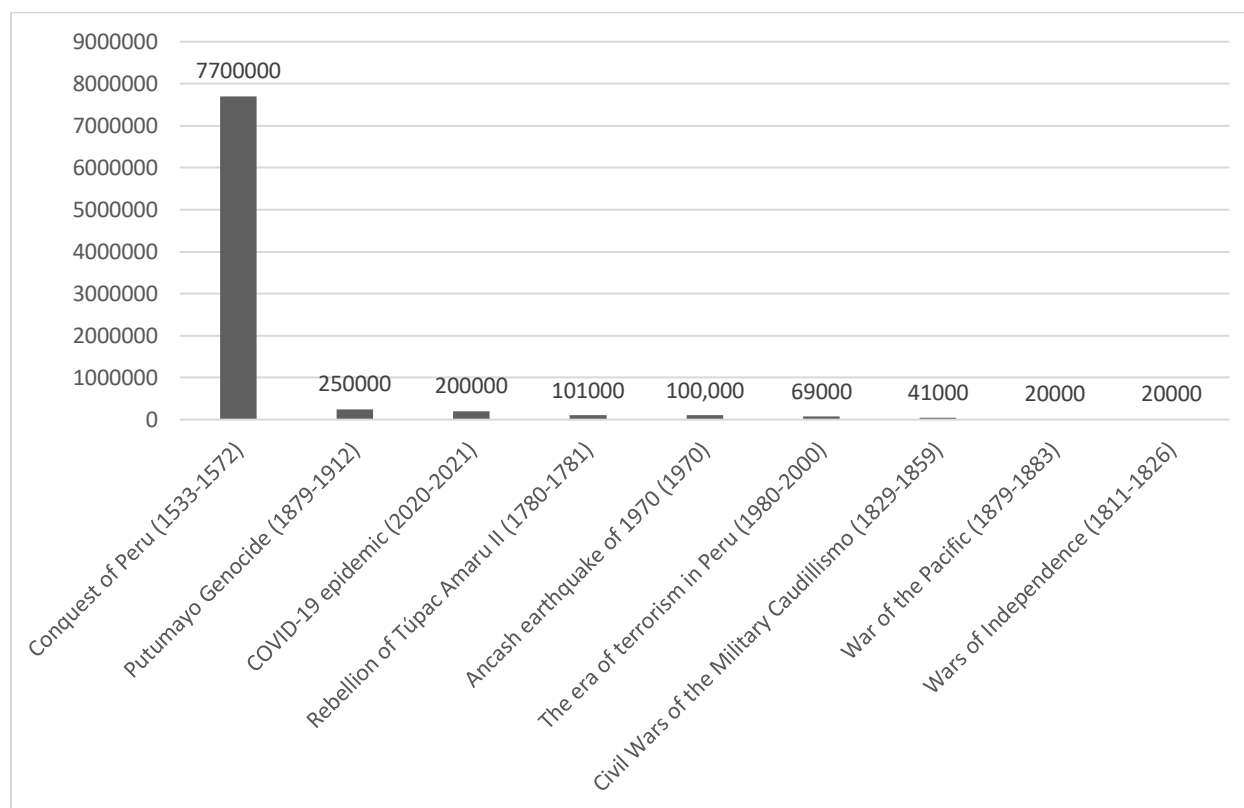
Rebellion of Túpac Amaru II (1780-1781)	101000
Ancash earthquake of 1970 (1970)	100,000
The era of terrorism in Peru (1980-2000)	69000
Civil Wars of the Military Caudillismo (1829-1859)	41000
War of the Pacific (1879-1883)	20000
Wars of Independence (1811-1826)	20000

Source: Author's compilation

* COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University – October 2021.

At the same time, the magnitude of the people affected by these catastrophes is evident when observing Graph No. 1. Specifically, the conquest of Peru took 100 years to kill approximately 8 million people. Conversely, the number of dead people turns out to be much less if we take into account that the Putumayo Genocide of nearly 30 years took the lives of 250 thousand people from different ethnic groups in the Amazon, while the COVID-19 epidemic together with its variants in a little more than a year has killed about 200 thousand people.

Graph NO 1: Total Fatalities of Different Historical Catastrophes.



Source: Author's compilation

However, when the average number of deaths per catastrophe is observed, the magnitude of the crisis faced is more frightening. Specifically, the COVID-19 epidemic

ranks second or third because it registers an average of 100,000 deaths for each of the two years that the catastrophe lasted. In that sense, and taking only this average into account, we can compare the tragedy with the number of deaths left by the Conquest. It should be remembered that this involved epidemics, civil wars and authentic massacres that ended up destroying the pre-Hispanic Andean world.

Table No 2: 10 main known catastrophes in the history of Peru (since 1532) in deaths per year.

Historical Events	Number of deaths per year
Conquest of Peru (1533-1572)	192500
1970 earthquake (1970)	100,000
COVID-19 epidemic (2020-2021)	100,000
Rebellion of Túpac Amaru II (1780-1781)	50500
Putumayo Genocide (1879-1912)	7576
War of the Pacific (1879-1883)	5000
Era of terrorism in Peru (1980-2000)	3450
Civil Wars of the Military Caudillismo (1829-1859)	1367
Wars of Independence (1811-1826)	1333

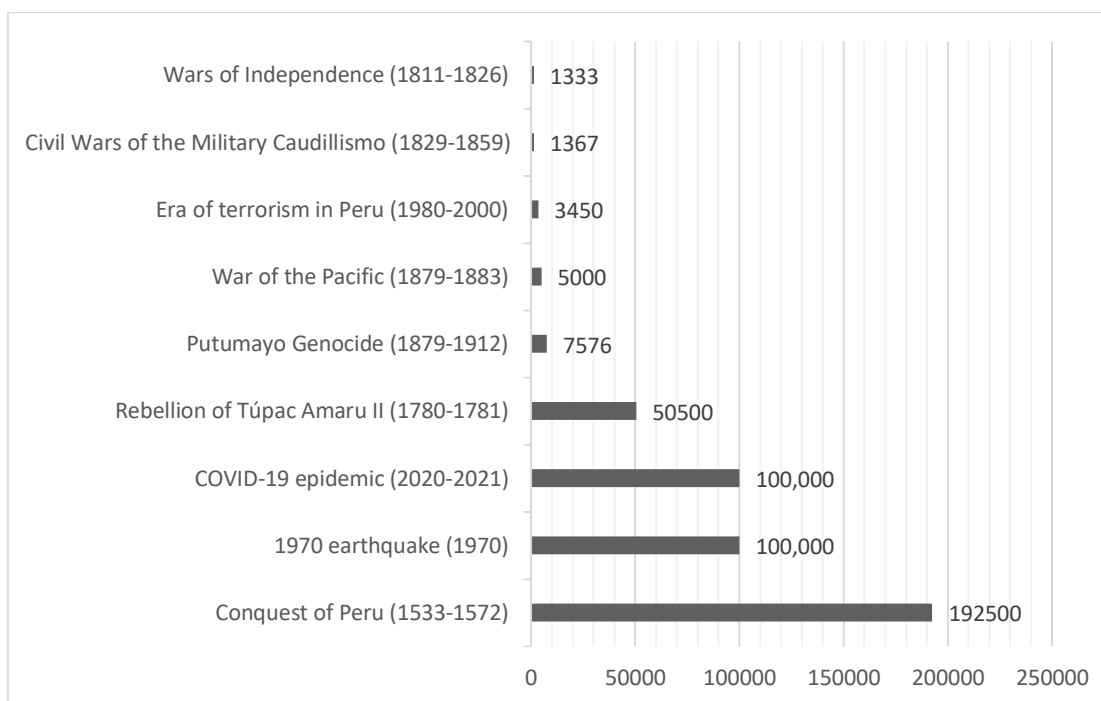
Source: Author's compilation

Looking at table No. 2, the conquest of Peru has been the greatest known catastrophe in national history because it accounts for approximately 200 thousand deaths annually between the 16th and 17th centuries. It should be noted that the Ancash earthquake of May 31, 1970, was the second-largest national catastrophe because it involved the loss of nearly 100,000 people in the Callejón de Huaylas. In parallel, the COVID-19 epidemic has also been responsible for a similar number of victims, with close to 100,000 deaths on average between 2020 and 2021.

In the fourth place, the rebellion of Túpac Amaru was responsible for approximately 50 thousand people killed each year as a result of the confrontation between the forces loyal to the caudillo and the forces loyal to the Spanish domain between 1780 and 1781. The rubber companies were responsible for the death of more than seven thousand natives each year between 1879 and 1912 due to exploitation and diseases. And in the 20 years that terrorism lasted (1980-2000) and in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), between 3,000 and 5,000 people died annually in different confrontations. Lastly, the wars of Independence as well as the subsequent confrontations of the military caudillismo resulted in the death of approximately 1500 people a year. Although it may seem a bit morbid to speak of the average annual death, we must use some indicators to understand the magnitude of the emergency. In other words, having just emerged from a political crisis that ended in the dissolution of the Congress of the Republic and with some economic stagnation, we had to face an epidemic that threatened the life of the entire population in general. So, with these data,

we should be able to understand that the COVID-19 epidemic was very serious and deserved a response from the State.

Graph No 2: Annual average of fatalities according to the duration of the catastrophe.



Source: Author's compilation

Taking into account the aforementioned, the COVID-19 epidemic has been one of the hardest catastrophes in recorded Peruvian history. Compared to other events, the spread of the disease ended up claiming more lives than wars and entire uprisings (Schwalb & Seas 2021). For example, the Pacific War and the era of terrorism had a total of 90,000 victims, a figure that was reached in the first year of the health emergency. In this sense, it is worth asking ourselves: if other less catastrophic events generated structural changes in Peruvian society, what consequences would the COVID-19 epidemic have in the long term? This question will probably not be answered for a long time, but it should remain a recurrent question from now on. What we can do is take stock of the situation, keeping in mind the limitations that we may go through as direct witnesses to the events.

PERUVIAN WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS WHEN FACING THE CRISIS

The main explanation for the high number of deaths is the absence of a welfare state that guarantees the full exercise of the social rights of citizens. During the period of economic growth following the mineral boom, the Peruvian neoliberal state resigned and put aside the implementation of a social welfare system capable of providing quality public services to the entire population. Among the main missing public services are: the absence of pensions for all social sectors, unemployment insurance, social housing, public education with adequate infrastructure, and, above all, a health system that

allows the entire population to be served (Béjar, 2012; Calderon-Anyosa & Kaufman 2021).

The absence of an authentic welfare society can be explained by the establishment of the Peruvian neoliberal state with the government of Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). This is characterized by the waiver on the part of public institutions to guarantee the full exercise of the social and cultural rights of the population as well as submission to international financial institutions. Thus, through a series of economic measures, the Peruvian elite determined that providing quality public services ends up being too high an expense to maintain.

Conversely, the abandonment of academic research was a factor to take into account because it deprived us of information that could well have helped us to face the crisis. Thus, on the part of the national elite, the idea was the following: we are not a developed country and first, we need macroeconomic stability, we cannot spend money on such “less urgent” things and “luxuries that do not correspond to us.” However, the COVID-19 epidemic showed that these services, far from being expenses, are the basic tools that allow every country to generate general well-being in its population. In that sense, one might ask: would two quarantines have been necessary if we had had a welfare state with a strong health system? Thus, it is believed that Peru recorded such a high number of deaths because of the prejudices that exist among the people in charge of designing the public policies of the Peruvian State, where the evil interests of private companies and stinginess disguised as “fiscal discipline” prevailed. This led to significant deficiencies in our health system in terms of its ability to respond to a general emergency, which had to be built along the way. During the entire constitution of the neoliberal State, it was thought that it was not necessary to invest in strengthening public services since little by little it was being covered by the private sector and the latter would bear the investment risks.

This error arises from the idea of “spending little” by public officials dedicated to managing the State's money. At the same time, there is a confluence with private interests to keep the sector in that situation because it left the market to cover that need. In other words, the waiver of guaranteeing the full exercise of social rights allowed public officials in charge of public spending to invest less, and private ones would be able to cover this service as long as it was seen as something that costs money. Thus, the absence of a welfare state capable of facing the COVID-19 epidemic resulted in the inability to carry out a labour and tax reform that allows the state to have the real resources to implement the services that it should always have. However, there are equally remarkable strengths as seen in our country's reaction to things that we could not even have imagined until about 20 years ago (Quiroz, 2013). It might sound strange but, in recent years, the democratic system has been strengthened in the sense that, little by little, regular elections have been held. This has provided some stability with the establishment of certain specialized groups to manage the public function so that the State could dedicate itself to implementing policies with some consistency. For example, economic policy has enjoyed a certain continuity due to the training of technical cadres dedicated to planning and executing the objectives set around the search for sustainable development. Likewise, this has been seen in agriculture, education, environmental protection, and culture. That is to say, little by little democracy as a political system of government is being accentuated in the country and producing officials dedicated to managing the State.

Consequently, with the growth of a democratic state, each public institution has enjoyed increasing independence to carry out its functions. This led to the government having two dimensions: policy-oriented to government decisions and politics in terms of power relations and confrontation between actors. Thus, although we could say that we do not have enough institutionalization, we had it more than 40 years ago (Cotler, 1978). Specifically, in recent years we have seen a greater division between the powers of the State. Hence, no group can become capable of seizing power, monopolizing various institutions, and our justice system has become more independent of political influences. Proof of this is that we have been able to prosecute and investigate a former president for crimes against humanity, and two others for corruption within the framework of the law. These are very significant facts, especially when compared with how the country was a century ago (Burga and Flores, 1984).

On the whole, it is not false to affirm that Peruvians are currently a nation. This is because regardless of our class conflicts and our racism, the COVID-19 epidemic has been approached as a national emergency. Throughout our history, in periods of emergency like these, we have always been able to appreciate that the breakdown of the State ends in each social group being saved as best it can (Quiroz, 2013). In this case, ours is a bad country that was able to maintain a government and remain accountable within the framework of the rule of law. In addition, the information provided by the different governments could be publicly accessible and it could not be said that there was an intention to hide the magnitude of the emergency. In this way, the State demonstrated a certain capacity to unite people around a common goal: to do everything possible to prevent huge numbers of people from dying as most citizens tried to comply with quarantine rules. The opposite is also true. There are fractures in the Peruvian society motivated by racism and class conflicts since colonial times. These have prevented us from treating ourselves as equals; but the changes promoted in the last 40 years allowed the creation of national consciousness (Cotler, 1978; CVR, 2004). Thus, it is also true that many groups prioritize their most immediate interests. However, it would be interesting to ask the following questions: which sector has said that the quarantine is unnecessary? Who has protested against the use of masks? In the worst moments of the emergency, have you seen demonstrations or lobbies deliberately disregarding the government's provisions?

Lastly, we could say that our healthcare system moved very slowly, but it did. Specifically, the State carried out an enormous amount of tests (between rapid, antigen, and molecular), many people were able to recover due to a correct intervention and doctors learned from the first wave to deal with the disease. In this sense, the Peruvian health system has tried to move as quickly as possible to prevent the epidemic, cure the sick and vaccinate the population in just over a year. Therefore, it could be affirmed that Peru did everything in its power to contain and combat the spread of COVID-19. Specifically, it was the Peruvian State that applied a very strict quarantine, applied most of the tests, put all its hospitals at the service of the citizens, and vaccinated the entire population (Huamaní, 2020). It can, therefore, be concluded that the most serious problem that costs the most victims is the lack of medical logistics capable of meeting the high demand for emergency medical services. In this sense, the majority of the population tried to abide by and respect the state of emergency to the extent of their material possibilities. In other words, the only reason why a stricter quarantine was not complied with was a financial necessity and not people's laziness. Rather, people were

able to endure the first months of quarantine without working, thanks to the implementation of solidarity mechanisms among the population side-by-side with maintaining order at the state level.

For example, the Armed Forces and the National Police of Peru together totaling about 200 thousand men could not control 33 million people in an area of more than one million square kilometers. Thus, the quarantine needed to enjoy a certain legitimacy among citizens so that it can be fairly complied with. Another measure complied with was the use of a double mask in all closed places and it showed that Peruvians were aware of the seriousness of the threat.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF WE DID NOTHING?

In the end, it is necessary to ask ourselves the following question: what would have happened if no measures such as quarantine had been taken? Although it did not happen and the quarantine was carried out, it is valid to think so because an epidemic responsible for the death of about 200 thousand people could perhaps become a real cataclysm if we had discotheques, schools or allowed crowds in closed spaces. For this reason, making an approximation to this hypothetical scenario gives us the possibility of understanding the dimensions of the problem in terms of how many lives would have been affected.

Let us see the calculation proposed by Pinedo and Pérez (2020) only for the first semester of the COVID-19 epidemic. In this case, the number of deaths is based on a mathematical model that starts from the scenario of a country that does not take any measures to contain the contagion rate. In other words, he wonders how many people would be affected if we had schools, discos, and concerts without any type of protection. Specifically, while two fairly strict quarantines were implemented for approximately three months each, it may have been because the consequences of doing nothing were simply unacceptable. Therefore, we must ask this question: What would have happened if we allowed COVID-19 to spread without any control throughout the country? How many people would have died only in the first wave? In short, the calculation made by Pinedo and Pérez (2020) shows an estimate of the real number of deaths that would have occurred and these numbers are simply terrifying. Although it could be considered that the number could be considered exaggerated, it is not impossible to reach this number of deaths taking into account the infecting capacity of the virus as well as the actual collapse of the health system. In this sense, the text does not indicate the number of deaths explicitly, but it can be projected by calculating the number of people who would need intensive care.

This can be seen in the fact that if we consider the fact that we had 250 ICU beds at the beginning of the emergency, the people who would need those beds and did not have access to them would inevitably die. Therefore, it can be said that between April and July 2020, about 1,828,091 people would be in this situation and that they would die from COVID-19 throughout the country. Thus, the potential number of victims of the first wave would be infinitely higher than the deaths we had in reality. It might be thought to be an exaggeration, but this type of calculation would not be entirely unrealistic. Even more so if we take into account the fact that our health system is more similar to that of the Western countries during the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 than to a modern health system typical of a welfare state within the context of the pandemic, we practically would not have a health system capable of dealing with a growing daily

demand for medical services. So if we take into account only a first wave under this epidemiological model that involves the spread of the disease without any restrictions, we will find out that only in the first wave we would have had about two million deaths (Pinedo and Pérez, 2020).

Table No 3: Estimate of people who died from COVID-19 if no action had been taken.

Date	Dead
Apr 15	4476
Apr 30	122654
01-May	136490
02-May	148472
03-May	158008
04-May	164702
05-May	168362
06-May	168990
07-May	166796
08-May	162242
09-May	155856
May 10	148116
May 15	102270
01-Jun	16648
Jun 15	3076
Jun 30	321
Jul 01	258
02-Jul	202
03-Jul	152
Total	1828091

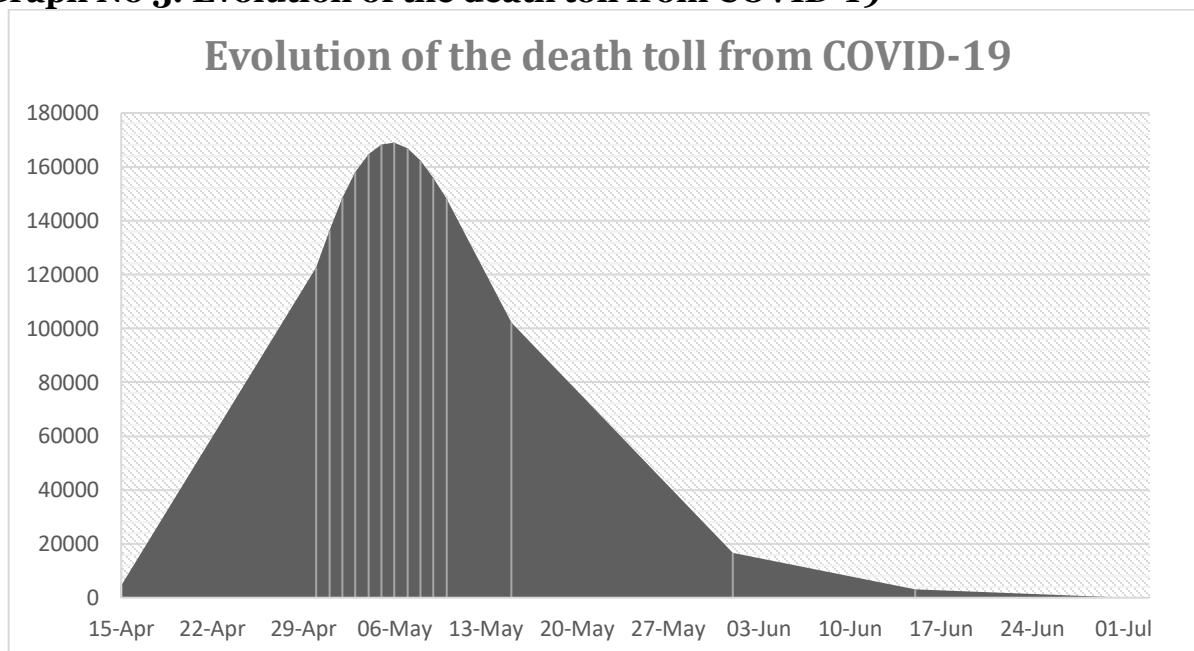
Source: Pinedo and Pérez (2020)

Thus, the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic occurs so rapidly that the number becomes unmanageable within a few days. As we can see in Table No 3, the worst months would have been between April and May, with an average of 100,000 people dying every day because they would need an ICU bed and could not find it. The article does not state explicitly, that a person who needs intensive care and does not find it is very likely going to die. The dynamics of the epidemic produced a peak of deaths and this would decrease as time passed. However, this model is designed solely and exclusively based on the first variant of the virus and for a scenario of a wave of infections. Thus, it would not take into account the arrival of new variants with their consequent waves of infections throughout the pandemic.

It should be recalled that from April 15 Peru recorded approximately more than 120 thousand deaths a day. This would increase until it reached a maximum of 160 thousand deaths a day because people could not get an intensive care bed. Subsequently, we would have experienced a constant decline at the end of May that would extend until

July. In other words, only the number of victims of a hypothetical first wave would have been 10 times more than the total number of deaths recorded (about 200 thousand). Consequently, controlling the spread of the epidemic was necessary to preserve the lives of millions of people. Had it not been done, the total number of victims - taking into account the existence of more variants and waves of infections - would have been unimaginable. This is then the explanation of why two strict quarantines were carried out throughout the national territory.

Graph No 3: Evolution of the death toll from COVID-19



Source: Pinedo and Pérez (2020)

Given the estimate presented, the panorama changes completely if we compare the consequences of the epidemic in relation to the number of deaths with other catastrophes that had occurred in Peruvian history. Thus, only the Conquest of Peru would have had a greater number of total victims than a wave of COVID-19 infections not controlled by the State. Therefore, the spread of the disease would have meant a humanitarian tragedy of far greater proportions than is currently experienced.

Table No 4: 10 main known catastrophes in the history of Peru (if nothing had been done to control the disease).

Historical Events	Total fatalities
Conquest of Peru (1533-1572)	7700000
COVID-19 epidemic (2020)	1828091
Putumayo Genocide (1879-1912)	250000
Rebellion of Túpac Amaru II (1780-1781)	101000
1970 earthquake (1970)	100,000
Era of terrorism in Peru (1980-2000)	69000
Civil Wars of the Military Caudillismo (1829-	41000

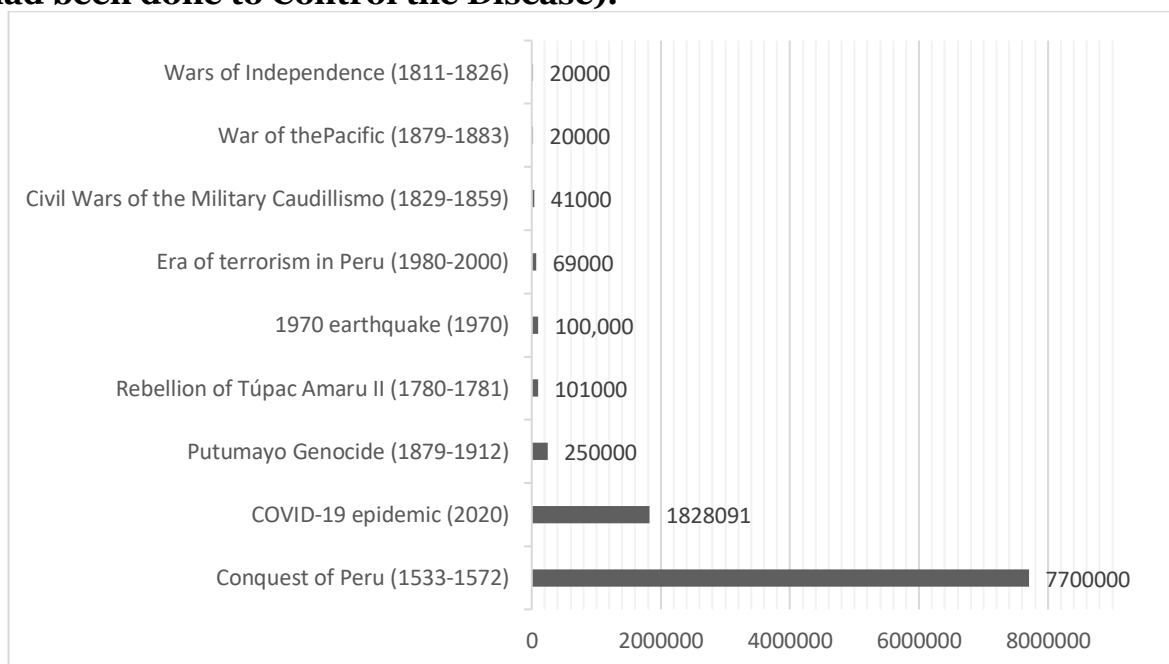
1859)	
War of the Pacific (1879-1883)	20000
Wars of Independence (1811-1826)	20000

Source: Author's compilation

It can then be said that if the State had not taken measures aimed at breaking the transmission chains of COVID-19, the number of deceased persons would have been greater than the death toll of all the wars waged by Peru throughout its history. Therefore, the social, economic, and political consequences of this humanitarian catastrophe would be comparable to the arrival of the Spanish in the Andean world. It would be difficult to imagine the political, economic, and social consequences of what would have happened if nearly two million people had died in the country.

Specifically, Graph No 4 gives us the possibility of understanding the dimension of what could have happened and comparing it with other catastrophes that had occurred in Peruvian history. Thus, not controlling the COVID-19 epidemic in Peru would have implied an overwhelmingly higher death toll than that experienced in external wars, internal wars, natural disasters, and genocides. In other words, the Peruvian State, as a group of people in charge of making decisions to ensure the well-being and security of citizens, concluded that this was a serious threat to the life of its population.

Graph No 4: 10 Main Known Catastrophes in the History of Peru (If nothing had been done to Control the Disease).



Source: Author's compilation

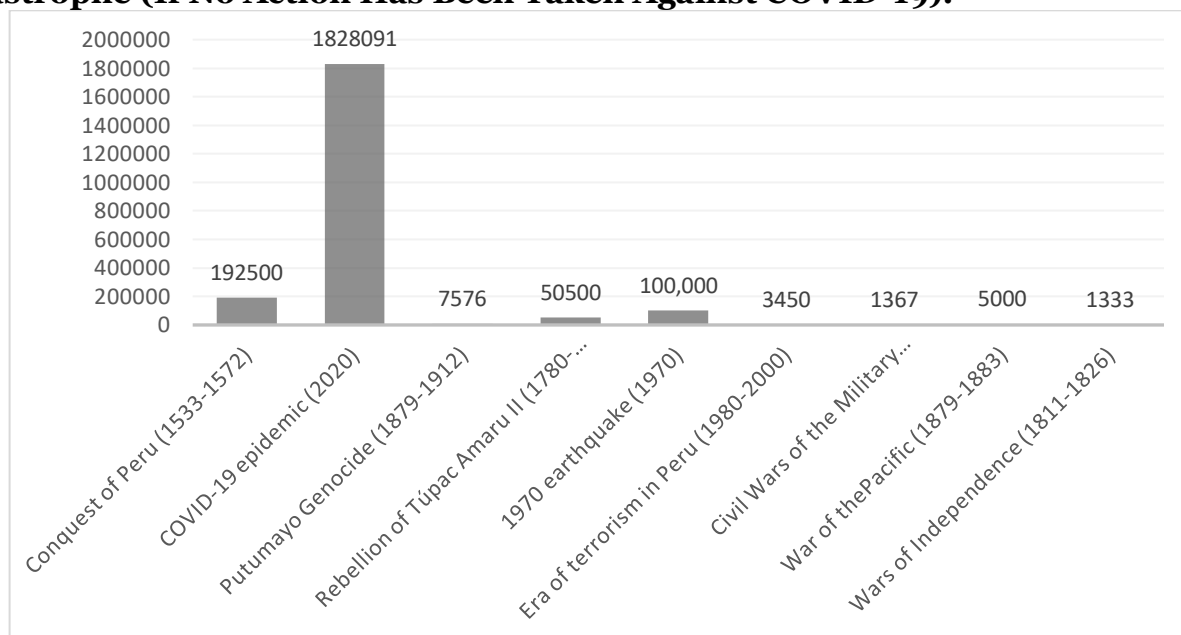
Unfortunately, the scenario becomes worse by averaging the number of deaths per year. Thus, the uncontrolled COVID-19 epidemic would have accumulated 10 times the number of deaths: 1.8 million victims in one year compared to 192 thousand deaths on an annual average. That is, while the Spanish conquest took 40 years to take the lives of

approximately seven million people, the COVID-19 epidemic would have been totally out of control as it would have meant that almost two million Peruvians would have died in just one year.

In that sense, the expansion of the COVID-19 epidemic throughout the national territory would qualify as the greatest catastrophe in known Peruvian history because its deaths in one year would exceed that of internal and external wars, genocides, and natural disasters together. It would be followed very far by the Conquest of Peru, where the Spanish were directly or indirectly responsible for about 192 thousand deaths per year throughout the process. Then, we would have to put the Ancash earthquake of 1970 and the alluvium that made the town of Yungay to disappear as being responsible for the death of about 100,000 people in one year.

Following this natural disaster, we would find the Tupac Amaru II Rebellion in 1780 with about 50 thousand people killed in two years, which implied a strong change in the power relations between the indigenous peoples with the entire population of origin. Hispanics settled in the Viceroyalty. And finally, we have to mention other events that significantly affected the dynamics of social relations in terms of their consequences: the Putumayo genocide (7,000), the Pacific War (5,000), and the era of terrorism (3,500). Thus, it was possible to understand the need for the Peruvian State to use all the resources at its disposal to stop the chains of COVID-19 infections. In other words, the scenario we were facing was very exceptional and would potentially be very dangerous for the majority of the citizens. In this sense, the magnitude of the humanitarian tragedy that could be is too costly for any government that seeks the safety and well-being of its population.

Graph No 5: Average Number of Deaths Per Year in Each Historical Catastrophe (If No Action Has Been Taken Against COVID-19).



Source: Author's compilation

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, the general balance of the COVID-19 epidemic in Peru could be the following: both the State and Peruvian society did what they could to the best of their ability. While nearly 200,000 people died in the entire epidemic, it is no exaggeration to say that the greatest humanitarian catastrophe in our known history has probably been averted. We have a historical perspective on other known catastrophes in Peruvian history.

In the first place, the COVID-19 epidemic has, in less than a year, done what entire wars took about five or twenty years to do by way of the number of death recorded due to the spread of the disease. This can be seen when we go to the archives and when we look at the annual death figures and we do a general count of the main demographic catastrophes in our known history. Thus, very few events in known Peruvian history are comparable to the number of victims left by the COVID-19 epidemic and much worse still if we talk about what could have happened. Overall, despite not having a welfare state capable of providing an efficient health system to its citizens, the people in charge of providing care have, little by little, been able to adapt to the emergency, propose solutions during the emergency, and even conduct scientific research. Proof of this is that there was a large number of persons who recovered from COVID-19 from the intensive medical care units of hospitals and who may have died. In the same vein, citizens have assumed the responsibility of wearing masks as a necessary protection measure in the containment of the epidemic and have decided to go out as little as possible in the worst moments of the emergency, taking into account the fact that it would not be possible to control 33 million people with barely 200 members of the military and police forces.

Finally, considering the spread of the disease, if nothing had been done to control the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of death would have been terrifying. Thus, a total abandonment by the Peruvian State of its responsibility when faced with the crisis would mean that we would probably have faced an infinitely greater tragedy. In this sense, it can be affirmed that the Peruvian government, led by different people, had a clear policy of doing everything possible to avoid the death of thousands of people throughout the country. It may be too early to talk about the consequences, but we may be able to identify the trends around how the COVID-19 epidemic in Peru will affect Peruvian society. By way of hypotheses, these could go in the direction of guaranteeing the full exercise of social rights for all Peruvians. All this with the aim that a new emergency such as the one experienced in this period does not generate a large number of victims again.

Among the policies that the country would need as a lesson learned from the epidemic is, in the first place, the implementation of a welfare state capable of guaranteeing the full exercise of the social rights of all citizens. Similarly, the central government must endeavour to create a powerful academic system capable of producing its knowledge through research because good information has become the main valuable asset in the 21st century.

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