Capitalism as “the best of all possible worlds”: a marxist critique of Boaventura de Sousa Santos' postmodern political thought

O capitalismo como “o melhor dos mundos possíveis”: uma crítica marxista do pensamento político pós-moderno de Boaventura de Sousa Santos

El capitalismo como “el mejor de todos los mundos posibles”: una crítica marxista al pensamiento político posmoderno de Boaventura de Sousa Santos

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ABSTRACT
The general aim of this work is to critically analyse certain conceptions and political positions of Boaventura de Sousa Santos on the problems of Western modernity and postmodernity. For the Portuguese sociologist, Western modernity is going through an unprecedented crisis of civilisation that can be identified through three fundamental dimensions: the epistemological dimension (the problem of Western scientific knowledge), the theoretical dimension (the problem of the Marxist theory of social emancipation) and the political dimension (the problems of the liberal social contract, social fascism and the disunity of left-wing forces). Postmodernity, however, represents the possibilities and opportunities for overcoming that crisis in view of the epistemological (the ecology of knowledge), theoretical (the new emancipatory political culture) and political (high-intensity democracy) renewals that are underway. The main hypothesis to be presented is that Boaventura Santos' political conceptions and positions – in parallel with his limited understanding of Marxism, the main interlocutor and target of his often mistaken criticism – correspond to the postmodern ideology, which can be characterised, according to Marxism, by epistemological scepticism, contempt for history and political defeatism. In this vein, the theoretical framework adopted here necessarily comes from Marxism, understood, according to Michael Löwy, as a social worldview, that is, an organic, articulated and structured set of values, representations, ideas and cognitive orientations about man in his relationship with nature, society and history, internally unified by a determined perspective and a certain socially conditioned point of view.
Keywords: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, crisis of western modernity, postmodernity, marxism, lefts.

RESUMO
O objetivo geral deste trabalho é analisar criticamente determinadas concepções e posições políticas de Boaventura de Sousa Santos acerca das problemáticas da modernidade ocidental e da pós-modernidade. Para o sociólogo português, a modernidade ocidental passa por uma crise civilizatória sem precedentes que pode ser identificada a partir de três dimensões fundamentais: a dimensão epistemológica (o problema do conhecimento científico ocidental), a dimensão teórica (o problema da teoria marxista da emancipação social) e a dimensão política (os problemas do contrato social liberal, do fascismo social e da desunidade das forças de esquerda). A pós-modernidade, no entanto, representa as possibilidades e oportunidades para a superação daquela crise tendo em vista as renovações epistemológica (a ecologia de saberes), teórica (a nova cultura política emancipatória) e política (a democracia de alta intensidade) que estão em curso. A hipótese principal a ser apresentada é que as concepções e posições políticas de Boaventura Santos – paralelamente à sua compreensão limitada do marxismo, aliás, o principal interlocutor e alvo das suas críticas, não raras vezes equivocadas – expressam uma ideologia pós-moderna caracterizada pelos: ceticismo epistemológico, desprezo pela história e derrotismo político. O referencial teórico-metodológico adotado provém, necessariamente, do marxismo, entendido, de acordo com Michael Löwy, como visão social de mundo, isto é, um conjunto orgânico, articulado e estruturado de valores, representações, ideias e orientações cognitivas sobre o homem em sua relação com a natureza, a sociedade e a história, internamente unificado por uma perspectiva determinada e por um certo ponto de vista socialmente condicionado.

Palavras-chave: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, crise da modernidade occidental, pós-modernidade, marxismo, esquerdas.

RESUMEN
El objetivo general de este trabajo es analizar críticamente ciertas concepciones y posiciones políticas de Boaventura de Sousa Santos respecto de las cuestiones de la modernidad y la posmodernidad occidental. Para el sociólogo portugués, la modernidad occidental atraviesa una crisis civilizatoria sin precedentes que puede identificarse a partir de tres dimensiones fundamentales: la dimensión epistemológica (el problema del conocimiento científico occidental), la dimensión teórica (el problema de la teoría marxista de la emancipación social) y la dimensión política (los problemas del contrato social liberal, el socialfascismo y la desunión de las fuerzas de izquierda). en curso. La principal hipótesis a presentar es que las concepciones y posiciones políticas de Boaventura Santos –en paralelo a su limitada comprensión del marxismo, de hecho, principal interlocutor y blanco de sus críticas, a menudo equivocadas– expresan una ideología posmoderna caracterizada por: escepticismo epistemológico, desprecio por la historia y derrotismo político. El marco teórico-metodológico adoptado proviene necesariamente del marxismo, entendido, según Michael Löwy, como una visión social del mundo, es decir, un conjunto orgánico, articulado y estructurado de valores, representaciones, ideas y orientaciones cognitivas sobre el hombre en su relación con la naturaleza, la sociedad.
y la historia, unificadas internamente por una perspectiva determinada y un cierto punto de vista socialmente condicionado.

**Palabras clave:** Boaventura de Sousa Santos, crisis de la modernidad occidental, posmodernidad, marxismo, izquierdas.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

The critique of capitalism has gone out of fashion - and here it is observed a curious convergence, a kind of unholy alliance, between capitalist triumphalism and socialist pessimism. The triumph of the right is reflected on the left through a radical shrinking of socialist aspirations. The intellectuals of the left, if they are not really accepting capitalism as the best of all possible worlds, have little hope of anything other than a little more space between the interstices of capitalism and expect, at best, only the most local and particular resistances (WOOD, 1999, p. 20-21).

The general aim of this article¹ is to analyse from a Marxist critical point of view, certain ideas by Boaventura de Sousa Santos about the problem of the Western modernity crisis which, according to the Portuguese sociologist, has three fundamental dimensions: the epistemological dimension (or the problem of Western scientific knowledge), the theoretical dimension (or the problem of the Marxist theory of social emancipation) and the political dimension (or the problems of the liberal social contract, social fascism and the disunity of the left).

The main hypothesis to be presented is that Boaventura Santos' conceptions and theoretical and political positions – alongside his limited understanding of Marxism,² which is one of his main interlocutors and the target of his often mistaken criticisms – correspond to the postmodern ideology that can be characterised, according to the Marxist framework, by epistemological scepticism, contempt for history and political defeatism.

Necessarily, therefore, the theoretical-methodological framework adopted here comes from Marxism, understood as a social worldview, that is. a relatively coherent set

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¹ Article translated by Thaisla Isabella da Silva Pinheiro.
² For José Paulo Netto, this is a "vulgar and very simplistic reading of the Marxist tradition. The result is not only unjustifiable, when one knows the talent of the author and recognises the richness of the subject, but above all it is inept for founding any serious appreciation of the Marxian legacy in the 20th century" (2012, p. 230).
of ideas about men in his relationship with nature, society and history, which in turn is linked to certain social positions or to the interests and situation of certain social groups and classes (LÖWY, 2009, p.16).

In the Marxist sense, to which we subscribe, postmodern ideology "is the theoretical expression of the profound forms of alienation to which individuals are subjected in contemporary capitalist society" which, in turn, has taken "to its ultimate consequences the irrationalist tendencies that had already been present in bourgeois thought since the 19th century and which were immensely accentuated in the 20th century" (DUARTE, 2012, p. 199). *Postmodern ideology* consists in:

a line of thought that questions the classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, the idea of progress or universal emancipation, single systems, grand narratives or definitive foundations of explanation. Contrary to these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, free, diverse, unstable, unpredictable, a collection of disunified cultures or interpretations, generating a certain degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, about idiosyncrasies and the coherence of identities (EAGLETON, 1998, p. 7).

This "line of thought", however, is not a "social worldview", as we defined it above, but a "discourse", as Maria Marcondes de Moraes puts it,

the postmodern discourse and the theories that make it up do not, of course, express a coherent and unified conceptual body. On the contrary, when we try to delimit its meaning, we come across a plurality of proposals and interpretations, often conflicting with each other (MORAES, 1996, p. 46).

or, as we prefer, a postmodern "ideology", defended and propagated by many intellectuals in the context of capitalism in its current regime of integral accumulation.3

Therefore, with the ideas of Maria Célia Marcondes de Moraes 1996, Terry Eagleton 1998, Ellen Wood 1999, José Paulo Netto 2012 and Newton Duarte 2012, we can characterise postmodern ideology as at least epistemological scepticism, contempt for history and political defeatism.

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3 See VIANA, 2019.
Boaventura Santos, however, defines and attributes to postmodernity uses and meanings diametrically opposed to those used by Marxism. For the Portuguese author, we are living in a time of transition, or interregnum, known as *postmodernity*.

*Western modernity*, which geographically refers to the Global North, where Western civilisation developed, is facing a *crisis* at the epistemological, theoretical and political levels, characterised respectively by the limitations of Western scientific knowledge, the inadequacies of Marxism as a theory of social emancipation and, finally, the harmful effects of the crisis of the liberal social contract, including social fascism.

We shall now turn our attention to each of these dimensions and the respective problems posed by the *crisis of Western modernity*, as well as its alternatives and solutions in post-modernity.

2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE CRISIS OF WESTERN MODERNITY AND THE ECOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGES

The *crisis of Western modernity*, in its epistemological dimension, generally refers to the problem of modern scientific knowledge. However, the central concern of Boaventura Santos' research is the social sciences, both positivism and, above all, Marxism.

Its epistemological objective consists of respecting and re-establishing the rich diversity and complexity of the world's reality (natural and human) through the *South epistemologies* and their corresponding *ecology of knowledges* that make it possible to recover, learn from and incorporate into the scientific knowledge of the Global North, the knowledges, knowledge, experiences and social, political and economic practices of the peoples and social groups of the Global South, which are despised, rejected and made invisible by the epistemology still predominant in the Global North.

The main criticism levelled at modern scientific knowledge is that it is indolent, metonymic and proleptic rational knowledge. Metonymic rational knowledge consists of "taking the part for the whole", "because it has a concept of totality made up of homogeneous parts, and nothing outside this totality is of interest" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 25-26). The idea of totality key to this definition,
is very reductionist because it shrinks the present by leaving out a lot of reality that is not considered relevant and that is wasted [...] we live in lazy knowledge, which is, by nature, dichotomous knowledge: man/woman, north/south, culture/nature, white/black. These are dichotomies that seem symmetrical, but we know that they hide differences and hierarchies” (SANTOS, 2007, p. 27).

Boaventura Santos opposes the Marxist idea of totality, from his perspective - narrow, limited, reductionist and dichotomous – to another idea of totality, the one that comes from oriental knowledge, which is "much more global, more holistic" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 27). However, this conception of totality operates which by "reducing the diversity of reality" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 28), in no way relates to the Marxist definition, given that,

it is the category of totality that [...] introduces the revolutionary principle into the social sciences. The principle of totality [...] does not mean a study of the totality of reality, which would be impossible, since the totality of reality is always infinite, inexhaustible. The methodological category of totality means the perception of social reality as an organic, structured whole, in which one element, one aspect, one dimension cannot be understood without losing its relationship to the whole (LÖWY, 2006, p. 16).

The net result of the double indolent reason, metonymic and proleptic, is, however, only one: a certain "mode of production of absences" characteristic of Western rationality and shared by the Social Sciences.

Without distinguishing between what is understood by scientific knowledge and common sense, knowledge and knowledge, Boaventura Santos argues that Western scientific knowledge is lazy, because it is homogenising, reductionist, dichotomous, arrogant (it disregards the validity of other knowledge), linear (history has a single and progressive direction), hierarchical (it naturalises differences), predominantly global and universalising (it disregards and invisibilises the particular and the local) and productivist.

With so many faults and limitations, it's not difficult to understand why the Coimbra sociologist foresees the need to establish other rational parameters so that scientific knowledge can effectively transform reality. For him, modern Western rationality "is based on the idea of transforming reality, but not on understanding reality" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 28).
If scientific knowledge has all those limitations, it will have an equally limited understanding of the reality it wants to transform. That's why it must be enriched, reinvigorated, "renewed" and "reinvented". How?

Also known as the Sociology of Absences (aimed at criticising metonymic reason) and the Sociology of Emergencies (aimed at criticising proleptic reason), Insurgent Sociology aims to "show that what doesn't exist is actively produced as non-existent [...] as a disposable, invisible alternative to the hegemonic reality of the world" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 28-29) and thus make visible, recover and learn from other knowledge that don't belong to the Global North. It is thus a "constellation of ecologies" that will found a new epistemology, that is, a new way of knowing and understanding the world – the South Epistemologies - with a view to ultimately transforming it.

Recurring in Boaventura Santos' ideas are the concern and misunderstanding of the Marxist methodological category of totality, understood as homogeneity and even as "globality". In the absence of "a knowledge as global as globalisation" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 20), he intends to found a South Epistemology but one that should not be constituted as a general theory or epistemology that would reduce the heterogeneity of nature and human reality.

What Boaventura Santos seems to be suggesting is that each individual can make sense of reality. As such, as many realities are possible as individuals are able to conceive of them. There wouldn't really be a single reality or a single meaning, but a thousand fragmented, subjective realities and meanings, all valid and true from an individual point of view.

Here we are faced with two characteristics of postmodern ideology. Firstly, epistemological scepticism, which, according to Ellen Wood, emphasises the "fragmented nature of the world and of human knowledge" and the "impossibility of any liberating politics based on some kind of 'totalising' knowledge or vision" (WOOD, 1999, p. 13) and, ultimately, of the contempt for history, which consists of the denial of
of "writing history”. There are no structured processes accessible to human knowledge (or, we have to assume, human action); there are only anarchic, separate and inexplicable differences. For the first time, we have what appears to be a contradiction in terms, a theory of epochal change based on a negation of history (WOOD, 1999, p. 14-15, author’s emphasis).

Boaventura Santos ignores or is completely unaware of the dialectical method of historical materialism and, in particular, the category of totality, as we have seen. Far from homogenising the reality of the natural and human world, the dialectical method considers it in its historical-social processuality. Thus, socio-historical processes and phenomena are analysed in their relationships, interactions and multiple determinations (totality), taking into account their dynamics, transformations and permanence (historicity) and their conflicts and antagonisms (contradiction). Using the methodological category of totality allows social scientists to consider "unity in diversity" when studying reality, and therefore all of its richness, complexity and contradictions.

3 THE THEORETICAL DIMENSION OF THE CRISIS OF WESTERN MODERNITY AND THE NEW EMANCIPATORY POLITICAL CULTURE

The crisis of Western modernity, in its theoretical dimension, is limited to the problem of the Marxist theory of social emancipation. According to Boaventura Santos, despite being obsolete and moribund, since it refers to the period of modernity that is in crisis, it is still hegemonic in the social sciences. It is therefore becoming urgent and necessary to reinvent a "new theory of social emancipation", bearing a "new political culture", suited to the current period of post-modernity. This is why the sociologist devotes a large part of his intellectual endeavour and a good part of his work to subjecting Marxism to supposedly analytical examination. In our view, however, he does so incompetently and often mistakenly, making the limitations of his postmodern critique explicit.

In order to "reinvent critical theory", therefore, "what is needed is another type of rationality, broader, in line with current needs" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 52). Marxism as a critical theory has neither considered nor integrated popular knowledge, practices and experiences into its body of theory. For example, in the economic field, it ignores
alternative production systems such as the solidarity economy, workers' cooperative forms of organising production and business management (self-management) (SANTOS, 2007, p. 36).

For Boaventura Santos, the Marxist theory of social emancipation is anchored in the following definitions and fundamental characteristics: i. the principle of equality; ii. the inability to think of other forms of exploitation, discrimination and exclusion beyond the relationship of oppression and domination established by capital-labour; iii. the linear sense of history in which capitalism has been transformed into a factor of progress, particularly by disregarding the colonial question: "In Marx we see a justification – especially in India – of colonialism as a factor of capitalism: colonialism is capitalism" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 51); iv. the proletariat as the only historical subject; v. the class struggle as the only form of social conflict; vi. the vanguard party as the bearer of the proletariat's class consciousness; vii. the proletarian revolution as the way to build a more just and egalitarian society; viii. socialism or barbarism as alternatives to capitalist society. In this way, centralised socialism, the critical utopia of modernity, has become a "conservative utopia", just like neoliberalism! (SANTOS, 2007, p. 54).

Boaventura Santos' assertion that Marx transformed capitalism into a factor of progress has no theoretical support, as it is nothing more than an interpretative misconception. As José Paulo Netto says: "The complex Marxian notion of progress is conveniently linked to positivist conceptions of determinism and evolution" (NETTO, 2012, p. 233). According to Netto, we can also say that Boaventura Santos undertakes a positivist reading of Marx and Marxism, identifying them with Eurocentrism and vulgar economism.

For Boaventura Santos, the Marxist theory of social emancipation is outdated and the historical period to which it corresponds is in crisis or no longer exists. It has already fulfilled its role by providing possible answers to the problems of its time. Thus why Boaventura Santos proposes “reinventing the emancipatory possibilities of emancipatory knowledge: a critical utopia [...] in a world dominated by conservative utopias” (SANTOS, 2007, p. 54).
In opposition to those eight fundamental characteristics of Marxist theory, Boaventura Santos presents eight guiding ideas for the establishment of a *new political culture*, which would be capable of reinventing a new theory of social emancipation suited to the new times and the new epistemological, theoretical and political needs of the *post-modern world*. Even if it doesn't constitute "avant-garde thinking", the capacity for renewal and the possibility of reinventing this theory necessarily involves taking into account and rescuing – hitherto invisibilised, despised, ignored and rejected – other popular, urban and peasant knowledge, experiences and practices from societies and communities in the Global South.

In the fragment we can see two characteristics of postmodern ideology: *contempt for history and political defeatism*:

we don't have any recipes for that world. So it's no longer about the concept of scientific socialism: it's another, much more open idea. Nor is it Rosa Luxemburg's idea of "socialism or barbarism". Rosa opened up Marx's proposal, in other words: the possibility of socialism is not the only one, there is the possibility of barbarism and we have to fight for one of them to be realised. We are even more open: today we are saying that another world is possible, a world full of alternatives and possibilities (SANTOS, 2007, p. 38, author’s emphasis).

The Portuguese sociologist ignores the fact that only socialism has become a viable historical-concrete option to capitalism and the social barbarism it engenders. He idealises the alternative of "another possible world", but within capitalism, devoid, however, of its deleterious and harmful aspects to social fraternity.

All of these "eight guiding ideas" allow for this interpretation. However, the fourth of them deserves to be highlighted, as it plays a central role in the reinvention and renewal of the theory of social emancipation proposed by Boaventura Santos. He believes that social movements are the current historical-revolutionary subjects and no longer the proletariat. Of all the social movements, he believes that the World Social Forum (WSF) has played a central role in the renewal and reinvention of the Marxist theory of social emancipation. It is no coincidence that he has dedicated several texts to it and has worked on it on a permanent basis.
According to Boaventura Santos, the social and political experiences shared and debated within the WSF made it possible to establish four major theoretical advances that are fundamental to the renewal of the Marxist theory of social emancipation. The first theoretical advance refers to the broader conception of power and oppression, something that the Marxist tradition has been unable to undertake given its analysis concentrated on "a single form of oppression or domination: that of capital-labour" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 61).

In fact, Boaventura Santos' conception of power differs little or not at all from Foucault's, if we understand it not as "a general system of domination exercised over one element or one group over another", but as "the multiplicity of power relations that are immanent to the domain in which they are exercised and are constitutive of its organisation" (FOUCAULT, 1976, p. 121-122 apud BOITO Jr., 2007, p. 21).

In capitalist societies, those six "time-spaces", however, "can be reduced to two forms of hierarchical domination" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 63): the system of inequality (the capital-labour relationship - Marx) and the system of exclusion ("where what is below is outside, does not exist, is disposable, contemptible, disappears" – Foucault) (SANTOS, 2007, p. 63).

The second theoretical advance is that the WSF can highlight the need to "build emancipation on the basis of a new relationship between respect for equality and the principle of recognising difference." Since in the Marxist theory of social emancipation, "all theoretical emancipatory energy has been guided by the principle of equality, not by the principle of recognising differences" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 62, author’s emphasis).

The third theoretical advance highlighted by the WSF is "the whole relationship between nonconformity, rebellion, revolution and social transformation" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 65). Boaventura Santos makes no distinction between them. Worse still, he completely ignores the importance of the Marxist theoretical and political debate on the problem of revolution – the key to the problem of the self-emancipation of the proletariat.

Finally, the fourth theoretical advance is the renewal of internationalism, since the WSF shows that "we are experiencing a new form of internationalism and social theories are not prepared for this: they are not international and even less internationalist"
(SANTOS, 2007, p. 66). This "new universalism", as Santos also calls it, consists of "producing trans-scalar theory and practices, in which local scales are articulated with national and global scales" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 67).

4 THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE CRISIS OF WESTERN MODERNITY AND HIGH-INTENSITY DEMOCRACY

The crisis of Western modernity, in its political dimension, refers to the problems of the liberal social contract, social fascism and the disunity of the left.

The emergence of social fascism is directly linked to the crisis of the liberal social contract and the corresponding weakening of its main liberal political institutions, namely the state and representative democracy. The disunity of the left, in this scenario, is incapable of generating organised and consistent resistance that obstructs, prevents or pushes back the fascist and neoliberal tendencies or forces that inexorably confront, corrode and advance on liberal society, the state and democracy.

Neoliberal policy, with its instruments and international organisations, is responsible for dismantling the welfare state and the developmental state, respectively, in the centre and periphery of the capitalist world system (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 356-357):

The neoliberal globalisation, deregulation, privatisation, free trade agreements, the inflated role of the World Bank and the IMF have gradually eroded the principle of the state, removing it from social regulation to market regulation. This required the radical distortion of democracy (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 28).

After identifying these problems, the Portuguese intellectual proposes reinventing politics on a contractual and institutional basis in order to implement a high-intensity democracy in which citizens actively participate and deliberate in the decision-making process of the polis. This would be the safe and democratic way to ward off the risks of neoliberalism and social fascism and therefore overcome the political crisis that has arisen within Western modernity.

In the current transitional period of post-modernity, this therefore requires: i. reinventions of the social contract and of the State as a social movement; ii. a new conception of the left and of the political forces and strategies for its permanent
articulation and unity; iii. the effective implementation of representative, deliberative and participatory democracy, in other words, high-intensity democracy. Let's see

4.1 THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

In the extract below, Boaventura Santos defines the social contract and points out the respective role of the state in civil society:

the grand narrative on which modern Western political obligation is based [...] to maximise and not minimise this freedom. The social contract is thus the expression of a dialectical tension between social regulation and social emancipation that is reproduced by the constant polarisation between individual will and general, collective will, between private interest and the common good (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 351).

The crisis of the modern social contract consists of the structural predominance of exclusionary processes (pre-contractualism and post-contractualism) over inclusionary processes (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 363).

On the one hand, post-contractualism

is the process by which social groups and interests hitherto included in the social contract are excluded from it [...]. The rights of citizenship, previously considered inalienable, are confiscated from them and, without these, the excluded go from being citizens to being serfs” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 363).

and, on the other hand, pre-contractualism "consists of the blocking of access to citizenship by social groups that previously considered themselves candidates for citizenship" (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 363-364).

For Boaventura Santos, it is at the level of assumptions that the general regime of values of Western modernity (freedom, equality, autonomy, subjectivity, justice and solidarity) “seems unable to resist the growing fragmentation of society, divided into multiple apartheids, polarised along economic, social, political, cultural and religious axes” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 359). However, it is “at the level of the operational devices of social contractualisation that the signs of this paradigm's crisis are most visible” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 362). Generally speaking, the transformations of each of these
mechanisms stem, directly and/or indirectly, from a "neoliberal consensus", particularly the Washington Consensus.

4.2 THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL FASCISM

For Boaventura Santos, social fascism is the greatest risk facing the corrosion of the liberal social contract. Hence his search for “sociability alternatives that neutralise or prevent these risks and open the way to new democratic possibilities” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 375). But how does he define social fascism?

Unlike historic fascism, “a nationalist, racist, sexist and xenophobic dictatorial political regime” (SANTOS, 2016, p. 202), the specificity of social fascism is that it coexists with low-intensity liberal political democracy (merely representative, limited to voting and elections). It is "a social and civilisational regime" that, instead of “sacrificing democracy to the demands of capitalism promotes democracy to the point where it is not necessary, or even convenient, to sacrifice democracy in order to promote capitalism” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 370).

Boaventura Santos distinguishes four forms of social fascism: i. the fascism of social apartheid; ii. parastatal fascism; iii. the fascism of insecurity, in which there is "discretionary manipulation of the insecurity of people and social groups made vulnerable by the precariousness of work" (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 372); iv. financial fascism. On the basis of these statements, we can see the confusion between the definitions of social fascism and neoliberalism, “above all, a culture of fear, suffering and death for the great majorities” (SANTOS, 2016, p. 180) in which:

all human rights violations are linked to neoliberalism, the most anti-social version of capitalism in the last fifty years. In the North, neoliberalism is imposing austerity on the vast majorities and bailing out the bankers, replacing social protection for citizens with social protection for financial capital. In the South, neoliberalism imposes its greed for natural resources, minerals, oil, natural gas, water and agro-industry. Territories become land, and the people who inhabit them, obstacles to development which need to be removed (SANTOS, 2016, p. 186).

A new social contract that is "much more inclusive because it must encompass not only human beings and social groups, but also nature"; intercultural, "because inclusion
takes place both by criteria of equality and by criteria of difference” and, finally, that does not establish “rigid distinctions between state and civil society, between economy, politics and culture, between public and private” (SANTOS, 2018a, p. 377-378).

Low-intensity democracy is also another aspect of the crisis of the social contract of Western modernity. As a merely representative liberal democracy, whose voters vote from time to time without any active and critical participation, it is therefore limited, “to create an island of democratic relations in an archipelago of despotsisms (economic, social, racial, sexual, religious) that effectively control the lives of citizens and communities” (SANTOS, 2016, p. 80).

Boaventura Santos therefore proposes "democratising democracy", in other words, a radical, high-intensity democracy that can be achieved by democratising all spaces and replacing "power relations with relations of shared authority" (SANTOS, 2016, p. 79). True participatory, deliberative and representative democracy, therefore, must exist, far beyond the political system, in the economic system, but family, racial, sexual, regional, religious, neighbourhood and community relations. Socialism is democracy without end. It follows that equality has many dimensions and can only be fully realised if, alongside equality, we fight for the recognition of differences, in other words, for the transformation of unequal differences (which create social hierarchies) into equal differences (which celebrate social diversity as a way of eliminating hierarchies) (SANTOS, 2016, p. 80, my emphasis).

In the excerpt above, we see a rather pretentious proposal for social, economic, cultural and political democracy. However, despite defining "socialism as endless democracy", as we shall see below, Boaventura Santos hesitates and sometimes even rejects the use of the word "socialism" to characterise his proposal for reorganising society. He uses the word "post-capitalist" instead of "socialism" in two texts written and published at different times. The Portuguese sociologist also passes a completely negative judgement on the socialist revolutions, saying that "they were bloody and failed" and that the "conservative governments that followed had to make concessions so that the social question would not descend into catastrophe" (SANTOS, 2016, p. 177).

Here we are facing the political defeatism that makes up the postmodern ideology present in Boaventura Santos' conceptions. Not even his conception of the left
incorporates the principle of equality into his conception of socialism. And his conception of the state as a "social movement" finds no theoretical support in political science, neither liberal nor Marxist.

4.3 THE PROBLEM OF LEFT-WING DISUNITY AND HIGH-INTENSITY DEMOCRACY

Boaventura Santos begins his critical analysis of the problem of the disunity of left-wing forces with the following diagnosis:

left-wing forces have traditionally been fragmented, divided by multiple differences, sometimes so deep that they imply turning rival left-wing forces into main enemies. [...] the left has not been able to distinguish between real, pragmatic differences that can be accommodated and negotiated, and ideological differences that sometimes take the form of dogmatic schisms very similar to those that in the past divided religions and led to fratricidal struggles (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 22-23).

The first deep division of left-wing forces occurred after the Second World War (1939-1945) in view of their divergent political conceptions and positions regarding: i. the adoption of economic models (of development and growth) and the means to realise them; ii. the alternative of socialism or the reform of capitalism; iii. the consideration of the proletariat as a revolutionary historical subject; iv. the conduct of the political and social struggle inside or outside democratic institutions; v. the state as an institution of domination, whether or not it can be mobilised to combat relations of domination (SANTOS, 2016, p. 173).

But which lefts is Boaventura Santos referring to and how does he define them? The left-wing forces he is addressing are quite broad. They are made up of political parties, social movements

which fight against capitalism, colonialism, racism, sexism and homophobia, and all citizens who do not consider themselves organised, but share the goals and aspirations of those who organise to fight (SANTOS, 2016, p. 183).

and all those who carry out actions or practices that are considered left-wing, even if they don't consider themselves to be left-wing. By left, he means:
the set of transformative theories and practices which, over the last 150 years, have resisted the expansion of capitalism and the types of economic, social, political and cultural relations it generates, and which have thus proceeded in the belief in the possibility of a post-capitalist future, of an alternative society that is fairer, because it is geared towards satisfying people's real needs, and freer, because it is centred on realising the conditions for the effective exercise of freedom (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 8).

As one can observe, Boaventura Santos has a liberal, anti-Marxist conception of the left. He emphasises that the objectives (theoretical and practical) of the left consist of resistance to capitalism and the belief in a post-capitalist society (or alternative society) that is fairer (because it meets the concrete needs of the population) and freer, because it promotes the exercise of freedom. In fact, the word "freedom" appears twice in this fragment.

The fundamental principle that defines the left's struggle against capitalism and, consequently, the building of a socialist society is the principle of equality, which guarantees opportunity for all, without which freedom becomes a mere abstract principle and, as it actually is in bourgeois capitalist society, a legal formality between citizens.

Boaventura Santos' aim is to "analyse the situation of the forces of the left", with the clear and objective proposal of "broadening mutual knowledge between them and suggesting possibilities for national and international coordination", hence the slogan "lefts of the world, unite" (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 9). Our author observes that, essentially, the left suffers from the same problem as Western scientific knowledge and the Marxist theory of social emancipation: the difficulty of dealing with (knowing, learning) and incorporating other knowledge, experiences and practices from other left-wing forces beyond the traditional Western left-wing political forces. This is what the extract suggests:

left-wing forces find it difficult to get to know the experiences of other left-wing forces and to learn from them; they are not interested in getting to know the political realities of other countries in depth, nor do they pay due attention to the international context and the economic and political forces that dominate it. The disappearance of analyses of the multiple faces of imperialism is proof of this. They also tend to be insensitive to the cultural and political diversity of the world (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 9).
The last sentence of the fragment is worth highlighting. Boaventura Santos states categorically that the forces of the left have completely lost interest in studying the multiple faces of imperialism. As we know, this is completely at odds with the historical truth. We can assume that the criticism is aimed at Marxism – a favourite target of his criticism. However, the claim is scientifically mistaken and historically unfair, as many revolutionary intellectuals and leaders (Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Ho Chi Minh, Sartre) dedicated themselves to studying and criticising imperialism. And not only that. Many left-wing political forces, such as the Indochinese, Indonesian and Malaysian communist parties, were engaged in promoting national liberation, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles and also committed to the socialist revolution.

The booklet *Left of the world, unite*, a sort of "manifesto of the left", diagnoses precisely these elements and, in a propositional way, presents some theses for the global articulation of the political forces of the left, whose "great banner" must be the defence of high-intensity democracy. (SANTOS, 2016, p. 174).

For Boaventura Santos, the historical significance of the "new interregnum" for the forces of the left is that it has revealed the need for them to recognise the limitations of liberal democracy in the face of anti-democrats and anti-fascists, the contradictions that exist between capitalism and democracy and the urgent importance of articulating them in order to establish a permanent unity capable of confronting and combating this state of affairs, but within the democratic camp itself:

With regard to the universalisation of liberal democracy, the forces of the left must start from the following observation: liberal democracy has never had the capacity to defend itself against anti-democrats and fascists in their most diverse guises. [...] This realisation urgently summons up the need for the left to unite in order to safeguard the only political field in which they can today fight for power: the democratic field. In turn, the widespread attack on wage incomes, workers' organisations and forms of social consultation, with the consequent transformation of social demands into a police matter; the increasingly serious and irreversible environmental crisis, aggravated by the

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4 Losurdo (2018), albeit in an analytical-critical key, presents a wide range of Western Marxist intellectuals who studied and debated the problems of European imperialism and colonialism with intensity. Completely neglected in the Italian philosopher's book, Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the main French intellectuals engaged in the anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles that marked the second post-war period, as Almeida (2018) argues.

desperate struggle for access to oil, which involves the destruction of countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya - and tomorrow perhaps Iran and Venezuela [...]. All these characteristics point to a condition of irreversible contradiction between capitalism and democracy, even the low-intensity democracy that the liberal version has always been (SANTOS, 2018b, p. 34-35).

The definition of "socialism as endless democracy" might seem strange were it not for the affiliation of Boaventura Santos' political conceptions and positions with postmodern thinking. The fragment summarises, in an exemplary way, the three characteristics of postmodern ideology that we have analysed so far: i. the lack of a "correct political line" expresses political defeatism due to the double abandonment of the idea of class struggle and the proletariat's struggle for socialist revolution, and also the conformism to which the lefts must submit and limit themselves – the "creation of forums" for debate and learning, even at a global level; ii. epistemological scepticism, which prohibits left-wing forces from objectively knowing the historical truth and from collectively and democratically building a "correct political line" of action; iii. contempt for history, which ignores all the social, cultural and economic advances and achievements made by socialist societies and the possibility of correcting their mistakes.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos' post-modern thinking, as "a cultural product of bourgeois society, an ideology that, instead of valuing the humanising aspects of bourgeois society, gives itself wholeheartedly to the celebration of irrationalism and scepticism", has the net result of discrediting the possibility of effective and articulated engagement by the forces of the left around a single project for global social transformation - the overcoming of capitalist society, for a Marxist approach in any field of knowledge must necessarily be linked to the perspective of overcoming capitalism with socialism and communism. However, this does not mean the pure and simple negation of everything that capitalist society has produced. A socialist society must be a society that is superior to capitalism and in order to achieve this, it must incorporate everything that, having been produced in capitalist society, can contribute to the development of the human race, to the material and intellectual enrichment of the lives of all human beings (DUARTE, 2012, p. 200).
5 FINAL REMARKS

As we have seen, for Boaventura Santos, the civilising crisis of modernity consists essentially of epistemological, theoretical and political crises. Post-modernity, on the other hand, is a transitional or interregnum period, inaugurated with the end of the socialist historical experiment, and is full of new horizons and perspectives, innovations and renewals in both the epistemological and theoretical fields, as well as in the political sphere.

Scientific knowledge from the Global North is regulatory, characterised by a monocultural, homogenous, universalising, reductionist and invisibilising epistemology. Hence the imperative need to relate non-Western knowledge in the construction of a new episteme.

Knowledge from the Global South is emancipatory. Hence the imperative need to relate non-Western knowledges in the construction of a new episteme - an ecology of knowledges that is rich, diverse, complex and holistic.

The Marxist theory of social emancipation, from being a critical theory, has become a "conservative utopia", obsolete and limited.

The theory of social emancipation, reinvented, can inaugurate a new emancipatory political culture, capable of producing rebellious, autonomous subjectivities, without subservience to parties and institutions. It recognises the principle of difference, broadens the concept of power and analyses other forms of domination and oppression, beyond that exercised by capital over labour. Histories in multidirectional senses must be rescued, rewritten and told. The proletariat is not the universal historical subject, but the social movements that organise themselves freely and fight for the realisation of "another possible world."

The politics of Western modernity is stigmatised by the crisis of the social contract, from which social fascism is emerging; by the hegemonisation of neoliberalism, which is responsible for the dismantling of the welfare state and the developmental state; by the disunity of left-wing political forces and, finally, by the crisis of representative democracy, which is only a low-intensity democracy.
The reinvention of politics in *post-modernity* presupposes and demands the reinvention of the social contract and of the *state as a social movement*, a *high-intensity democracy* - participatory, deliberative and representative - and, finally, the effective unity of the political forces of the left, can definitively ward off the threats of social barbarism, whether neoliberal or fascist.

However, for Marxism, Boaventura Santos’ political conceptions and positions are *postmodern*, as they correspond to an *ideology* characterised by epistemological scepticism, and so forth. the belief in the incapacity of scientific knowledge to understand and explain reality objectively and systematically, in its totality, historicity and contradictions; the *rejection* of history by dismissing the experiences, advances and theoretical and practical contributions of Marxism and socialism and, finally, the *political defeatism* that effectively abandoned the revolutionary anti-capitalist struggle in favour of the defence of "another possible world", which, contradictorily, is nothing more than capitalism itself, supposedly renewed and reinvented "as the best of all possible worlds."
REFERENCES


