Teratocracy and Contemporary Political Power

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Abstract: This article introduces the concept of teratocracy to analyze contemporary forms of political power marked by the erosion of symbolic limits and the normalization of excess. Epistemologically, it aligns with the tradition of the criminological imagination articulated by Jock Young, reconnecting criminology and sociology through C. Wright Mills' critique of abstracted empiricism. From a criminological perspective, it also draws on recent developments in zemiology and social harm approaches, shifting the analytical focus from crime to the production, normalization, and denial of harm. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the analysis examines processes of symbolic collapse and their implications for authority, responsibility, legitimacy, and social harm. Teratocracy is conceptualized not as governance without law, but as a mode of power organized around unbounded enjoyment, which reshapes moral boundaries and weakens mechanisms of accountability.

Keywords: Teratocracy, Criminological imagination, Symbolic collapse, Social harm, Political power, Moral culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

It appears that we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of governance that alters—rather than simply "revolutionizes"—social relations: *Teratocracy*: the government of monsters.

This article offers a theoretical and interpretive analysis of contemporary forms of political power, drawing on sociological, psychoanalytic, and ethical frameworks, rather than an empirical or clinical assessment of individual political actors.

Teratocracy refers to a mode of political power characterized by the foreclosure of symbolic limits, the normalization of excess, and the transformation of transgression into a governing principle. It does not abolish law; rather, it subordinates law to a logic of unbounded enjoyment, thereby reshaping moral boundaries, weakening accountability, and facilitating the production and denial of social harm. Teratocracy is not a regime type but a modality of power that can emerge within formally democratic systems.

This concept does not aim to replace established categories such as populism, authoritarianism, or illiberal democracy. Those frameworks illuminate institutional degradation, charismatic leadership, or the erosion of liberal norms. Teratocracy, by contrast, foregrounds a different analytical dimension: the erosion of symbolic mediation and the reorganization of political power around excess, spectacle, and exemption. Its distinctiveness lies not primarily in institutional closure or ideological coherence, but in the normalization of transgression and the restructuring of how harm is morally processed within the public sphere.

As shown in Table **1**, teratocracy differs from adjacent concepts not primarily at the institutional level but at the level of symbolic mediation and moral processing of harm. While classical categories allow us to describe what deteriorates—institutions, rights, procedures—teratocracy points to something more prior and unsettling: the deformation of the very ground of shared expectations that renders social life intelligible (Garland, 2001; Loader & Sparks, 2011).

The work falls within a theoretical–interpretive approach aimed at conceptual clarification rather than empirical measurement or clinical assessment. The use of psychoanalytic categories is neither diagnostic nor psychologizing: it does not attribute individual pathology to political actors, but mobilizes Lacanian concepts as structural operators to illuminate how symbolic mediation, limits, and accountability can be reorganized within a political field. In this sense, references to emblematic figures function as illustrative instances of a broader configuration, not as case studies. The argument proceeds through Weberian ideal-typical construction and analytical translation across levels (from symbolic law to political legitimacy; from foreclosure to regimes of mediation and denial), with the purpose of identifying mechanisms through which excess becomes normalized and harm becomes socially processed. Teratocracy is therefore offered as a heuristic concept—an interpretive model designed to sharpen criminological and sociological inquiry into contemporary power, rather than a label intended to replace existing regime typologies.

From the perspective of moral culture, certain political leaders can be described as monstrous insofar

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Table 1: Teratocracy: Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Populism	Authoritarianism	Teratocracy
Relation to law	Challenges liberal norms but operates within legal-political framework	Concentrates power through institutional restriction or suspension	Subordinates law to a logic of unbounded enjoyment; law is instrumentalized
Symbolic limits	Appeals to 'the people' against elites; preserves moral antagonism	Reinforces order through vertical authority	Forecloses symbolic mediation; limits lose binding force
Role of transgression	Strategic norm-breaking to mobilize support	Repression framed as necessity or security	Transgression becomes normalized and constitutive of governance
Mode of legitimacy	Popular sovereignty and charismatic identification	Order, stability, national security	Spectacle, excess, exemption, affective complicity
Processing of harm	Harm justified as necessary for 'the people'	Harm denied or framed as collateral to order	Harm normalized, trivialized, or rendered morally indifferent

as they embody extreme degradation, or abjection, understood as the refusal to recognize limits. The abject is not simply what is “bad”; it is that which threatens to contaminate everything, collapsing the separations that make social life possible: public and private, legitimate and illegitimate, sayable and unsayable (Kristeva, 1982). A psychologically and socially viable subject is constructed through opposition to the abject, through processes of delimitation, rejection, and mediation. Such construction requires time and restraint: accepting limits, recognizing the other, and enduring frustration. Teratocratic politics is disturbing precisely because it appears to reverse this minimal anthropological achievement, celebrating as a governing style what once marked the boundary of the human.

The function of classical narcissism was to purge the self of abject residues and to protect it from the ever-present threat of chaos. However, rereading the myth of Narcissus under contemporary cultural conditions reveals a different trajectory. The mirror, reality as reference, and the symbolic order may dissolve when Narcissus falls into the pool reflecting his image. This dissolution does not necessarily entail the disappearance of the self, but rather its metamorphosis into a boundless entity capable of assuming any form because nothing is incompatible with it. In place of a structuring narcissism that domesticates the drive, a form of functional self-deification emerges: the fantasy of permanent exception, of owing nothing to anyone, of recognizing no symbolic debt (Lasch, 1979; Wacquant, 2009).

In politics, this self-deification manifests not merely as arrogance, but as a systematic practice of impunity and as a pleasure in humiliation that requires no justification. The political monster, as conceptualized here, does not simply transgress norms; it redefines transgression as normality and normality as weakness. Yet its power does not rest solely on fear. It also draws strength from affective complicity. Where shame might once have appeared, laughter emerges; where guilt might have been expected, pride takes its place. Teratocracy thus operates not only as a mode of rule, but as an atmosphere—a moral climate in which the grotesque becomes endearing and inhumanity entertaining (Cohen, 2001).

This interpretive orientation deliberately aligns with the tradition of the criminological imagination. As Jock Young recalls in the prologue to The Criminological Imagination, drawing explicitly on C. Wright Mills’ critique of abstracted empiricism, criminology risks losing its critical vocation when it confines itself to technical measurement and fragmented data analysis. Taking Young’s invitation seriously, this article approaches contemporary political power not as an object to be exhaustively measured, but as a social and symbolic configuration that demands theoretical imagination in order to be understood in its full moral and political implications (Mills, 1959; Young, 2011).

What is at stake here is not the transgression of norms as such, but the transformation of transgression into a governing principle. When enjoyment ceases to be mediated by symbolic law, power no longer needs to justify itself normatively; it merely needs to display its capacity for exemption.

This article advances a central hypothesis: teratocracy does not amount to governance “without law,” but rather to governance through unbounded enjoyment. Political power becomes organized around

a form of jouissance no longer mediated by symbolic law, transforming public life into a rule-shifting political practice. The analysis unfolds in three movements. First, drawing on Lacanian theory, it examines how the foreclosure of symbolic law can be translated into a logic of power. Second, it analyzes the broader process of social destructuration that weakens mediations and authority. Third, it outlines a minimal normative horizon: when vertical anchoring dissolves, only the horizontal anchoring of the Other—ethical responsibility—remains as a fragile but necessary limit.

Taken together, the article makes three distinct contributions:

Conceptual contribution: it introduces teratocracy as a heuristic concept for analyzing contemporary forms of political power characterized by symbolic erosion, unbounded enjoyment, and the normalization of excess.

Theoretical contribution to criminology: it reconnects criminological analysis with moral culture, social harm, and symbolic authority, extending the tradition of the criminological imagination beyond narrow empiricist frameworks.

Normative implication: it identifies ethical responsibility toward the Other as a minimal limiting principle capable of resisting teratocratic dynamics under conditions of symbolic collapse.

2. IF LACAN WERE TO ANALYZE TRUMP

Teratocracy does not amount to governance without law, but rather to governance through unbounded enjoyment. This distinction is crucial, as it helps explain why the political monster does not appear merely as a transgressor, but as an actor who moves comfortably within a terrain where transgression itself has lost its exceptional character. Enjoyment becomes unlimited, obscene, invasive, no longer mediated by the law of desire. Whereas desire is structurally traversed by lack and by the Other, enjoyment aspires to ignore both. This displacement signals a profound transformation of power: governing no longer consists in administering norms, but in displaying the capacity to exempt oneself from them (Lacan, 1966/2006; Žižek, 1998).

In the clinical field, Lacan understood foreclosure—the radical exclusion of symbolic Law, represented by the metaphor of the Father—as one of the pathways that could lead to psychosis. When the Law is not symbolically incorporated, it does not simply disappear; rather, it returns from the Real in a traumatic and disorganized form, through phenomena such as neologisms, hallucinations, or delusional constructions (Lacan, 1966/2006). Transposed to the political plane, this logic allows us to conceptualize a form of leadership that does not recognize stable symbolic mediations and that, precisely for this reason, establishes a disturbed and confusing relationship with shared reality.

The figure of Donald Trump is paradigmatic in this respect, not as an individual clinical case—which would be methodologically inappropriate—but as a political type. References to Trump should therefore be understood as illustrative of a broader configuration of contemporary leadership, rather than as a psychological or psychiatric diagnosis of a specific individual. The analytical interest does not lie in individual pathology, but in the form of power that such figures embody, normalize, and render socially intelligible, as well as in the symbolic and political effects they produce within the public sphere (Weber, 1978; Garland, 2001).

Trump's language offers revealing clues: defective syntax, erratic pronunciation, obsessive repetition, ritualized insults, and stereotyped expressions. This cannot be reduced to mere rhetorical incompetence or communicative negligence. The degradation of language fulfills a precise political function: it erodes the boundary between what can and cannot be said, between public speech and private outburst, thereby weakening the symbolic space where responsibility might otherwise be anchored. Added to this is the recurrent appeal to conspiracy theories, which—beyond their empirical falsity—serve to reorganize the social world as a paranoid scenario in which all resistance is explained as conspiracy and all criticism as betrayal (Hofstadter, 1964; Fenster, 2008).

In this context, some psychiatrists have spoken of phenomena of shared psychosis between the leader and segments of his followers. Regardless of the clinical relevance of this term, what matters sociologically is the effect of resonance: symbolic disorganization is not experienced as pathology, but as liberation. In the court of the monstrous ruler, the grotesque becomes endearing, incoherence is reinterpreted as authenticity, and cruelty as courage. There is neither guilt nor shame; instead, triumphant laughter, celebrated obscenity, and the banalization of harm prevail. This affective economy aligns with what criminology has described as processes of moral

neutralization and denial, whereby harm is rendered invisible or morally inconsequential (Cohen, 2001; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

The teratocratic political actor does not recognize symbolic Law—the law that humanizes social actors by imposing limits—but instead embraces penal law as a sufficient ethical minimum. This reduction, already warned against by Simmel, entails a profound danger: when morality contracts to coincide with minimal legality, everything not explicitly prohibited becomes permissible. The social world is thus transformed into a game board, part Monopoly and part battlefield, where winning matters more than preserving the conditions of the game itself (Simmel, 1908/2009; Garland, 2001).

At this point, a key distinction emerges: the political monster is less a social actor than a social player. The actor assumes relatively stable roles and is accountable for them; the player, by contrast, can abandon the game at will, shift the rules mid-play, and evade responsibility by claiming that "it was only a game." Once politics is transformed into play, its connection to the real consequences of decisions is severed. Suffering is trivialized, collective life is converted into a performative political dynamic, and power operates through excess rather than restraint. Teratocracy does not break with reality; it drains reality of its moral weight (Young, 2007; Loader & Sparks, 2011).

From a criminological perspective, this transformation is crucial because it alters how responsibility, denial, and harm are socially processed: when transgression becomes ordinary, harm no longer requires justification to be ignored.

3. SOCIAL DESTRUCTURATION AS FERTILE GROUND

Lacan famously spoke of the Names-of-the-Father in the plural when he began to perceive, more than half a century ago, the decline of paternal authority as a unifying symbolic figure. Authority, he argued, could be embodied by other symbolic devices: institutions, traditions, ideals, and collective mediations. The crisis currently affecting contemporary societies, however, appears far deeper than that early diagnosis could anticipate. What is at stake is not merely the erosion of a particular figure, but a transversal dissolution of symbolic authority across the multiple orders that structure social life (Lacan, 1966/2006).

In modern societies we commonly speak of "careers": academic, professional, bureaucratic, political, military, ecclesiastical. All presuppose relatively stable trajectories, systems of recognition, and figures of validation. In some cases, such validation derives from abstract authorities—institutions, normative frameworks, traditions; in others, from embodied authorities—teachers, mentors, superiors. In both cases, authority functions as mediation: it introduces distance between immediate desire and social position, between personal ambition and legitimate recognition. Authority does not merely constrain; it structures aspiration and expectation (Weber, 1978; Garland, 2001).

Over recent decades, this system of mediations has undergone an intense process of erosion. The influence of the classics has gradually weakened, first under the impact of post-structuralism—which, despite its critical richness, fostered a generalized suspicion toward all forms of foundation—and later under the expansive logic of cancellation culture. The result has not been the replacement of old authorities with new ones, but their progressive evaporation. Not only are paternal figures displaced, but also counter-paternal figures—revolutionaries, dissenters, and critics—who, even in rupture, still acknowledged the existence of a shared symbolic framework. What emerges instead is a pervasive logic of suspicion that corrodes the possibility of symbolic mediation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Bauman, 2000).

This process generates a form of symbolic vacuum, a black hole through which foreclosure no longer appears as episodic or marginal, but as structural. Where authority dissolves, autonomy does not necessarily emerge; rather, arbitrariness takes its place. It is precisely within this terrain that teratocracy finds favorable conditions for its expansion. The political monster does not create the void; it occupies it. It does not destroy mediations; it thrives on their absence.

Destructuration does not affect only elites or formal institutions. It penetrates everyday life, shaping subjective experiences of time, effort, and recognition. When life trajectories lose continuity, when merit becomes opaque and the future radically unpredictable, the temptation to embrace immediate, simplified, and personalized solutions intensifies. In this context, the teratocratic leader appears as a paradoxically reassuring figure—not because order is restored, but because an illusion of shared omnipotence is offered. If stable rules no longer exist, at least someone appears capable of breaking them more effectively than others (Young, 2007).

The erosion of symbolic authority is further reinforced by the progressive replacement of recognition with visibility. Where accumulated trajectories, learning, and validation once mattered, immediate exposure now prevails. The logic of being seen displaces the logic of being recognized, and emotional impact displaces reflective judgment. This shift is not politically neutral. It favors leadership styles based on constant provocation, performative rupture, and the production of shock. The political monster flourishes in this ecosystem precisely because incoherence no longer penalizes; it amplifies attention and affective engagement (Debord, 1967/1994; Loader & Sparks, 2011).

Understood in this way, social destructuration does not necessarily lead to classical anomie, conceived as the absence of norms. Rather, it produces a condition of chronic unpredictability in which norms persist but no longer orient action, sanctions operate erratically, and responsibility becomes diffuse. Social life becomes unstable not because everything is permitted, but because nothing is symbolically prohibited with sufficient force. In such slippery terrain, teratocracy does not appear as an anomaly, but as a symptom (Durkheim, 1897/1951; Garland, 2001).

This framework also helps explain why the rupture with reality is never fully consummated under teratocratic conditions. There is no total collapse of social bonds because followers transform dissonance into adhesion. Incoherence is reinterpreted as audacity, aggression as sincerity, and the humiliation of others as spectacle. The result is an affective community no longer organized around shared values, but around a shared experience of enjoyment. Where symbolic authority disappears, excess occupies its place (Cohen, 2001; Young, 2007).

4. RUNAWAY HORSES PAINTED PINK

There exists an immaterial element that also functions as symbolic law: a vital impulse, an élan that activates desire and that, when bridled by survival instincts and social mediation, usually finds its path—even if it occasionally loses it. This force can be imagined as a *Thoroughbred horse*. Analytically, this image refers to the weakening of normative mediation under conditions of accelerated individualization and competitive self-optimization. What appears as liberation is, structurally, a reduction in symbolic braking mechanisms capable of channeling desire into socially sustainable trajectories. Its power is not problematic in itself; on the contrary, it constitutes the condition of possibility for any life trajectory. Yet in order to move toward a destination—to become a project rather than a mere discharge—it requires a carriage capable of regulating its impulses and fixing its direction. That carriage consists of the values, norms, and symbolic references that transform raw energy into orientation and meaning (Durkheim, 1897/1951; Taylor, 1991).

The "blood" of the thoroughbred may take different forms, translating into distinct cultural values. Throughout much of modernity, relatively plural models of success, recognition, and meaning coexisted: intellectual prestige, public service, professional mastery, religious vocation, artistic excellence. As modernity has advanced, however, these types of "blood" have been progressively impoverished. The value of success has become increasingly homogenized, reduced to quantifiable indicators of performance, visibility, or accumulation. At the same time, moral carriages have grown lighter, less capable of braking, redirecting, or absorbing excess. Energy remains, but orientation weakens (Weber, 1978; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

As the capacity for symbolic restraint diminishes, the likelihood that the horse will run wild increases. A runaway horse is not a free horse; it is an animal in danger, incapable of distinguishing between moving forward and falling into the abyss. Transposed to the human plane, this image helps conceptualize a form of subjectivity exposed to overload, exhaustion, and disorientation. In this regard, the sustained rise in mental disorders—chronic anxiety, depression, and suicide, including among younger populations—is hardly accidental. Where demands for self-realization intensify while symbolic mediations weaken, the psychic cost escalates dramatically (Ehrenberg, 2010; Rose, 1999).

In this late phase of modernity, some discourses have attempted to resolve this tension by repainting the vital impulse in the pink hues of self-realization. The message is seductive: desire intensely, believe in yourself, "be authentic." Yet when the light trot turns into a gallop—when competition intensifies and comparison becomes permanent—the sweat of egoism and the frustrating winds of performance quickly strip away the paint. Beneath the pink emerges the pitch-black of Hades' horses. This does not mean that self-realization is a myth or a mere illusion, but rather that, under specific cultural conditions, it can be

perverted and degenerate into self-deification (Lasch, 1979; Illouz, 2007).

In this context, the loss of the symbolic value of Law does not necessarily lead to anomie understood as the absence of norms, but to something more unsettling: the unpredictability of social life. Rules persist, but they no longer orient action; limits are articulated, but not internalized. The result is not visible chaos, but latent instability, manifested in diffuse malaise, collective irritability, and compulsive searches for scapegoats. The political monster thus becomes the most expressive symbol of this new form of power grounded in imbalance: it does not promise containment, but acceleration; it does not offer meaning, but discharge (Young, 2007; Garland, 2001).

From a sociopsychological perspective, the phenomenon is particularly troubling because it introduces a logic of contagion. If foreclosure can be conceived as a virus—lethal or nearly so—in the individual host, once it migrates to the collective body through political channels its lethality acquires a spectacular dimension. Excess ceases to be perceived as pathology and becomes celebrated as authenticity, as a liberating rupture from hypocritical constraints. The invitation is clear: come and see your favorite political monster; the spectacle is ready. Not coincidentally, one of the dictionary meanings of madness refers precisely to the excitation of delirium, to leaving the furrow, the limit.

The problem is that, unlike artistic spectacle, political spectacle does not allow for aesthetic distance. Harm is not represented; it is produced. Those splashed by this overflow are not figurants, but concrete individuals who become part of what criminology increasingly conceptualizes as collateral damage—those who, as Zygmunt Bauman repeatedly warned, tend to bear the brunt of exclusionary logics with particular intensity. In a society where horses run without reins, not everyone falls in the same way (Bauman, 2004; Pemberton, 2015).

5. RESPONSIBILITY, ALTERITY, AND LIMIT: THE ETHICAL REVERSE OF TERATOCRACY

The erosion of symbolic limits reshapes not only authority, but also responsibility, punishment, legitimacy, and the social perception of harm. When symbolic mediation collapses, acts that would previously be recognized as deviant or harmful can be reframed as acceptable, humorous, or even admirable, thereby altering the moral economy that underpins social control (Garland, 2001; Pemberton, 2015).

Under such conditions, contemporary societies appear to generate a structural logic of desymbolization within the socio-political sphere that resembles, in both form and effect, clinical foreclosure. At this level, the only functional equivalent of the Name-of-the-Father capable of immunizing the system against the political monster is no longer a vertical figure of authority, but the Other. When vertical anchoring dissolves—when symbolic fathers, recognized traditions, and institutions capable of embodying limits disappear—only the horizontal anchoring of alterity remains. The decisive question is whether this anchoring can be sustained without being absorbed into the logic of unbounded enjoyment (Lacan, 1966/2006).

It may therefore be necessary to shift attention away from names—figures, titles, formal legitimacies—toward what animates them and grants them human density. It is not the name itself that contains excess, but the practice of placing oneself in the position of the other, recognizing the other's vulnerability and irreducibility. In this sense, symbolic Law cannot be reduced to an external set of norms; it refers to a deeper principle: ethical responsibility. It is this principle that reins in the potential chaos of social life, preventing alienation and suffering from being normalized as the inevitable price of the game (Levinas, 1969; Bauman, 1993; Gil Villa, 2021).

For precisely this reason, ethical responsibility constitutes the blind spot of teratocracy. The political monster deliberately situates itself in a condition of permanent exception: forward flight, euphoric excess, systematic impunity. Its relation to the other is not mediated by recognition, but by instrumentalization. The suffering of others does not function as a limit, but as one variable among others—or, at times, as a source of enjoyment. There is always a gesture, a word, a public scene in which this inhumanity casts its shadow: the mockery of the vulnerable, the humiliation of the adversary, the trivialization of harm (Cohen, 2001; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Yet not every asymmetrical relationship is necessarily ethical. For relations structured by horizontal anchoring to qualify as ethical, they must challenge the logic of reciprocity without nullifying responsibility. Reciprocity implies balance; ethics, by contrast, introduces disproportion. As Levinas insisted, in the ethical relation I do not stand before the other as an interchangeable equal, but as an irreplaceable

hostage. This asymmetry does not constitute domination, but exposure: I am obligated prior to consent (Levinas, 1969).

Teratocracy radically inverts this logic. Where Levinasian ethics affirms "I am responsible for the other," teratocratic power operates according to the opposite principle: "the other is my hostage." Asymmetry does not disappear; it is perverted. Contemporary rulers may exceed the framework of reciprocity through unilateral and punitive economic, diplomatic, or military policies. In this regard, it is worth recalling that both religious figures and historical dictators have operated from asymmetrical positions. The difference lies not in asymmetry itself, but in its orientation: being-for-the-other versus being-outside-the-other (Arendt, 1963; Bauman, 1993).

In Search of Lost Time, a work that deeply influenced Levinas during his captivity, Marcel Proust writes in The Prisoner: "It is terrible to have another person's life tied to one's own like a bomb that one cannot drop without committing a crime" (Proust, 1988: 194). Levinas later condensed this intuition into a radical ethical formulation: "The other summons the self as an irreplaceable hostage" (Levinas, 1969). For the political monster, however, the hostage is not the self but the other. Dependence is experienced not as ethical burden, but as play, as a demonstration of power, as confirmation of omnipotence. The bomb does not generate anguish; it entertains.

From this perspective, the political monster's indifference toward the suffering of others is not an accidental moral defect, but a structural condition of its mode of power. Recognizing the other as other would introduce an intolerable limit for a logic of enjoyment without mediation. For this reason, teratocracy requires dehumanization, reducing the other to a number, an obstacle, or a spectacle. Where ethics would demand restraint, acceleration appears; where silence would be required, provocation emerges; where mourning would be appropriate, laughter prevails (Bauman, 2004; Pemberton, 2015).

This reflection does not aim to offer a redemptive solution or to naïvely restore a lost order. Rather, it points to a minimal threshold: without responsibility for the other, without some form of horizontal anchoring capable of limiting excess, political life remains exposed to a monstrous drift. Teratocracy cannot be countered with more enjoyment or greater spectacle, but only by recovering what the monster despises most: the gravity of the human bond.

The normative implications of this argument are not confined to ethical reflection. Under teratocratic conditions, accountability mechanisms become structurally fragile: parliamentary oversight, judicial review, and public scrutiny may formally persist while being symbolically weakened through ridicule, delegitimation, or affective polarization. This shift alters the thresholds of tolerance within democratic institutions, normalizing exceptional measures and expanding zones of discretionary power. From a criminological perspective, such dynamics complicate the attribution of responsibility and blur the distinction between lawful governance and harmful governance, thereby reshaping the institutional landscape within which harm is recognized, contested, or denied.

In this sense, the deficit of mediation associated with teratocratic dynamics translates into socially observable consequences. Policies enacted under regimes of exemption tend to redistribute vulnerability downward while concentrating discretion and impunity upward. The outcome is not merely symbolic destabilization but an uneven exposure to risk, insecurity, and institutional neglect, which can be analytically traced within the framework of social harm scholarship.

Teratocracy should not be understood as an episodic deviation but as a configuration made possible by specific structural conditions: the erosion of symbolic mediation, the destabilization of institutional authority, and the affective normalization of exemption. Its significance lies not in the personality of particular leaders, but in the reorganization of accountability, legitimacy, and harm under formally democratic arrangements. The concept therefore aims less at moral denunciation than at analytical clarification. By identifying how excess becomes routinized and how harm becomes trivialized, it seeks to contribute to a criminological vocabulary capable of diagnosing contemporary forms of power without reducing them to either individual pathology or institutional breakdown.

Understanding these structural consequences requires examining how such configurations of power are socially assembled and rendered intelligible within late-modern conditions.

6. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE LATE-MODERN *MONSTRUM POLITICUM*

The contemporary *political monster* should not be understood simply as a cruel ruler or as the stereotypical villain of social dramaturgy. That

expression is not employed here as a rhetorical exaggeration but in dialogue with the older Latin notion of *Monstrum Politicum*, later echoed in readings of Machiavelli's centaur in The Prince. In the classical sense, the monstrum was not simply a creature of horror, but a sign—something that revealed a disturbance in the natural or moral order. Recalling this genealogy allows the term to be understood analytically: the political monster designates not an aberrant individual, but a configuration of power that signals a deformation in the symbolic architecture of authority itself. We are not dealing with the "intelligible" evil of traditional villains—those who, however brutal, still respect a recognizable grammar—but with a form of power that disorients. It dissolves the boundary between seriousness and farce, norm and exception, truth and fabrication. In such a terrain, social actors do not merely suffer; they lose their bearings. When predictability collapses, obedience and resistance no longer organize themselves around stable rules, but around shock, rupture, and affective intensification (Young, 2007).

If the previous section delineated a minimal ethical threshold capable of introducing limits into political life, the phenomenon analyzed here can be understood as its systematic negation. The teratocrat is a composite creature, a human patchwork assembled from fragments drawn from two major scrap heaps. The first is historical: that of powerful figures whose relationship to the world was marked by megalomania, instrumental violence, or systematic disregard for human life. From Cesare Borgia to Rockefeller, passing through Mobutu Sese Seko or Idi Amin, these figures do not form a homogeneous model but rather a repertoire of practices that late modernity recycles without assuming their moral or political cost. The political monster does not invent these materials; it recombines them (Arendt, 1951; Bauman, 2000).

The second scrap heap is conceptual. From it emerge fragments that are mutually incompatible: public and private, anarchy and monarchy, democracy and dictatorship, realpolitik and hyper-ideologized politics. Teratocracy does not resolve these tensions, nor does it conceal them; it displays them openly. Contradiction ceases to be experienced as a problem and becomes a resource. In the political arena, this mixture generates an atmosphere of ambiguity that confuses the citizens who breathe it. A pure dictatorship tends to activate clear forms of resistance; a dictatorial democracy, by contrast, postpones and weakens resistance, at least for a decisive period. By the time opposition mobilizes, it is often too late for many (Linz, 2000; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

The effectiveness of the political monster lies precisely in this sustained ambiguity. It can present itself simultaneously as anti-systemic and as guarantor of order, as defender of "the people" and as ruthless entrepreneur, as moral crusader and as cynical provocateur. Incoherence does not penalize such figures because it is no longer perceived as incoherence. In a context of desymbolization, demands for consistency are ridiculed as naïve or elitist, while contradiction itself is reinterpreted as authenticity (Moffitt, 2016; Young, 2007).

When power no longer recognizes symbolic debts, it also fails to mobilize symbolic defenses. Where there is no inheritance or transmission, there is no obligation; and where there is no obligation, there is no limit. This void allows the monster to appear as a providential figure, even as a savior. It may unabashedly adopt the posture of a Superman born to rescue democracy from fraud and corruption, while legitimizing or tolerating equally fraudulent practices whenever they prove functional. Contradiction is not corrected; it is normalized (Garland, 2001; Weber, 1978).

This assemblage acquires particular gravity in a global context marked by overlapping crises. An exhausted planet demands a revision of the paradigm of overaction that has characterized Western modernity and calls for models of restraint, care, and minimal action. An economic system based on unlimited growth and a social order structured by inequality and stress require reduced rhythms, consumption, and competitive aggression. It is precisely at this historical juncture that the political monster emerges to stretch the rope to its breaking point, intensifying exploitation, polarization, and acceleration (Rosa, 2013; Bauman, 2000).

In late modernity, the political monster also performs a backward leap, reconnecting with the spirit of the sixteenth century and with the figure of Machiavelli, described literally as a monstrum politicum. In The Prince, power appears as a centaur, half human and half beast. Gramsci interpreted this figure as a representation of modern political power: an unstable mixture of force and consent, rationality and irrationality, a political ideology that operates as a "concrete fantasy which acts on a dispersed and pulverized people in order to arouse and organize a collective will" (Gramsci, 1999: 13). Contemporary

rulers such as Donald Trump can be seen as approaching the personification of the political myth evoked in Machiavelli's epilogue.

This archaic return coexists paradoxically with contemporary discourses. When societies critically reassess their androcentric past in order to allow their female half to live with dignity, the political monster retreats into the manosphere. When historical memory is activated to confront colonial and dictatorial violence, the monster recolonizes territories and bodies in the name of progress or security. When religious traditions re-examine their role in legitimizing predatory capitalism, the teratocrat reactivates the most puritanical and punitive versions of faith to shield economic and political interests. The mixture does not produce synthesis, but long-range explosions (Connell, 2005; Wacquant, 2009).

7. WHEN LANGUAGE FAILS: TERATOCRACY AND THE NORMALIZATION OF HARM

From a criminological standpoint, Teratocracy offers a framework for understanding forms of state harm that frequently escape conventional legal definitions of crime. Rather than focusing exclusively on criminalized conduct, the concept foregrounds the production, normalization, and moral neutralization of harm under conditions where symbolic limits erode. In this respect, teratocratic dynamics intersect with debates on crimes of the powerful and state crime (Tombs & Whyte, 2015; Rothe & Mullins, 2011), insofar as harm may be generated through legal, semi-legal, or formally democratic mechanisms while remaining socially denied or affectively trivialized. The issue is not primarily illegality, but the restructuring of accountability: when exemption becomes a governing style, impunity can expand without the suspension of institutional forms. This perspective resonates with zemiological approaches and contemporary criminological scholarship on social harm (Hillyard & Tombs, 2004; Pemberton, 2015; Liebling, Maruna & McAra, 2023), which move beyond juridical categories to examine how social suffering is produced, distributed, and rendered invisible within contemporary regimes of power.

The political monster's trajectory often appears as unstable as that of its literary counterpart Frankenstein, its movements as discordant as its speech, shaped by symbolic disorganization. Unlike the fictional creature, however, what becomes destabilized in its wake is not merely its own body, but the shared social world. The language of the teratocrat is not simply a defective instrument; it functions simultaneously as symptom and weapon. By degrading public language, it erodes the common space in which critique, responsibility, and limits might otherwise be articulated (Garland, 2001).

The crucial distinction between a generic monster and the political monster lies in what each reflects. While the former marks the boundaries of what a society considers culturally acceptable as human, the latter reflects a society that has lost the capacity to establish and sustain those boundaries. The political monster does not arrive from outside the social order; it emerges when symbolic frontiers erode and when the mechanisms that once regulated excess lose their binding force (Bauman, 2004).

Under such conditions, one outcome can be identified with relative certainty: the production of harm. The disorder generated by teratocratic power is not only institutional or normative, but existential. Lives become more precarious, more exposed, and more interchangeable. Politics, when transformed into a game of rule-shifting and affective spectacle, generates real victims who do not participate in the performance but nevertheless bear its consequences. From a criminological perspective, this dynamic aligns with analyses of social harm that extend beyond legal definitions of crime to encompass structural and symbolic forms of injury (Pemberton, 2015).

Rather than anticipating the downfall or humiliation of the political monster, a more analytically defensible approach is to recognize that teratocratic dynamics tend to leave behind an eroded symbolic landscape. Even when specific actors exit the political stage, the damage inflicted upon language, trust, legitimacy, and moral boundaries does not automatically repair itself. Processes of denial, normalization, and moral neutralization often persist beyond individual leaderships, reshaping collective expectations and thresholds of tolerance (Cohen, 2001).

One of the most significant risks associated with teratocracy is not its spectacular excess, but the possibility of habituation. When shock becomes routine and transgression loses its capacity to scandalize, the gravity of the human bond weakens. Under these conditions, the erosion of symbolic limits ceases to be experienced as crisis and becomes normalized as background noise, altering the moral economy of social control (Garland, 2001; Cohen, 2001).

The concept of teratocracy invites criminology and sociology to reconsider foundational categories such as authority, deviance, legitimacy, and responsibility under

conditions of symbolic collapse. Classical models of social control and norm violation often presuppose relatively stable symbolic limits. When those limits erode, power operates less through prohibition than through the normalization of excess. Understanding this shift is essential for grasping contemporary forms of political harm that elude traditional criminological frameworks while producing tangible and enduring social consequences (Pemberton, 2015).

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Criminology is one of the scientific fields -regarded as fields of struggles- that has evolved the most epistemologically in recent years. The dilemma that was presented to researchers between Mainstream Criminology and Radical Criminology has given way to greater integration. On the one hand, new voices are accepted from the Global South. On the other, it opens on new themes that admit interdisciplinary views: Cyber, Green, Queer, Zemiology, and Atrocity.

Perhaps a call to investigate the *penultimate* subject is needed: Moral Culture, following the works of Sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman (Gil Villa, 2024). Studying the changing cultural conditions in which the voice of consciousness is developed is essential to understand why we break with the norm, from genocide to harassment, going through the social harm of falsely democratic governments—including teratocracy—manifested in enduring social inequalities and suffering.

In this regard, teratocracy may serve not only as a conceptual lens for interpreting contemporary political excess, but as an invitation to broaden criminological inquiry toward the cultural conditions that shape the production and normalization of harm. If social harm scholarship has expanded the analytical horizon beyond legal categories, attention to moral culture can further illuminate how thresholds of tolerance shift, how responsibility becomes diluted, and how exemption is affectively legitimized. Investigating these processes does not imply moralism, but analytical rigor: it requires examining how symbolic erosion transforms both institutional accountability and everyday ethical perception. In this sense, the study of teratocratic dynamics opens a research agenda situated at the intersection of power, culture, and harm.

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