

Casual Casualty & Eliminated

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Casual Casualty*

"We gathered them up just to stare at them.... This created huge anxiety as nobody knew what to do with them. We kept F0 [patient] to stop the outbreak, but we gathered them up but didn't know what to do with them""

They locked you up behind white curtains, staring until your body siphoned through the thick humidity of Saigon in rainy days. You have no saying as your life has been simplified into Patient No.0 --- And if you die quick they have more empty beds for someone as unlucky as you. Your bone evaporated on the roof of the crematorium seeking way home to see your daughter who fainted by the porch when they dropped your urn at her front alley--- The disease stripped everyone from their last piece of dignity, or it just revealed how this has been always like this, Your survival contributes zero to the handsome economic pride shown to the world --- your worthlessness is destined. Down the alley, a handicapped old beggar leaned on a marble flower pot next to a skyrocket building, exhaled last breathe ejecting the unbearable lightness of hunger, of disease. His soul wandered with billowing ghosts; forming unutterable black clouds. There are burnings; flesh and bone feeding the cold fire consuming simplified numbers and mass-produced urns 24 thousand lives – incinerated – shuttered in quiet and forgetfulness. Your non-existence paved the road to national pride - disease of justice. As some lives are worth more than others you have to die quick in the void.

You are just a number – and counting.

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One year and a half into the pandemic, Vietnam was proud to be an early success model. With pride, the country didn't prepare resources for major outbreaks. Patients' rights and basic human rights were severely violated. Patients' personal information was circulated on the internet, forming something like a "witch-hunt" with positive-tested patients. Patients received death threats; their families were

* This poem, titled "Thương tích" in Vietnamese, is previously unpublished.

** The quote is translated from an interview with the Party Secretary of Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Van Nen, on October 12, 2021 in Tuoi Tre Newspaper: <https://tuoitre.vn/bi-thu-nguyen-van-nen-tp-da-ap-dung-bien-phap-khan-cap-nhung-khong-tuyen-bo-tinh-trang-khan-cap-20211012213220633.htm>

humiliated and discriminated at their apartment blocks.

The same strategy was applied drastically in the lockdown from May 2021 to October 2021. All F0 patients are forced into so-called field hospitals without being provided proper care. Over 16,000 patients died in four months (double the death number in Thailand although Thailand recorded double the number of patients duringat the same period) since the beginning of a strict lockdown in June 2021. Many families just received their beloveds' urns without being notification of the funerals. For the first time, on October 12th, after the lockdown time, HCMC Party Committee Secretary Nguyen Van Nen admitted what happened with the detained patients in those days behind the public eyes.

12 Dogs - Eliminated*

We don't need to remember
The innocent eyes fading in the tongue of fire

Down there, heaven or hell
Not home for clueless souls
Committed no crime of being living creatures

Fire licked their fur
yellow and brown and black
Vaporized

*Why do they kill them?
I am hungry, but I tried to feed them
They are my children (*)*

We don't need to remember
Once upon a time kindness was generous

The dogs stood on their owners' fragile bike
fed on passerbys' cuddles - their mom said
we return home

Apocalypse crushes, but no storms or floods

: [Disease control prioritised
Kill them immediately
Necessary
Preventive
Measure]:

*If I knew they would kill them, I would never
return home (*)*

Dogs, animals, children
migrants, farmers, nannies, workers
do not need
homes.

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* This poem, titled "Tan biến" in Vietnamese, is previously unpublished.

(*) Migrant workers have lost their livelihood because of the strict lockdown in Ho Chi Minh City due to Covid-19. When the city eased restrictions, thousands of workers fled home with no money and in hunger. They traveled thousands of kilometers from Saigon to far flung provinces.

One couple brought home all their beloved pets, 12 dogs and one cat, in a 400km-long trip. The moment they reached their district in the tip of the Mekong Delta, the local authority snatched the dogs from their hands and burned all of them for "fearing the dogs to spread Covid-19", without consulting the couple. WHO and US CDC never indicated that dogs can spread Covid-19 to humans.

The case caused a major stir on social media as many people met the couple and petted the dogs on their long way home. The couple's rare positive attitude had left others perplexed when hearing them cry after knowing all the dogs were killed.

Migrant workers and poor people were given almost no financial and mental support in the pandemic while they are the most vulnerable group. They have stripped almost all their basic rights and have been suppressed by local authorities, in these cases, the rights over their pets.

About the Author and Translator

Khải Đơn is a journalist and writer from Vietnam. She is a Fulbright Scholar and pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at San Jose State University. Her nonfiction pieces have been published in *The Architectural Review* and *Singapore Unbound*. She won the Academy of American Poets/Virginia de Araujo Prize, 2021, at San Jose State University (USA). She can be reached via email at phuong.l.pham@sjsu.edu.