

# Against ideology, demo-fascism, and the militianization of knowledge (A Latin American perspective)•

From South to West; from the philosophical South to the philosophical world. Perhaps this reversal of order and hierarchy is not particularly original and provocative since it has become commonplace to say that the research project of the destruction of modernity/coloniality and the affirmation of decolonial thought occupy the center of the contemporary Latin American debate.

Despite this, an attentive and non-ideological analysis of the discussion reveals the sophisms, false reasoning, and inconsistencies of a significant portion of the intellectual production that claims to address these issues. I am not intent on provoking useless polemics, so I will focus on highlighting some points that seem central to me.

In my view, Latin American philosophical and political thought is hostage to the *selective* use of arguments and critical reason; double moral; and a relativistic, Manichaeist, and authoritarian conception of society and education. To understand this context, it is necessary to begin with an archeology of Latin American (political) philosophy from a dual perspective: the ideological matrix and the horizon of humanity's essence in today's world.

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Scientific literature that analyzes the history of the concept of ideology and seeks to determine its main characteristics is immense. In the following pages, I would like to focus on one fundamental aspect—one that is frequently concealed or trivialized—which consists of the transformation of ideas into ideology for the purpose of mastery, control, and manipulation of society. It is a strategy that has destabilized the West’s philosophical, academic, political, and social history since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through militant tactics (techniques, campaigns, doctrinal principles) employed against the enemies of the People, the Party, the Class, or a small Corporatist clique.

Contrary to what has been widely accepted in recent decades, the idea of ideology is neither dead nor in crisis. The 20<sup>th</sup> century together and the first decades of the current century comprise the “age of ideologies” (Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeit der Ideologien*) in which recurrent, increasingly intense waves “of ideological energies and intellectual seductions area taking place” in a process of “marked ideologization within the State and society, in the economy and in culture.” In other words, such powerful and noxious ideologies as communism, fascism, and national socialism that dominated the world stage during the Cold War, and on to this day after the fall of the Berlin wall, have been replaced by the “proper nouns,” including nationalism, universalism, liberalism and neoliberalism, socialism (in its several forms), and, of course, activism, and social movements (including international Occupy Movement protests).

The decisive problem, often disregarded by the intelligentsia (intellectuals and scholars alike), is that of “simplifying and manipulating political ideas, of their use for the purpose of mobilization and political domination over a multitude, and their effective penetration in the masses for the conquest and exercise of power. Through a system of ideas encompassing the totality of the man-society-political relationship, the aim is to reduce reality to a formula with a view to shaping or manipulating it according to the interests of power politics.”<sup>1</sup> Political ideas are transfigured into ideologies, concepts into (often) infamous actions, thinking into religious dogma. Instrumentation, exaggeration or simplification, psychological terrorism, harassment, and the falsification of reality—these ideas are transformed into ideologies used in building and legitimizing “a fideistic,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeit der Ideologien*, 1982. Italian Translation: “Il Novecento. Secolo delle ideologie”, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2008, p. 395.

action-oriented system that serves both to interpret reality as well as to justify any kind of decision.”<sup>2</sup>

The consequence of this world vision (*Weltanschauung*) is the birth and diffusion of new forms of authoritarianism. This happens to be the “social fascism” analyzed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos or the “Ur-fascism” of Umberto Eco. It is the demofascism<sup>3</sup> that controls politics, society, and culture. Unfortunately, this also seduces and contaminates the new left and social movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We ought to keep in mind that society in Latin American countries, to a considerable extent, can be seen as an aggregate of people who have come “to know citizenship through the unusual figure of the master (of slaves)”<sup>4</sup>

It is a society where “social and personal differences and asymmetries are immediately transformed into inequalities in terms of hierarchy, command and obedience. The individuals are immediately distributed between superior and inferior (...). *All the relations*<sup>5</sup> take the form of dependence, tutelage, concession or favor (...). Where Law has always been a weapon to preserve privileges and also the best instrument of repression and oppression, without ever defining concrete rights and duties understandable to everybody [and] the Judiciary is clearly perceived as distant, secret, representing the privileges of the oligarchies and never the rights of the society in general (...). In this society the authentic political representation does not exist, neither the idea nor the practice. The political parties tend to be private clubs belonging to the local or regional oligarchy”<sup>6</sup>

What is to be done?

Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy might help us further our understanding of our circumstances. Agamben’s thought is deeply helpful for comprehending and characterizing the contemporary political and legal paradigm. His concept (and strategy) of Profanation is of central importance: “If consecration was the term that denoted the

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<sup>2</sup> IDEM.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my text “O realismo do mal. A agonia da democracia e demo-fascismo no Século XXI”, In: *Sexo, Política, Desconstrução* (Edited by Rossano Pecoraro and Baptiste Grasset), Rio de Janeiro, CAPES/Imprimatur, 2018 and *Idola*, shortfilm by LabFilGM, <https://vimeo.com/247508169>.

<sup>4</sup> Marilena Chauí, “Culture and democracy”, In: *Crítica y Emancipación – Latin American Journal of Social Sciences*, Year 1, number 1, 2008, pp. 70-71.

<sup>5</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>6</sup> Marilena Chauí, “Culture and democracy”, In: *Crítica y Emancipación – Latin American Journal of Social Sciences*, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

leaving of the sphere of human law, profanation signified returning something to the free usage of mankind.”<sup>7</sup>

It is a positive act; it consists in the full realization of a power of action that is taken as an imperative by contemporary human beings.

Agamben also employs the concept “Inoperative” (*inoperosita*). This does not simply refer to inertia or non-activity but “refers rather to an operation which involves inactivating, decommissioning (*des-oeuvrer*) all human and divine endeavor.”<sup>8</sup> It is this act that allows the profanation—with the sheer force of the movement it carries—of the empty core of the West’s political and legal framework.

*Who* could do that? *Who* would be the active subject of this profanation? Is it something that is performed by an individual? Is it an action conducted by organized social groups? Is it an ethical act? A political act, or even a revolutionary one?

First of all, the contrast between individuals and groups, “between Individual Psychology and Social Psychology, which at a first glance may seem to be full of significance, loses a great deal of its sharpness when it is examined more closely.”<sup>9</sup> In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud reader of Le Bon (*La psychologie des foules*, 1895) describes groups (crowd, *masse*, community, *multitudo*) as follows: “A group is impulsive, changeable and irritable. It is led almost exclusively by the unconscious. The impulses which a group obeys (...) are always so imperious that no personal interest, not even that of self-preservation, can make itself felt.” The group is “incapable of perseverance,” “extraordinarily credulous,” “open to influence” and “it has no critical faculty.” It thinks in “images.” It cannot tolerate any delay “between its desire and the fulfilment of what it desires.” The feelings of a group “are always very simple and very exaggerated.”<sup>10</sup>

No *logos*, no doubt, no morality, no reason, no arguments, and in such circumstances man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity is unlikely to occur, as the Kantian formula would have it.

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<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanazioni*, Milano, Nottetempo, 2005, pp. 83-84. Cf. integral edition of *Homo Sacer*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Art, Inactivity, Politics”, In: *Politics* (Edited by Rui Mota Cardoso), Serralves, Fundação Serralves, 2008, p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1949, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> IDEM, p. 17.

“Inclined as it itself is to all extremes, a group can only be excited by an excessive stimulus. Anyone who wishes to produce an effect upon it needs no logical adjustment in his arguments; he must paint in the most forcible colours, he must exaggerate, and he must repeat the same thing again and again. Since a group is in no doubt as to what constitutes truth or error, and is conscious, moreover, of its own great strength, it is as intolerant as it is obedient to authority. It respects force and can only be slightly influenced by kindness, which it regards merely as a form of weakness. What it demands of its heroes is strength, or even violence. It wants to be ruled and oppressed and to fear its masters. Fundamentally it is entirely conservative, and it has a deep aversion from all innovations and advances”.<sup>11</sup>

After all—as Spinoza writes in Chapter XVI of *A Theologico-Political Treatise*—it is far from being the case that all men can always be easily led by reason alone; everyone is drawn away by his pleasure, while avarice, ambition, envy, hatred, and the like engross the mind so deeply that reason no longer has a place.

So—with all of this considered, what is to be done?

This is a difficult question to answer, especially in societies in which, for example, speaking out against the educational system is as dangerous as confronting paramilitary groups in Mexico or in Rio de Janeiro.

However, “we have maintained a silence closely resembling stupidity,” as stated in the Revolutionary Proclamation of the Junta Tuitiva (the first free government of Latin America; La Paz, July 16, 1809) that Eduardo Galeano uses as epigraph to his book *Open Veins of Latin America*.

Therefore, it is necessary to decide to defend freedom and rebel against the voluntary servitude that crushes us (Étienne de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or the Anti-Dictator*).

It is necessary to stand against ideology, demo-fascism, and the militianization of knowledge.

It is necessary to resume, reoccupy, and update the meaning of *logos*, enlightenment, and nihilism.

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<sup>11</sup> IDEM, pp. 15-16.

It is necessary to develop a new *paideia* (human formation, education and culture as purpose of the human being, and search of the ideal of moral perfection).

Finally, “it is necessary not to feed the vultures (...) It is necessary not to die on a public sidewalk, while there is still time.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Torquato Neto, “Diário da Internação” (A Committal Diary), In: *Torquato Neto essencial*, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica, 2017, p. 227.