

History, critique and politics

Historia, crítica y política

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Abstract

The present essay aims to exhibit the manner in which Gramsci and Benjamin recover the principles of Marx's historical materialism to carry out the critique of political praxis, during the fascist period. From them it is possible to understand the indissoluble connection between history, politics and ethics in political praxis, as well as critique as a movement inherent to knowledge and practice, it is proposed to know, and modify, the structures of coercion that are set up in the knowledge and in political praxis. From Marx, Gramsci and Benjamin it is possible to undertake the task, necessary in the present, of knowledge and political praxis where it is imposed a unilateral discourse over the conception of society, the life and beliefs of the concrete subjects.

Keywords: Gramsci, Benjamin, Marx, political praxis, historical materialism, emancipation.

Resumen

El presente ensayo pretende mostrar el modo en que Gramsci y Benjamin recuperan los principios del materialismo histórico de Marx para realizar la crítica de la praxis política, durante el período fascista. A partir de ellos es posible comprender la indisoluble relación entre historia, política y ética en toda praxis política, así como la crítica como movimiento inherente a todo conocimiento y práctica que se propone conocer, y modificar, las estructuras de coerción que se instauran en el conocimiento y en la praxis política. Desde Marx, Gramsci y Benjamin es posible emprender la tarea, necesaria en el presente, del conocimiento y la praxis política donde se impone un discurso unilateral en la concepción de la sociedad, de la vida y creencias de los sujetos concretos.

Palabras Clave: Gramsci, Benjamin, Marx, praxis política, materialismo histórico, emancipación.

Prelude

FROM MACHIAVELLI, THROUGH HOBBS, Locke, Rousseau, to Hegel and Kant, a mode of political theory and praxis was forged in which, at every moment when there was a politicization (mobilization and organization) of the emerging social classes, occurred a counter-flow of depoliticization that has shaped a dominant political language and practice which tends to dehistoricize politics by reducing them to administrative technics that dismiss the critique that all political praxis involves: in this way politics lose its relation with the material based upon the one that acts and from which it emerges, while dilutes its nexus with the past and the future. Such a situation forces us to rethink the relations between history, politics and critique, to point towards a horizon that makes reconstruction possible, we proceed to recover some of the approaches that go from Marx to Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin.

Since the rulers of monopoly integration capitalism's language, as well as the so-called mass media, it has become commonplace to use the term *politicize* to show that public order issues, government issues, do not have a political content, but only technical and for it has been elaborated an intricate language where the politics are to purge any ideological content or interests, that is, to the governmental, legislative and judicial action. In fact, this tendency leads, irreducibly, to a dehistoricization of politics, as well as a narrowing of the critique towards the censorship of the leaders, to the fulfilment of public policies. The background of this approach is a conception of history focused on the political or business boss, as leader, where the interests and problems of the subaltern classes disappear: they are treated because of individual conditions or shortcomings in the functioning of existing institutions.

It is therefore necessary to focus on two authors who, in a central way, dealt with the relationship between history, critique and politics, from a critical-dialectical posture: Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, to point out some indications of this technical notion of the policy that imposes an univocal conception of the socio-historical reality and leads to the passivity of the subjects, where the only possibilities of social construction - of possible futures - and of participation are restricted to propose ways of execution of the politics imposed by capital.

In social theory and in contemporary political praxis there is a neglecting on the way of historical thinking about politics as well as critique, accompanied by a profound depoliticization of the subaltern classes.

Both Gramsci and Benjamin depart from Marx's epistemological and methodological principles to understand history, politics, and critique and use them to question the way in which dominant political praxis once contained a conception of history and critique, too narrow, just as Marx and Engels did in their time.

They find, in Marx, the epistemological principles that allude to the manner in which the economic production and the social structure derived from it, it's the basis of political and intellectual history, hence, as Marx points out, the first historical fact is the production of material life - the satisfaction of material necessities of existence - that determines class relations and the legal, political, and ideological superstructure, so that categories - theory - must be brought into connection with the development of society; that is why Engels indicates that the theory can be understood as *discursive development*, and as *praxis* when it is referred to the contradictory relation between classes and their warfare (Engels y Marx, 1980:51). This operation, necessary for Marx and Engels, is to break out with the conception of *perennity* and *inevitability* (ideology) that the categories of "bourgeois science" set up. Thus, for Marx and Engels, history is nothing more than the fight history of the exploiting and exploited, dominant and dominated classes, thereby rejecting the idea of a history "as a generic act" or as a spirit and critique - method of criticizing, as Marx would said - as a mere "war of phrases", because critique is the movement of one's own thinking and knows its validity in practice (Marx, 1974:17-18; Marx, 1980:187-188).

Gramsci, unit of history, politics and critique

IN THE FIRST PLACE, Gramsci claims two methodological principles of Marx, namely: 1) the tasks imposed by a society require certain material conditions and, 2) a society does not change until developing the forms implicit in their relationships. Gramsci, by his very political praxis, tries to show the misconceptions in the dominant conceptions of his time regarding the organization of the masses, where on the one hand are the conceptions of Sorel and Croce and, on the other hand, the disfiguration of the philosophy of praxis for economist (Gramsci, 1999:32-33), and even insinuates a questioning of Soviet dogmatism. Gramsci maintains a conception of history where, on one part, it is expressed as political praxis and, on the other, as a process of knowledge. In both cases, critique is incorporated as a substantial part of praxis and as of theory (knowledge).

Although it uses almost indistinct politics and political praxis, the latter category is used, fundamentally, to refer to the formation of a collective will for a specific purpose, there history is distinguished by its use to shape a myth, an ideology, and a utopia to “arouse and organize a political will”. The category of political praxis also uses it, to reject the conception of history anchored to the figure of an individual, or the idea of history as unpredictable or irrational, disconnected from the analysis of social classes (social forces) and material conditions and superstructures (culture) in which political will, emerges.

History, both in its form of political praxis and in the process of knowledge, notes Gramsci, implies periodate based on the forms of organization of social forces, apprehending their contradictions from: relations between structure and superstructure, the relationship between organic and conjunctural movements. If history is used to create a “national-popular collective will” aimed at “the fulfilment of a superior and total form of modern civilization”, then political praxis involves the concretization in a program, from a discourse (Gramsci, 1999:13-17). It is in this sense that he conceives politics as history in action.

Thus, history as a process of knowledge presupposes the knowledge of the structure distinguishing *organic movements* (more or less permanent) from the *conjunctural movements* (occasional, immediate) of this distinction depends on the critique that will be made as a *historical social critic* or *of the leaders, of the management staff*; such a distinction is crucial to differentiate the organic movements that they do tend to transform society insofar, as they involve a reorganization of social forces, those that can only constitute an organization of antagonistic social forces that are expressed as “ideological, religious, political, legal, etc.”. In political praxis, the transformation is presented as a *historical duty*, which avoids confusing the immediate operating causes of the mediating operating, since if political praxis turns into economist (doctrinaire or ideologist), mechanistic, or, it ends in voluntarism and individualism (Gramsci, 1999:32-33). With this, Gramsci points out, the reconstruction of history, avoids constructing the present or future because of personal desires and passions that inhibit the conscious means that stimulates action.

Thus, the philosophy of praxis oriented to the formation of a collective will for a specific purpose allows to maintain a specific relationship of forces either to ensure social order or to arouse and organize the political will to transform society; but this philosophy of praxis is based on a *historical knowledge* understood as attempts and results, to organize a collective will in relation to the movements of structure and relations of force: thus politics is the creation of new equilibrium, new relations of force, for that reason political praxis moves within an *it must duty* that allows to warn if “an act is arbitrary or necessary, it is concrete will, or whim, desire, love

to fantasy,” politics is “concretion and interpretation, is history and philosophy in action... [for that reason] no individual or a work (book) can change... the reality but only that they interpret it and indicate the possible line of action”, although the “statesman” forces of a State or an army and not only armies of words” (Gramsci, 1999:31-32) and not because such a “statesman” effectively carries out immediate, short-term action.

Finally, what Gramsci inherits is an understanding of politics, of historical materialism, as a philosophy of praxis, in which he notices a degenerate form “in its most widespread form of economistic superstition” because he forgets the thesis that men acquire an awareness of fundamental conflicts in the field of ideologies is not of a psychological or moralistic nature, but of an organic gnoseological character, a conception where politics and history become deception, since history is conceived as a continuous *marché de dupés*, and “criticism” is reduced “to reveal tricks, to provoke scandals, to hold accountable representative men” (Gramsci, 1999:45), reduce the state to the mere interest of a fraction of the ruling class, or to a supposed political realism that exalts the figure of the head of government and, moreover, the men who represent the antithesis are forgotten, that is, “another proposition of the philosophy of praxis: that «popular beliefs» or beliefs of the type of popular beliefs have the validity of material forces” (Gramsci, 1999:45-46).

Thus against the economism and reductionism of the state at the mere interest of a fraction of the ruling class, Gramsci erected the concept of hegemony as fundamental and the concrete study of ideologies to avoid common sense claims or “moralistic accusation of double and evil (for supporters), avoiding the reduction of politics to “a series of personal facts ... of who is mocked by its own leaders and does not want to be convinced about it by its incurable stupidity” (Gramsci, 1999:47), and by of course, to question the history that is made around the great political leader, around the heads of government.

Benjamin, political praxis as a way of theorizing critique and constitution of subjects

Benjamin, part of the same epistemological principles that Gramsci claims, although the opponents he faces are different, he adds an element of discussion with hermeneutics, visible in his approach to how to understand sociohistorical events according to their *original meaning*, modes as it *has come to us - as a way of understanding socio-historical events -*, that is, as a result of its own history and as a manner of thinking that allows us to capture the movement of societies in time. But he

adds that, in a dialectical history, the researcher renounces “the calm, contemplative attitude towards his object, to become aware of the critical constellation in which the fragment of the past is precisely with the present, that is: connects the present action with an original experience to break the continuum of history. From this he questions the idea of a *history of culture* anchored to the ideas of “popularization of science”, “public cultural work” (linked to the State) or “education of workers”, or under the slogan of *knowing power*, as Social Democracy put it, assuming that the knowledge of bourgeois rule enables the proletariat to emancipate itself; shows that in the dominant theorizing forms the technique is exalted, forgetting its link with the production of merchandise (Benjamin, 1989:96-97).

As we can see, here, he already glimpses how theorizing, and theoretical debate, constitutes a political praxis - or in the Marx of the theses about Feuerbach: dissolving the abstract theoretical world to its earthly base, explaining its contradictions, “to criticize theoretically and virtually revolutionize” the material base (Marx, 1980:2) - which, especially in the realm of history, emphasizes that *the historical*, beyond a date, a great character or genius, an artefact or work of art is revealed as a particular experience in the time and in the space in which material conditions of production are articulated, the technique associated with it, the relation between subjects to which it gives rise –originating meaning–, distinguishing itself from the *historical development* referred to the ways in which it was understood, and the ways in which it has been received, has reached the present, and allows us to have an understanding of the past by outlining a concrete future-oriented political praxis. Here an anecdotal form where the facts are disjointed from the sociohistorical totality to which they belong.

Benjamin calls dialectical history also, as a *revolutionary recovery of the past* through which the oppressed, the interrupted... as part of a political fight that transforms, because it contributes to politicize the intellectual adhered to the bourgeois class by the education, but this only occurs in political praxis, not in the change of theoretical or political schemes that give rise to similar looting to those of politicians who kidnap authors, theories (Benjamin, 1989:28, 57).

For historical reconstruction, Benjamin, establishes a tension between *continuity* and *discontinuity* to break with the vision – and political praxis – tied to the idea of a linear time that, occasionally, is altered and corrected to continue an irrepressible march towards progress, towards the realization of humanity. This tension arises in social theories - more specifically, in the narratives of history - and in the political praxis expressed in the *forms of theorizing* (positivist and historicist), in the justification of situations of violence (legitimate / illegitimate) that start from a conception of a barbaric human nature or in relation to the persecution of ends

considered legally fair, or to strategies that involve the extension of freedom and democracy without relation to the particular constitution of the social classes, but especially in the forms of theorizing and political practice that exalt the technique disconnected from the production of merchandise and its destructive character in wars (Benjamin, 1989:99-100).

This same linear time is present in social democracy that claims the development and use of science and technology exclusively to improve the level of skill of workers thinking that this leads to the improvement of working and living conditions, thereby which transmutes the principle that the proletariat is the last exploited class and undertakes the liberation of all dominated classes by invoking all the classes previously subjugated by the maxim that *the proletariat undertakes the emancipation of future classes*. Both ways of theorizing and acting, Benjamin points out, maintain the idea of a continuous historical time that leads to an understanding or not (politically) the class warfare, as well as the connection of the technical-productive mechanism from which they are constituted certain social subjects and certain relations between them that imply a barbarism, a violence, of which it is necessary to notice as historical materialist concerned with the emancipation.

Understanding this connection makes it also possible to understand the transit between priest-parish subjects and producer-consumers, which transmits the understanding of the cultural as the domain of an image - as a display value - that converts the mass into public, subjects the actor to exigencies of the technical mechanism and not of the spectator, and yet creates the illusion of the spectator as an expert and makes of art (the culture), the art of producing effects that the public seeks, in such a way that the mass tends to conform to "certain technical effects" with their implications for political praxis visible in building construction (prototype of art) that imposes a way of seeing and feeling, that is, forms a sensitivity through daily use and contemplation inhibiting cultural value and dispersing in the mass, which serves - to Benjamin -, to understand what happens to fascism and its relationship with the masses when it warns that a proletarianization of man entails a greater alienation of the masses, while a tendency occurs to organize the proletarian masses by inhibiting their demands of suppression of the conditions of the property (of exploitation, of oppression); Thus the aestheticism of politics becomes violence as a cult of the warlord (manufacture of cultural values) and as a suppression of the right of the masses to demand the elimination of the conditions of their oppression, going so far as to present war as a disorganization mechanism to mobilize the masses outside their own political action, since the past and present (the reconstruction of history) converge in the conservation of property conditions mutilating any possibility of future for the masses making barbarism

to prevail by denying demand for the abolition of oppression (Cfr. Benjamin, 1989:55-57).

The tension between continuity and discontinuity - and the way of understanding history as the centre of political praxis corresponding to certain material conditions of production with its technique and the relation between subjects constituted from those conditions - allows Benjamin to criticize the idea of *overcoming* - in religion, in philosophy, or in political theory - since in this way both thought and history itself are conceived as a continuity that ends in the "bourgeois illusion of eternity, and of validity as the ultimate instance of capitalist production, "prevailing in the dominant theoretical currents, and in the interpretations and practices of Social-Democracy, since these ways of understanding and writing history are part of the conformation of social subjects.

In sum, Benjamin raises the need to consider the dominant scientific tendencies and material conditions that are present in a conception of history, such as the role of Darwinism in the evolutionist conceptions of history. to pose a determinist history, to the imposition of "natural laws", and in political practice is translated into specific tactics: to think of society and human action in organic, physiological terms... leads to an optimistic conception of history, progress, where barbarism is forgotten, or lead to a democratic conception of history, in the sense of measuring the progress of mankind in terms of expanding universal suffrage, erasing the distinctions of social class, as the dominated classes have access to vote, to human rights (Benjamin, 1989:112-115).

It is a clear example that history is not evolution, causality, is illustrated when it questions the idea that the proletarian revolution was forged in the spirit of bourgeois revolutions, in which it finds its genealogical tree: Benjamin's objection is implanted in the unveiling of bourgeois morality expressed in its revolutions that claim the interiority, the conscience of the citizen, bourgeois behaviour anchored to "their own interests, but referred to another complementary behaviour of the proletariat, not corresponding to the interests of the latter, proclaimed the conscience as a moral instance", a conscience that preaches altruism, which advises "to favour the other proprietors in the middle, and with all ease advises the same to those who have nothing" (Benjamin, 1989:121), thus imposes the morality of the ruling class that declares all behaviour useful which favours, the dramatic, for Benjamin, is that the bourgeoisie has not required so much of that but if it is necessary for the proletariat, if it intends to overthrow the bourgeoisie, it must detach itself from the "good conscience" that believes in bourgeois democracy, that is to say: it has to reveal the ideology that underlies this conception and that makes it impossible to think of the proletarian class "position in the process of production", which prevents, its own

political action, prevents its emancipation and maintains the political action of the subordinates on the borders of the negotiation of the conditions of exploitation, maintains the reification of the exploited, denies their moral expression, human, by interposing between the material conditions of existence of the exploited and themselves, a bureaucratic administrative and legal apparatus that inhibits the exercise of functions to such subjects, denies moral fullness (Benjamin, 1989:123).

In making history –which has to be understood as political praxis– one has to get rid of fetishes, as illustrated by the situation and comprehension of the work of art in market conditions: the fetish is the author, the master, not the work of art in connection with the existence of society, with the ways in which a “collectivity had contemplated ... things and the world” (Benjamin, 1989:132). This is where art appears as *the historical*, to the extent that the emergence of mass art is linked to technical reproduction, mass dissemination, which entails reduced cost (Benjamin, 1989:133) and finds in Fuchs the evidence to claim the oppressed, the despicable, the apocryphal, that runs with the development of the productive forces and the masses creating “images of the historical man”, which allows to pronounce against the cult to the caudillo like sign of humanization (Benjamin, 1989:135) in such a way that the art, also, implies a form of political praxis, or at least inspires it.

With Benjamin, we can question the conceptions of history, social theory and art, which erase barbarism, or where barbarism itself is understood as the aesthetic of politics since they tend to impoverish the vital experience. Hence it is necessary to make internal and external poverty emerge not as a nostalgia nor as the full existence of technical prodigies which men also laugh at, an idea developed by Benjamin as a relation between experience and history, between experience and poverty, to express the way in which the human body undergoes devaluation, experience, with “the most atrocious experiences of universal history” during the First World War, for it tells us:

No, it was not weird. Because there have never been such denied experiences as the strategic ones by the trench warfare, the economic ones by the inflation, the corporals by the hunger, the moral by the tyrant. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn trolley found itself helpless in a landscape in which everything but the clouds had changed, and in whose centre, in a field of forces of explosions and destructive currents, was the minimum, brittle human body (Benjamin, 1989a:168).

Thus, the idea gets emphasized by the fact that history is a political praxis which, to comprehend and act on it, the different spheres of life cannot be separated, as strip stories of their horrors and dominated subjects who have been stripped of their goods, the word and from the possibilities of their own action.

That same perspective is maintained in *On the Concept of History*, where Benjamin starts from an allegory: the automaton that replicates the plays of a chess player ensuring, with it, to always win; as well as an idea of happiness tied to the experiences lived and to the longed, as a redemption to say that “the same thing happens with the representation of the past, of which history makes its own. The past carries with it a temporal index through which it is remitted to redemption. There exists a secret appointment between the generations that were and that of ours. And like every generation that lived before us, we have been given a weak messianic force over which the past demands rights. This requirement should not be taken lightly. History materialism knows something about it” (Benjamin, 1989b:178). Although at the same time it indicates that nothing, of the past, must be considered as lost, hence the question is the idea of humanity redemption, thus “only for the redeemed humanity has its past become quotable in each one of its moments” (Benjamin, 1989b: 179).

Benjamin directs critique toward the kind of history that has made historical materialism to be deformed, which, starting from the class warfare expressed as “a fight for rough and material things which without them, the fine and spiritual do not exist”, although in the warfare of classes are presented “in another way as how we would represent a plunder that the winner keeps. They are alive in it as confidence, courage, humour, cunning, and as courage, acting retroactively in the remoteness of the times. They end up calling into question any new victory achieved by those who dominate”; this modification of “fine and spiritual” things, cannot escape the historical materialist (Benjamin, 1989b:179). This implies the creation of images of the past that emerge and disappear “at the instant of their cognoscibility”, for “historical materialism goes through the image of the past that threatens to disappear with every present that is not recognized in it”; hence: “to articulate the past historically does not mean to know it «just as it authentically has been». It means taking possession of a memory when it glitters just right before a danger. To the historical materialism matters to fix an image of the past just as it suddenly presents itself to the historical subject right at the moment of danger. The danger threatens both the heritage of tradition and those who receive it. In both cases it is one and the same: lending itself to be an instrument of the ruling class. In all ages it is necessary to try to extract the tradition to the respective conformism that is about to subjugate it” (Benjamin, 1989b:180). There he finds an analogy with the theological thought that promises a redeemer Messiah, the conqueror of the Antichrist. He also sees in this way of historicize “the gift of lighting on in the past the spark of hope which is inherent only to the historian who is permeated by the following: neither will the dead be safe before the enemy when this succeeds. And

this enemy has not ceased of conquering” (Benjamin, 1989b:180-181). As we see, writing a story supposes a concrete political praxis, as well as debating the different theoretical conceptions that are detached from the material conditions from which they emerge.

Benjamin insists on criticizing historians who intend to “revive an age” and that they use “a procedure of empathy”, in which, in the case of the “historicist historian”, empathy is with the conqueror, with the dominators, and their achievement presented “as cultural goods”. There the historical materialist distances himself and sees in “each and every one [of those cultural goods] an origin which he cannot consider without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous servitude of their contemporaries” (Benjamin, 1989b:182).

Never a document of culture is given without being at the same time of the barbarism. And just as he himself is not free from barbarism, neither is the process of transmission in which he passes from one to another. That is why the historical materialist moves away from him as much as possible. He considers it his own responsibility to pass the brush against the grain (Benjamin, 1989b:182).

Benjamin turns to “the tradition of the oppressed [who] teaches us that the rule is the «state of exception» in which we live. We have to get to a concept of history that corresponds to him” it is, then, “to provoke the true state of exception; which will improve our position in the fight against fascism”, so that the fight against it is not made in the name of progress, otherwise we are content with the “philosophical astonishment” that provokes, *denoting how* “the representation of the history from which it proceeds remains” (Benjamin, 1989b:182). It is not a matter of accumulating data after data, but of looking at the catastrophe that accumulates ruins, which summons “to awaken the dead and to recompose what has been torn”, but in that calling of the dead [to look at the past] giving the back to the future which one is being pushed, increasing the ruins, by the progress (Benjamin, 1989b:183); right there emerges the demand of history as a current political praxis that questions the practices and political ideas that offer to liberate “the political creature,” deceived in the faith of progress, invoking a “base in the masses” and “in the servile insertion [of politicians] into an uncontrollable apparatus, “hence the demand for a different history, a” history that avoids all complicity with the one to which the aforementioned politicians keep clinging” (Benjamin, 1989b:184).

And critique is severe when referring to the conformism promoted by social democracy clinging to the idea that nothing is with the current of technical development (progress), whose vestiges are already in the *Gotha Program* by declaring “work as «the source of all wealth and all culture»”, of which Marx was already

suspicious when he said “that the man who possesses no property other than his labour power «has to be the slave of other men who have become proprietors»” (Benjamin, 1989b:184-185), nevertheless, he continues to insist that “work is the saviour” –the new messiah– and that, therefore, only an improvement of work is required; Benjamin attacks against the vulgarized Marxism that:

...it is not ask with the necessary calm for the effect that its own product do to the workers so long as they cannot dispose of it. It recognizes only the progress of the nature’s domain, but does not want to recognize the setbacks of society. It already has the technocratic features that we will find later in fascism. To these belongs a concept of nature that catastrophically distinguishes itself from the socialist utopias prior to 1848. Work, as it is now understood, leads to the exploitation of nature which, with naive satisfaction, opposes the proletariat exploitation (Benjamin, 1989b:185).

What Benjamin sees there is the way in which the proletariat and its fights are conceived as subject, first of historical knowledge as it was in Marx and leads him to conceive of it as the last enslaved social class, which will perform “the work of liberation in the name of defeated generations”, but that Social Democracy repudiates and assigns

the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations. This has cut the nerves of his strength better. The class unlearned in this school both, hatred and the will to sacrifice. Since both feed on the image of the enslaved ancestors and not the ideal of the liberated descendants (Benjamin, 1989b:186).

Hence the criticism of social-democratic theory for its dogmatic pretensions that are based on the idea of progress of the human race as skills and knowledge, of technical progress as inconclusive and incessant that result in a representation of a linear, homogeneous, empty time, therefore it is necessary to criticize this representation of progress (Benjamin, 1989b:187), because “history is the object of a construction whose place is not constituted by homogeneous and empty time, but for a full time”, “time-now”, that is, as a present that cites the past as a return, but it is the space where “dominant class controls”, so it is necessary to move away from that representation in order to understand history as a “dialectical leap”, as Marx does in speaking of revolution, that is to say, as a way to blow up the continuity of history, because:

The historical materialist cannot renounce the concept of a present that is not a transition, but has come to a halt in time. Since this concept defines the present in which he writes history for his own account. Historicism raises the “eternal” image of the past; conversely, the historical materialist poses an experience with him that is unique (Benjamin, 1989b: 189).

Finally, social-democratic theory, or dogmatic historical materialism, anchored to the idea of progress, is equated with historicism:

Historicism is content to establish a causal nexus of various historical moments. But no fact is already historical because it is a cause. It will become posthumously through data that may very well be separated from it for millennia. The historian, who starts from it, will stop to unfold the succession of data like a rosary between his fingers. It will capture the constellation in which with a previous one very determined has entered its own time. It bases a concept of the present as “time-now” in which the splinters of the messianic mess have come in (Benjamin, 1989b:191).

And even worse, the future loses meaning, even the messianic sense inherited from Judaism (Cfr. Benjamin, 1989b:191). Thus, it is revealed that history is political praxis and is marked by violence, as it involves remnants, forgetfulness, barbarism, the despicable, and the apocryphal. This gives us another way of understanding the text *For a Critique of Violence*, where Benjamin states that “the task of a critique of violence can be confined to describing the relationship of violence to law and justice”, this is only possible “within an ethical context” (Benjamin, 2001:21).

What stands out is that, for Benjamin, violence is part of political praxis either because of the way in which its variants positivist, historicist, social-democratic and even dogmatic historical materialism eliminate the subjugated past; as well as in the form of a political order, order of right, which covers violence as rationality, since it constitutes one of its means, but this raises the question, whether violence “serves for righteous or unrighteous ends”, which leaves unresolved “the question of whether violence is in general ethical as a means to an end” (Benjamin, 2001:23). Therefore, it questions the ideological form of the use of violence considered as a factor, a natural fact, against its historical consideration that conceives it as an acquisition, which happens with the positive law that questions “any right in the process of the constitution, only through the critique of its means” (Benjamin, 2001:24).

A key to understanding violence in political praxis is found in the way in which Benjamin proposes the connection of all areas of life to the mechanism of technical reproduction anchored to the satisfaction of needs and, from which subjects are constituted, alienated, that in art dominated by reproduction for mass consumption, only the relationship between producer-consumer subjects and the illusion of the spectator as a public expert that is shaped by the production of technical effects, whereby sensitivity is subjected to mere contemplation and custom, for this reason art forms part of the political war, implying violence, to the extent that this constitution of subjects, subjected to the technical mechanism of production, disorganizes the proletarianized masses, as social classes which may require the suppression of ownership conditions over the means of production and, at the same

time, suppresses the right to the masses to claim the abolition of oppression, in short, inhibits their own political action. For this reason, not understanding how the technical mechanism of production structures the various spheres of social life lead to an isolated treatment of the questions of art, history, politics, economics, philosophy, law.

The reconstruction of the connections between these different areas of life is a task of a political praxis based on criticism. This situation is reiterated in Benjamin when he distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate violence - based on the distinction between natural ends and ends of law - that tear away the structures of class domination that appear in the organization of the State and the administration of rights, as illustrated by the right to strike, which conferred on labour organizations the use of violence, but when exercised by the State, it withdraws that right, when it transfers participation or refrains from this in an activity or service “which amounts to a «breach of relations»”, but the right to strike is to “evade the violence of the employer” by means of declarations of «aversion» or «distancing» from the bosses. The violent moment, in the form of blackmail, necessarily appears, when the resumption of interrupted activity, from a position of principle, is linked to conditions that have nothing to do with the activity or that signify external modifications on it. In this sense, the right to strike represents, from the perspective of the labour sector, facing the violence from the State, a right to use violence to serve certain ends” as in the case of a revolutionary strike and for the State is an abuse to the right to strike (Benjamin, 2001:27), this is the “practical contradiction of the rule of law, and that is, that the State recognizes violence, whose natural ends are indifferent to it, except for the serious case of the general revolutionary strike” (Benjamin, 2001:28).

We may be well entranced by Benjamin’s argument about the way in which law emerges from violence and the exercise of rights implies other forms of violence, or how the legitimacy of the use of violence is assumed. However, to understand the political praxis here is another element that cannot be omitted: for Benjamin, the exercise of a right has a potential of violence to the extent that it tends to overturn the legal order, makes possible the organization of masses to demand their own interests, so the use of violence by the state is not in the mere repression of the transgressors, but finds its culminating point in the connection of violence with the technical mechanism of production and fall marked in the warlike violence.

In this way, violence can happen when a right is exercised to the extent that this action tends to “overthrow the legal order”, thereby revealing that violence derived from the exercise of a right is feared because it alters the legal order that protects such right, so it does not matter when violence appears as something for-

tuitous, as a means to achieve a desire or satisfy a need, but it does not found or modify the legal order (Benjamin, 2001:28), but precisely in this type of violence, which Benjamin calls “pirate”, Military violence appears as a practical contradiction of the rule of law, since the relationship is between subjects of law (states) pursuing legal or natural ends, leading to “ceremonies of peace”, that is, recognition to the victories of the winner and to fix “the new circumstances... as a new «right» (Benjamin, 2001:29) here is fundamental the twist that produces Benjamin when declaring that warlike violence, it is the “origin and model of all violence that pursues natural ends”, and how “all forms of violence found a right”, because what happens is that private persons (subjects of law) are not recognized as the possibility of exercising violence to satisfy their natural ends, except in the cases of “the great criminal”, for this reason the State fears –and tries to control– the violence that founds a new right, being in situations related to the great criminals, of war, or of class warfare (Benjamin, 2001:29).

If the technical mechanism of production subdues all areas of life and moulds the masses as producer-consumer subjects, right operates as another mechanism for the maintenance of the established order, for it subjects citizens to laws; but therein lies the problem of criticizing the violence of law: it cannot be performed as a mere pacifist invocation, nor can it be done as a simple rejection of any commitment to invoke that “«what is in the way is what is allowed»”, since “such a maxim does nothing more than untie this reflection of the ethical-historical, of all sense of action and of all sense of reality, since rights cannot be constituted if «action» is extracted from its context”, it which means that, the criticism of legal violence can begin with “the recognition of the safeguarding and promotion of the human interests in the person of each individual”, which has to be considered beyond the “establishment of a necessary fatally order” founded on “a simple informal reference to «freedom»”, since freedom requires a higher order to designate it, while also requires discussing “the validity of order of law in its entirety”, since the order of law is threatened by “conservative law violence” itself (Benjamin, 2001:30), or a conception of temporal continuity, a continuous march towards progress.

Colophon, begin critique to our present

From Gramsci and Benjamin, we have two critical horizons to proceed to question the way in which a conception of politics, of political praxis, has been constituted in the common sense, as in any other social discipline: first an idea of autonomy of the policy with respect to other disciplines, which focuses on the study

of power, or conflict, which involves the relationship between men characterized by selfishness and instincts, or by relations of friendship and enmity. Hence, de-historized politics loses its sense of transforming praxis to concentrate only on the search and maintenance of power or the handling of conflict between individuals to restrain their natural egoisms through law, according to liberal theories. Second, the relationship with criticism is lost and politics ends up being locked in the small, daily issues of organization, direction and control of a great mass conceived as directed, ruled, subordinate, where the figure of the rulers and therefore, of the government, to lead to the common welfare, to preserve general interests (which are those of capital) expressed in the State as neutral entity, everything is supposedly resolved, controlling –moderating– the individual acting and its selfishness, same as the possibility of the rulers corruption and improving the functioning of existing institutions, the legal order, or the culture of legality and equity. Criticism, as Marx would say, becomes phraseology.

The conception of the politics issues and of the State as a neutral and technical activity, like other areas of social life and their disjointed knowledge, have become the object of recommendations from International financial organisms, in particular, from which the meetings of ministers and heads of government stand out, but there is hardly any mention of the groups of researchers, intellectuals, who elaborate, at international level, the recommendations, in the form of scientific studies by experts, of new theories that are replicated in the national academic fields or in the mass media imposing a language, meanings around things and relations between subjects that presents itself as a “public agenda”.

An example of such studies and recommendations is the OECD report, *Financing Democracy*, which deals with the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, as well as what it calls the capture risks of public interest policies. It outlines a conception of politics centred on the small, everyday issues, where the main thing is the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns as a democracy guaranteed and neutrality of the State, in such a way that it leads the demands of the masses towards discussion about the fact that public policies should not be for sale, which is done through private donations, for which the regulation of electoral campaigns is recommended, not only transparency in the use of public resources to restore public policy trust: what it concerns the OECD is to maintain political competition as the key to public debate in the field of “political choices” in terms of candidates and parties, competition that is affected by the role of money citizens to promote their candidates so that the parties reach the voters, which is why access to resources becomes apart from political competition between parties (Cfr. OECD, 2016:22, 66).

Obviously, this is not about transforming society, because the participation of the citizenship-mass (subject of rights) is restricted to the possibilities of choosing candidates and parties, and to express their confidence in the decisions from the head of government and existing institutions.

The policy is therefore drawn between the state organization of citizenship and the assurance of the conditions of the accumulation process, as shown by the overwhelming concern of international organizations, insisting that economic growth depends on the flows of foreign investment, which moves, and recovers, from the management of public policies, geopolitical risks, and, especially, fiscal policies (UNCTAD, 2017: ix). Public policies emphasize investment policies that, on one side, are said to have become “more complicated and multifaceted”, and on the other hand, they have tended to liberalize the income conditions, to grant incentives, or to continue with privatization processes, for direct foreign investment in 58 countries, while the regulation of foreign investment revolves more around the settlement of disputes and mergers that involve takeovers from abroad (UNCTAD, 2017: xii-xiii).

When examining the recommendations of the international organizations, it is noticed that there are no social forces (classes) in a social construction project; the social-economic structure and its movement becomes a substitute for perennial conceptions when the inequalities arising from the mode of production are attributed to structural problems to be corrected and the political-ideological superstructure is restricted to questions of culture or mentality that facilitates, or obstruct, structural change. In this way, a conception of a linear time, a homogeneous history, is emphasized, in which one ends up exalting the figure of the political chiefs (of government), of entrepreneurs who risk their capital, in front of a mass citizen impoverished in terms of their possibilities of vindicating their own interests, as subject of rights stripped of their own interests. It is also revealed that the possibilities of undertaking a political praxis, at the national level, are subordinated to the relations of each country with the outside world.

Even beyond the state, the large transnational corporations are governing, since it is argued that the transformation of the economy rests on the so-called digital economy, which is credited with the ability to “... boost competitiveness in all sectors, create new opportunities for companies and entrepreneurship, and opening up new avenues for accessing foreign markets and participating in global electronic value chains”, as well as fostering a new” geographic relocation “of the industries through three-dimensional printing, as well as lead to “greater outsourcing of services” or to generate other types of alliances between suppliers and recipients, yet the same UNCTAD report notes that only 40% of the assets of the large multinational

information and communication technology is moving outside their countries of origin and, its major impacts are in “electronic commerce and digital content”, although it is argued that the digital economy augurs prosperity, as long as the digital gap between countries get closed and the operations of multinationals are regulated (UNCTAD, 2017:xvi-xvii).

The policy – in technical sense – focuses on meeting production growth in relation to the expansion or contraction of trading, linked to the number of jobs and profitability of foreign subsidiaries, but resting that profitability in a salary reduction, with adverse results because, although the costs of production and therefore the demand for goods and services, the crises are described as a result of structural problems facing the “new roles of the public, private and external sectors, the expansion of finance and the increasing income concentration altered the structure and dynamics of global demand in a way that heightened vulnerabilities, eventually leading to the crisis” (UNCTAD, 2013:12-14). Once again, the barbarism committed on the large contingents of unemployed workers is now transferred to individual capacities to become “employable” or “entrepreneur” without connection with the mechanism of production and circulation of capital that is reorganized to continue expropriating wealth produced socially, so that the misery of the large dispossessed masses is attributed to their lack of skills and abilities or their limitations to access credit.

The most paradoxical is the way in which a relationship is established between fiscal policy, democracy and legitimacy, since it is asserted that: “fiscal policy [is] the centre of the relationship between citizens and the State”, so that legitimacy is reduced to “the confidence of citizens in democracy over other forms of government... Equally, fiscal legitimacy reflects the confidence that people place in the work of the government in the collection and expenditure of tax revenues”, but the crisis of legitimacy (reduced to lack of confidence) in fiscal policies in Latin America, says OECD, is due to the fact that they do not achieve a redistributive effect, “it does not manage to close the gap between rich and poor [because] poor taxation hamper the generation of tax revenues, frustrate public spending and undermine fiscal and democratic legitimacy”, the remedy they propose is: to increase fiscal efficiency, to control public deficits, fiscal responsibility laws, improve transparency to predict the macroeconomic environment, reduce inflation, to consolidate public finances and a reasonable manage of the debt, to achieve “democratic governance” restricted to acceptance and support for tax reform (Centro de Desarrollo de la OCDE, 2007:34).

What political praxis can be done when a conception is imposed that says that “democracy allows a country not only to approve reforms, but to adjust in a prag-

matic way the own process of reforms according to the changes that occur in the local conditions or international”? And even more so if it is said that “while public finances and democracy do not always go hand in hand, democracy is the political regime in which fiscal policy can reach its potential as a tool for allocating resources, redistributing income and securing macroeconomic stability” (Centro de Desarrollo de la OCDE, 2007:53), the policy is reduced to a technical activity where citizens “participate” through mechanisms of transparency and accountability, democracy is restricted to political representation and electoral suffrage that ensure governance, as not only people are willing to pay taxes, but “people’s attitudes toward democracy and their support for government officials are deployed” (Centro de Desarrollo de la OCDE, 2007:39). The key to this hegemonic policy lies in one point: how pension reform promotes “financial development, and even [facilitates] savings growth”, as well as favouring foreign investment and private sector participation in activities “to improve long-term growth, as more and better spending on education, innovative capacity and infrastructure” (Centro de Desarrollo de la OCDE, 2007:30-31).

This entire situation, if we examine it from Gramsci’s approach, reveals a conception of history centred on the character, the public official and the supplanting of the interests of the subaltern classes in the public policies of security and social welfare subject to fiscal and investment policies. The criticism is restricted to the evaluation of the success of public policies, the scandals of party leaders and the State: there is no possibility of a transformative political praxis. Moreover, if we add Benjamin’s perspective, a reverence for what is established, and for technical progress, prevails when it is proposed to improve or correct what exists to include the dominated, when in reality they are constituted as subjects conforming to the conditions of accumulation of capital.

With Benjamin, we notice how, from the predominance of the technical mechanism of the conditions of production, producers-consumers have been defined as being legally defined in terms of rights by gender, ethnicity, age, access to consumption, which have allowed the expropriation of capacity of the oppressed to write their own history, cancelling their possibilities of demanding the transformation of the conditions of property that are the basis of their oppression, because even forms of oppression (exploitation) are thematized restricted to groups of women (domestic workers) of working children, of sexual exploitation, as if the production of socially produced and privately appropriated wealth was no longer a source of oppression, but rather the development of individual capacities (competences), the empowerment of specific social groups characterized as a vulnerable population, where vulnerability is measured, mainly, in relation to the access to consumption.

We have in Benjamin and Gramsci proposals that allow us, on one hand, to unveil the structure of coercion - the technical mechanism of production - from which docile subjects are constituted to the social order, and, on the other hand, a proposal to break with this structure of coercion by organizing the subaltern classes; learning the lesson that both history and politics are critically inscribed when the task of transforming to emancipate is imposed, and they imply an indissoluble relationship between theory and praxis that allows us to apprehend socio-historical realities as a whole. For this reason, it is necessary the critique the dominant theories, claiming the category of *political praxis*, so as not to be trapped in the discussion and practices of politics as an exclusive sphere of the State, that is, how policies, in the technical sense; to liberate the theoretical consciousness, insofar as it is expressed in language, of its alienation and, consequently, contribute to create a collective consciousness oriented to the transformation of the conditions of oppression.

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