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Studies in Critical Social Sciences
Critical Global Studies 15

Alejandro I. Canales and
Dídimo Castillo Fernández

Against Inequality

Contributions to a Discourse
of Social Emancipation

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poverty gender marxism
working class race segregation
migration dispossession racism slavery
precariousness patriarchy inequality wage
partriarchy social classes injustice underclass profit
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Against Inequality

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Against Inequality

Contributions to a Discourse of Social Emancipation

By

Alejandro I. Canales
Dídimo Castillo Fernández

Translated by

David Stiles Sparks



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Foreword

When the authors first honored me with the request to write the foreword to this book, I did not think I would find within its pages a seminal work. The text you have in your hands is the result of a profound reflection that goes beyond a scholastic enumeration of theories and interpretations of inequality. The authors have made an effort that is difficult to surpass. Writing with four hands represents a choice in which the authors must share principles, values, and show coherence. When this is achieved, the result is unbeatable. Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo have united experience, academic history, and a theoretical praxis whose scope places them at the pinnacle of Latin American critical thought. Knowledgeable about the reality of Our America, they dissect the dynamics of inequality in all its forms. Their objective is to visualize the origin and causes of the phenomenon in order to act accordingly.

It is no easy task to delve into the study of inequality when it can be said, without fear of being mistaken, that it is one of the problems that has been most treated in the social sciences. This has led the authors to make an extra effort to avoid falling into clichés. With clear language and fluent writing, they make the text a reference work. It is not a mere descriptive study in which statistical methods and methodological options are listed and end up describing all types of inequalities, be they social, economic, gender, cultural, or ethnic.

What distinguishes their proposal is their theoretical conception that exposes the inequality trap. The authors resist a sweetened version that transforms inequality into an endemic problem. Their horizon seeks to broaden our view of the issue, and to achieve this, they confront the different schools of thought that have examined inequality, exposing the weaknesses they present, the contradictions in which they incur, and the limits of their arguments. From their broad research and analysis, Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo open up a certainly novel perspective in studies on inequality. They warn us of the danger of limiting ourselves to take for granted analyses based on a sea of abstractions, the results of which at times does nothing more than perpetuate inequalities, as if they were an insurmountable reality. On the contrary, the authors propose a dialectical adventure, which makes it easier to understand, if I may paraphrase Marx, the fetishism of inequality.

The theoretical and political praxis that is presented in the pages by Canales and Castillo is truly at the service of the emancipatory causes of our day; it is knowledge linked to the struggles faced by Latin American critical thought. In this sense, the authors take sides, breaking the accommodating neutrality that describes and thinks of inequalities as a phenomenon whose consequences

can only be mitigated. They exercise what Wright Mills identified as sociological imagination. They unite the action of the social scientist with political praxis as part of their civic responsibility in order to question power, governments, and those responsible for applying policies. In this way, Canales and Castillo evidently follow the mandate of academic and public intellectuals in the sense Mills (2000 [1959]: 185) intended with the idea of the sociological imagination:

To those with power and with awareness of it, [they impute] varying measures of responsibility for such structural consequences as [they find] by [their] work to be decisively influenced by [the] decisions and [the] lack of decisions [by the powerful]. To those whose actions have such consequences, but who do not seem to be aware of them, [scholars direct] whatever [they have] found out about those consequences. [They attempt] to educate and then, again, [they impute] responsibility. To those who are regularly without such power and whose awareness is confined to their everyday milieu, [they reveal] by [their] work the meaning of structural trends and decisions for these milieus, the ways in which personal troubles are connected with public issues; in the course of these efforts, [they state] what [they have] found out concerning the actions of the more powerful.

They present their results, refute arguments, recover concepts, put them in to play, and give them prominence. Under this dimension, inequality is redefined as part of a social order—capitalism—and at that moment, the great forgotten—social class—emerges with force. They recover the analysis of class and Marxian thought to underline that the thesis on the end of classes and the obsolescence of “sinful” Marxism, in general, lies on the same weak double characteristic: its superficiality in the critique and the caricaturing of Marxism as a social theory. In defense of the explanatory capacity of the concept of social class and Marxism, Canales and Castillo deploy a theoretical arsenal of deep depth. Their arguments are difficult to refute. They go to the roots, which is why their proposal is radical and transforming. They break down and mark the contradictions of those previous scholars who have caricatured and abandoned class analysis in the study of inequality.

The authors question the classics and take their arguments to the limit. Under this perspective, inequality is redirected to incorporate it structurally to the evolution of capitalist development. Taking Marcel Mauss and his essay *The Gift* (2002) as a starting point, inequality is defined as a total social fact. Inequalities take root, become institutionalized, and configure a social

relationship within the economic, political, religious, military and family orders. As a total social fact, it comes to life in education, technological transformations, symbols, and culture.

Implicitly, Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo become co-participants of the analysis present in Pablo González Casanova's *The Sociology of Exploitation* (2006). In it, González Casanova points out that:

the measurement of inequality is not a purely scientific phenomenon and far from any value; sometimes it takes on obviously ideological forms that appear in the Pareto coefficient and in different types of graphic analysis; but even when formulas are used that more faithfully express inequality, such as the Gini index or the Schutz coefficient, at the base of their application lies the central dogma of a new type of political and social order to which Tocqueville referred, speaking of the capitalist society of his time. Irrationalism, fascism and racial or colonial discrimination will not be able to do away with it, as a value, nor with the empiricist analysis of inequalities.

This work by Canales and Castillo shows how keenly aware they are of the forms that inequalities take in the contemporary world within global capitalism. Their conclusion, because of its rotundity, leaves no room for doubt: It shocks the conscience. Inequality, they say, kills. For the authors, we are experiencing a crisis of inequality as a pattern of development of capitalism, to which we must incorporate the transition from analog capitalism to digital capitalism. In their characterization, however, Canales and Castillo sustain in this monumental work that this is:

not only another industrial revolution but also a radical and structural transformation in the social and political, sexual and cultural, ecological and spiritual, demographic and human spheres, among many others that make up contemporary social life. The digital age and microelectronics redefine and restructure all social forms, including class structure and social inequality.

Once again, their proposals are in line with one of the most influential economists in Latin America, González Casanova, who in the late 1980s highlighted in his essay "Poverty and Inequality in Latin America" (González Casanova, 2015) the consequences of a style of capitalist development in which:

neoliberal conceptions came to legitimize the accentuation of inequality as the price of growth. Modernization and external openness. The hierarchization of exports as the main source of dynamism, the growth of imported supplies, the provisions of all kinds in favor of capital, the contraction of public employment and the internationalization of ways of life and consumption, were all factors that strengthened historical relations that lead to the constant reproduction of inequality.

Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo practice the noble art of thinking. They link social knowledge and intellectual processes to a solid proposal. Therein lies the greatness aspect of the work, while giving meaning and amply justifying the subtitle: contributions for a discourse of social emancipation. Their text is an open plea against inequality, both politically and epistemologically.

In their debates with modernity, the reader finds the guide to follow Canales' and Castillo's reasoning. From its pages emerge ideas, concepts, and categories on which the discourse of inequality is built. It is not by chance that they begin their journey by quoting J.J. Rousseau. How could they not? His work marks a before and after in studies on inequality. Therefore, recovering one of the most outstanding theorists of the 18th century, whose work inspired the French Revolution and the Latin American emancipation process, is a wise move. The authors quote Rousseau to remind us of the difference and distance between natural and social inequalities, reinforcing the idea that social inequalities arise from the "forms and conventions established by human beings in their social coexistence. It would correspond to the different privileges and benefits enjoyed by some individuals to the detriment of others, such as wealth, power, status and authority." Thus, there is little to add.

It is difficult to find those who, since Marx, rescue Rousseau. In this sense, the courage of the authors is palpable through their theoretical rigor, which will act as a referential part of Latin American critical thought. They do not engage in theoretical syncretism; instead, they express the need to incorporate within their analysis emancipatory and revolutionary thought. Canales and Castillo reject reductionist visions and place the struggle against inequality as part of humanist thought. Only in this way can we understand the relationship they establish between Rousseau and the denunciation of inequalities.

I take the liberty of quoting Rousseau to support Canales and Castillo in their recovery of the Genevan. In his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1761) [1755], he stresses:

If we follow the progress of inequality through the different revolutions, we shall find that the establishment of the Law and the Right of property

was its first term, the institution of the Magistracy the second; that the third and last was the change of legitimate power into arbitrary power; so that the condition of rich and poor was authorized by the first epoch, that of the powerful and the weak by the second, and, by the third, that of Master and Slave, which is the last degree of inequality and the goal to which all others finally lead, until new revolutions ... bring the government back to being a legitimate institution.

Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo have achieved an orderly reflection. A filigree work, the two authors have successfully unraveled the asymmetries of social relations founded on the contradiction of capital and labor and on the social relations of exploitation. If the statement 'inequality kills' serves as an initial alert to the direction the authors will explore, it primarily grounds us in the tangible reality, from which they subsequently embark on a journey to challenge conventional perspectives through their work. Above all else, they highlight that the alternative is not to live in inequalities, to make them endemic, to make them bearable. The goal, rather, is to put an end to them. Canales and Castillo understand inequality in the same way that Zygmunt Bauman understood the Holocaust. Inequality and the Nazi Holocaust are linked by their meaning. They are proposals of death incorporated into the rationality of the West. They are modernity. They are not extramural: they are constituted in its womb and history.

In short, I believe that the work that you, the reader, have in your hands is destined to become a classic in the fight against inequality. And that makes its reading obligatory—I would even say, essential—for those who from the academy and political praxis seek to break the siege of socially conformist thinking, of empty answers. Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo encourage social scientists of today to think in radical ways in order to win and draw a rupturist alternative to capitalism. Thus, they distance themselves and warn against falling prey to descriptive studies that are incorporated into the logic of capitalism with a human face: "they are not public policies, no matter how progressive they were, the strategy to overcome inequality, but rather strategies of social emancipation." The authors question the idea of progress that legitimizes capitalism on which the world of inequality is built. Inequality is not "a pending issue of modernity, it is one of its contradictions." It is a question, they will say, of capitalist modernity.

Their knowledge is placed at the service of emancipatory causes, drawing on the accumulated body of knowledge of great Latin American intellectuals. In its pages, we will recognize those who have forged the critical thought of Our America. But we also find the main representatives of the different traditions

that give life to the cultural reason of the West. The authors take a look at these texts from the global south, joining those who have not hesitated to question power, uncover the inconsistencies, make explicit the limits of capitalism, and propose an alternative to overcome the exploitation of human beings by human beings.

To conclude, it is possible to affirm that the authors bring inequalities to the ground. We can feel inequality in an era where it expresses a lacerating reality. We walk through cities in which, as soon as we focus our gaze, we are assaulted by inequalities. Children at traffic lights selling Kleenex, swallowing fire, dressed as clowns, or begging for alms. Helpless elderly people lying on the sidewalks, the poverty of those who are marginalized, excluded and persecuted. Young people sniffing cans of glue. Women with their babies begging for sympathy and a few coins. Jobless workers, with disjointed gestures. They are the forms of inequality that oppresses and destroys the human condition and, in its worse cases, kills; they are explicit ways of denying human dignity.

The authors raise their voices in denouncement. In other words, they show how people live, get sick, and die as a consequence of the social class structure in contemporary capitalism. Only in this way can harsh realities truly be understood, like the fact that members of the ruling classes have a life expectancy that in some cases exceeds that of members of the working classes by 15 years. Social inequalities are class inequalities.

Alejandro Canales and Dídimo Castillo are aware of this reality. For this reason, their text, *Against Inequality: Contributions to a Discourse of Social Emancipation*, is not just another work. It is an option for social change and for struggles for human dignity, as well as a profound analysis of capitalist modernity. Now, the reader has the floor. Think to win and act accordingly.

Marcos Roitman Rosenmann

Preface

The entire strength of the modern labor movement rests on theoretic knowledge.

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Globalization, postmodernity, the information age, digital capitalism, labor flexibility, *precariousness*: All terms that point to the transformations of capitalism in the current era but which, in their uses and meanings, fall prey to the theoretical-ideological dominance of contemporary conservatism. In the face of this, leftist thought is unable to emerge from the political defeat it has suffered in recent decades. But it is not only a defeat in class struggle, it is something deeper. Its theoretical-political foundations have been questioned—in a certain way, displaced—by the expansion and consolidation of a new mode of capitalism, with new political and ideological underpinnings and foundations, and in the face of which, as leftists, we are still trying to take our first critical steps.

Both revolutionary socialist and reformist social democratic thought, which dominated the debate and the political programs of the left in the twentieth century, have become, supposedly, “outdated,” obsolete in the face of the new ways of constituting social conflict and class struggle. The now urgent need for a political and theoretical re-foundation of the left is evident. It is not only the case that many of its leaders, parties, unions, movements, are today explicitly or implicitly embracing neoliberal postulates. Faced with the almost absolute power of a singular ideology (conservative, neoliberal), it would seem that there is no other option but to adapt to it, even from positions that could open some space for a social progressivism, but which, nevertheless, does not question either the social and political bases or the ideological and comprehensive bases of the neoliberal doctrine.

Confronted with this political defeat of critical thinking, the left has tended to take refuge in its ideological discourses, trying to reinvent itself from the humanist principles of its philosophy. This serves as a foundation from which it gives meaning to its political praxis, at whatever level it may occur. The left and critical thinking, thus, find solace in their always valid and legitimate ethical principles and moral values concerning the human being, society, and the proper way to act in it. However, they are still ethical principles, not political ones.

If a young elementary school child, embodying the innocence that defines them, were to ask a leftist militant, be it a grassroots member or, more

significantly, one of its leaders, the simplest question of all: “*What for do you do politics?*”, the answer from that militant or leftist leader would, in most instances, be remarkably similar. It would be centered around guiding their actions based on principles and humanist values. To caricature that response, the militant or leftist leader might aptly express: “*To make the world a better place to live in.*”

This is, undoubtedly, a totally unquestionable argument from an ethical and moral point of view. But it is also an argument not far from the one that any Miss Universe contestant would answer when faced with a similar question.¹ The truth is that, beyond the corny and emptiness of this answer, it must be acknowledged that politicians, both on the left and the right, in the present political landscape, wouldn’t offer more profound answers if confronted with the same question. They would say that it is for the social good, to advance social justice, and so on, a long peroration of good intentions. In the end, and in the best of cases, it is a set of humanist ideals. Of *dreams and utopias*—valid, legitimate, necessary and unquestionable—yet undoubtedly insufficient in today’s context, as they remain just that: *mere dreams and utopias*.

Faced with this situation of the left, the basic question seems to be the same as the one faced in the mid-nineteenth century: What is the strategic sense—that is, the horizons of reason that give transcendence to a political program of the left²—that give sustenance to the praxis of its militants and leaders and allow them to go beyond themselves? What are those theoretical-political premises (and not only philosophical ones) from which all of us—militants, leaders, and social classes themselves—can presently utilize to construct a sense of transcendence extending beyond the ethical principles and moral values of humanism? In our view, this would mandate establishing comprehensive frameworks about social and historical reality (its theoretical and political principles), from which the left and social classes can formulate a political strategy for transformation and social emancipation.

Obviously, we are not addressing the academic theories of contemporary society per se, but rather their potential application as comprehension categories for supporting transformative practices within that reality. Faced with

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- 1 And with this, we neither want to denigrate nor disrespect this contestant or the Miss Universe competition; however, we wish to illustrate, by taking the matter to an extreme situation and comparison, the theoretical-political weakness of critical thinking in the contemporary left, both in its reformist wing as well as in its revolutionary wing.
 - 2 In this sense, we are referring to political programs, distinct from government programs. These are ideas forces that surpass immediate circumstances, aiming to transform society rather than merely govern it.

these academic theories, we must adopt a twofold critical approach: (1) a critical theoretical use that unveils the extent and limitations of this knowledge, revealing the philosophical and political agendas they uphold. And (2) a critique political that unveils the rational horizons that can be derived from such theoretical critique. The latter necessitates that political critique is both sustained and constructed from a class position within the social and political topography of this society, encompassing not only an understanding of social reality but also a commitment to its transformation through a project of social emancipation.

To do this, we believe that it is necessary to reframe that child's initial question. The question isn't so much about *what for* an individual, identifying as a leftist, holds a particular office and political commitment today. Rather, it involves turning the question around and asking *why* that militant or leftist leader believes that, from the field of politics, they can make progress toward realizing the answer they initially provide: *making a positive difference in our current social realities*. In essence, *why* does this militant or political leader of the left believe it is *possible* to attain such ideals and humanist utopias?

At this point, the response takes us beyond the realm of ideals and abstract idealism, steering us toward the domain of materialist thought and philosophy. It is about supporting the "why" in a Theory of History that refers to historical processes and social subjects that make this utopia of humanist ideals possible. Consequently, the *historical possibility* of the socialist project would no longer be based only on its ideals, but would have theoretical and political foundations. These foundations not only provide *why it is possible* but also *why it is necessary* a socialist project of transformation and social emancipation.

On the one hand, it would be based on a theoretical argument, rooted in a political philosophy of the subject matter. Consequently, it embodies a material and historical perspective for comprehending and interpreting the world and its everyday nature. And, on the other hand, it would allow the identification of social subjects, equally historical and mundane, *capacity* of materially constructing that utopia, from their historical and circumstantial conditions.

Another clarification is in order here: The fact that we can distinguish and identify subjects with the material *capacity* to execute such a political program does not necessarily imply that they possess the *power* to enact it. This differentiation between the *capacity* to perform an action and the actual *power* to do so is neither trivial nor superficial. The former pertains to the subject's inherent material conditions and *capacities*, while the latter is contingent upon the historical conditions in which the subject operates. This, in turn, involves the capacities and *powers* of other subjects with whom they interact in an ongoing struggle to safeguard their respective material and worldly interests. *Capacity*

is intrinsic to the subject themselves, while *power* is contingent on their position in relation vis-à-vis other subjects.

Paraphrasing Silvio Rodríguez, the Cuban singer songwriter, we can assert that *History is made by hand and without permission*. And that is the point. Firstly, History (the dream) is made by historical actors. And, on the other hand, these dreams and utopias are built from historical contexts, full of conflicts, struggles, interests and materialities, risks, uncertainties and with and against (without the permission) of other equally historical and material subjects.

Due to this *historical materiality* of the social world, the socialist project, whether revolutionary or reformist, requires being supported by a theory of History that explains its possibilities of construction and transformation. Ultimately, it involves the *making* of History, extending beyond its historicities. Idealisms (dreams and utopias) do not materialize based on their goodness, desirability, or universal acceptance. Instead, their realization depends on material and historical conditions that either possible or impossible them. It is never a matter of *capacity* to bring them to fruition but always a matter of *power* to do them.

It is paradoxical, moreover, that it is precisely the fact that these interests become possible (a question of *power*), that is, materialize as concrete facts, which ends up, in many cases, making them equally acceptable, although not necessarily desirable. The historical materialization of these principles and values, their materialization in the social structure, as vectors of the foundational matrix of society, is what ends up making them acceptable. There is, at the end of the day, a form of pedagogy, of education of society and its populations in those principles and values, which makes them act according to those material interests. They are not accepted because they are desirable purely and simply, but because that acceptability is achieved, has been made possible by and from their very *imposition* as social praxis, and therefore, that it has been done from positions of power, from concrete and specific material interests, particular, not global, proper to certain sectors, classes, genders, races within society, positioned in positions and *locus* of power within the political, social and economic structure of society.

Neoliberalism, for example, is currently accepted (and, in some cases, even projected as desirable) not because of the goodness of its proposals but because it was *imposed* and materialized as a project, because it was built from a social practice, from which its acceptance and its current potency as a desirable project was founded. But this construction was made from positions of power. It was imposed from the outcome in its favor of a particular class struggle, where the defeated included not only specific subjects (such as workers, industrial capitalists, middle classes, small and medium traders, state

officials, etc.) but also long-standing historical projects (like industrial capitalism, the social-democratic and socialist left, the liberal right, etc.). This defeat marked not just the loss of concrete social subjects but also a historical mode of constitution and social formation that had reached its phase of exhaustion. This mode was the basis for sustaining forms of power, particularly the political power to organize society, the State, the Nation, the economy, and politics around its interests and principles.

At the end of the day, it is not about ideals but about interests, concrete projects, and material conditions—specifically, structural and historical conditions. These conditions make the aforementioned possible and form the bedrock that creates and sustains the *historical and material possibility* of a project.

However, the concept of *possibility* carries a philosophical significance of no lesser importance. It signifies that no project is given or preordained; instead, every project is actively constructed by concrete subjects. This construction does not occur in a social or ahistorical vacuum but, rather, within the context of an ongoing struggle with other subjects, who pursue alternative “ideals,” aiming for the materialization of equally material and worldly interests. In essence, *praxis* becomes the arena of politics, construction, transformation, and, consequently, *theorization*.

Returning to our initial reflection, the question, then, centers on the theoretical-political (or philosophical) frameworks from which a leftist politician today derives the historical feasibility of their project. In essence, why does a leftist politician believe that their socialist (or social-democratic, as the case may be, considering them equivalent for our purposes) project is *historically and materially possible*? The response, in this instance, cannot and should not be confined to the field of principles and ideals alone. It necessitates grounding on the level of theories and philosophies of history. It is within this realm that the left finds itself grappling with a substantial void, entangled in a defeat from which it has yet to emerge.³

It is not the *desirability* of a project (its humanist philosophy) that gives it political meaning; rather, it is the material foundations of the *historical necessity* of that project that gives it political meaning. Thus, socialism and social

3 The answers that Marxism elaborated in the past are insufficient today. This does not stem from the shortcomings of Marxism as a theoretical body in itself or as a philosophy of history, but because society, the social reality to which those Marxist theories alluded at the time of their writing, was transformed due to the influence of conservative and right-wing projects that shaped alternative modes of capitalism, consequently altering the constitution and formation of classes and class conflict within capitalism.

democracy are posed as *necessary* because they would make it possible to overcome the structural contradictions that capitalism generates and is unable to resolve. The recurrent crises of accumulation, labour exploitation, oppression and injustice, and social inequality, to name just a few, are all material conditions in the face of which the *historical need* for a radical transformation of capitalism is posed. The critique and reflection on these structural contradictions (material conditions) leads us to the formulation of theories of history and capitalism that explain the *reason* for the need to transform society.

However, no theory of history resolves the question of *how* these transformations can be made possible. Following Luxemburg, this necessity can materialize if the subjects (classes) are constituted not only with the *capacity* to do so but, above all, are constituted as subjects with the *power* to make it possible. If the *capacity* of a certain class rests on the objective contradictions of capitalism, the *power* to actualize this capacity involves its formation as a class with consciousness in itself and for itself. And it is in this process, which entails constructing the social and political consciousness of class, where the paramount significance of the theoretical dimension becomes apparent.

On this point, Marxism, or more specifically, Marx himself, provided us with an answer. However, today, that theory is being scrutinized and questioned, not due to potential fallacies, but because it experienced a political defeat. Hence, the initial step is to reclaim that political stance from which it was displaced. It is a moment to reignite with politics, to recommence a struggle for transformation. Yet, to undertake this, we require theoretical underpinnings that not only provide a sense of transcendence but also offer a perspective of historical possibility.

In response to the child's initial question, we would say: *we do politics because we firmly believe that another world is not only desirable but also possible*. This prompts the need to delineate the distinction between the *possible* and the *desirable*.

If we assert that *another world is possible*, it is because we are based on a theory that identifies material forces, not just individual *wills*, that can drive it. Specifically, we recognize a material realm of struggle from which the construction of this alternative world is *possible*. It is not merely a matter of *voluntarism*, but always involves material and historical *possibilities*, which are built and rebuilt through social praxis.

In articulating this stance, we deliberately distance ourselves from the conservatism of the possible. Unlike the conservative view that regards politics as *the art of the possible*, that is, the possible as *limitations* to politics, we advocate for a perspective where politics is viewed as the art of *making it possible*, that is, the possible as praxis political. The former takes a conservative, conformist

stance, while the latter represents an active commitment to transformation, grounded in knowledge and a theory explaining why this transformation is possible. From this standpoint, the socialist (and even social-democratic) project is not only desirable but *is possible*. And it is possible because there are material and historical forces that *can make it possible*, more precisely, because there is the possibility of unleashing the material forces that *make it possible*.

In this line of reflection, we must unravel what the *possible* means for us and what is a *possibility* in the realm of history. Socialism is not the fruit of a historical determination but is a *possibility* of History. The material processes—the material structures that construct History—do not determine it but arise as possibilities. And it is precisely because there is the possibility of socialism in History that we do politics—that is, we develop a political praxis that makes it possible. If socialism were already determined by material structures, then politics, the art of making it possible, would be meaningless; there would be no *point in* doing politics, nothing more to do than to sit and wait for the evolution of history, which will inevitably lead us to socialism. In the best of cases, the meaning of politics would be to facilitate that historical determination, not to actively construct it.

The crucial point is that History doesn't progress in a predetermined manner but unfolds through struggles whose outcome remains undecided, wrought within the very course of the struggle itself. History is the product of the class struggle, yet it is a struggle whose conclusion remains open-ended. This is precisely why we do politics—to render that outcome possible and no other. However, for this very reason, we require a theory, and a philosophy of history that elucidates why socialism is necessary and fundamentally possible.

This inevitably leads us to rethink Marx and undertake a re-foundation of Marxism rooted in Marx and previous iterations of Marxist thought. It is not a question of post, neo, trans Marxist proposals but rather to re-found Marxism from its own roots, essentially making Marxism by returning to Marx. In this context, the pivotal concept is not merely Marxism itself but the active process of *making* Marxism.

For this, it is necessary to return to the elemental idea-force of Marxism: the founding thesis of the revolutionary character of Marx's thought. And it is revolutionary not because it is radically situated against capital, but because it is situated from a political philosophy, a theory of praxis, where the very meaning of theory, philosophy, politics, and history is reconfigured. It is the return to the theses on Feuerbach, in which the importance for Marx of the Theory-Praxis link is synthesized.

On the one hand, the validity of a theory is not merely an academic issue but fundamentally a political one. Its sense of truth is not demonstrated

through “empirical researches”, but from social praxis. Its measure of *truth* lies in its capacity to become social practice, and in our case, praxis of social transformation.

On the other hand, the conditions in which this praxis unfolds and which the theory seeks to theorize are not pre-existing but, instead, are in a constant state of construction and transformation. This dynamic evolution is a direct consequence of the specific trajectory of social praxis during each historical moment. Within this praxis, individuals possess the possibility (both the capacity and power) to make and transform such historical circumstances.

Lastly, we must revisit Marx’s most renowned and frequently cited thesis: that theory serves not only as a means of comprehending history but also as a tool for its transformation. In other words, it enables intervention in history.

Within these three arguments resides the integral connection between Theory and Praxis, embodying a revolutionary essence. From our viewpoint, this conception of history embraces possible horizons, framing the future as a realm of historical possibility (in the words of Zemelman).

What is paradoxical is that this dual principle of theories, serving as a framework for understanding and as a model for praxis and transformation, is also at play in the realm of right-wing theories and philosophies, such as liberalism, among others. All liberal theories have consistently been employed for both comprehending and actively influencing society, guiding its trajectory. These theoretical frameworks propose ways of organizing society, whether from an economic, political, or cultural standpoint. A couple of examples can be found in the field of economic, such as in popular theories of economic development that have not merely functioned to comprehend capital accumulation in advanced economies but have also operated as theoretical frameworks to impose their perspectives on the structuring of the economy, labor, politics, and populations within Third World societies.

Likewise, in recent decades, the neoliberal economic doctrine not only constitutes a framework for comprehending production and distribution processes; more significantly, it functions as a program of intervention, particularly in the construction of a new political economy. Neoliberalism serves as the theoretical foundation for the conservative political agenda that has set the groundwork for the process of global capital accumulation.

What is relevant, in any case, is that all liberal theories have always had a political sense, as orienting a political and social praxis that contributed to consolidate a mode of domination and exploitation. In the face of this, we understand that critical theories must go beyond understanding and unraveling these modes of construction and use of theories for the purpose of

preserving the *status quo* and, instead, advance in ways of understanding the material bases that make their social transformation possible.

It is in this context that this book is inserted. It is a political-intellectual effort that seeks to contribute to the formulation of a political theory on the need for social change, one that hopes to lead to a program of social transformation in the present times. We seek to contribute to the foundation of the historical need for socialism, not from the level of its ethical principles and moral values, neither from its humanist philosophy or the desirable that it may present, but from a political perspective that allows us to unveil the material bases and structural foundations of the possibility of this political program of social transformation. We want to move from the foundation of the *need* for socialism in its *desirability* to a foundation in its *historical possibility* as a political program.

In our understanding, the challenge is to theoretically sustain a policy of socialist transformation that articulates the humanist perspective of the project of social emancipation, while maintaining a materialist philosophy of history. It is, in short, a theoretical contribution that points to how to make the *desirable possible*, how to make *historical necessity* a *historical possibility*.

This happens, in the first place, by understanding that the possible is constructed—that is, it is not given but *becomes possible* from its own historical conditions, not as determinations but as the foundation of that possibility. In this sense, if class struggle is the space from where History moves and is structured, then it is in that same space from where we must base the *historical possibility* of the socialist program, as a necessary and desirable program.

Luxemburg grounds the historical inevitability of socialism in the Marxist thesis on the anarchy of capital and capitalism, manifested in their propensities towards recurrent crises and the consolidation of economic and political power. We position the issue of inequality as an integral domain of this tumultuous nature and a factor contributing to the cyclical crises of capital accumulation. Hence, we suggest concentrating on the analysis and comprehension of *social inequality* as one of the factors that could propel us forward in the aforementioned theoretical-political project.

In fact, inequality serves as a gateway to transcending capitalism, given its role as a social realm and a mode of organizing society that has been a constant throughout the formation of all human civilizations to date. Specifically, each society has been upheld by a distinctive combination and arrangement of what we term the fundamental forms of social inequality, namely, *class*, *gender*, and *race* inequality. Why do we assert that the class-gender-race triad constitutes these elemental forms?

1. Class is significant because, in each social structure, classes constitute the framework through which the labor process is organized, thereby shaping the conditions for the material reproduction of the population.
2. Gender plays a crucial role as the means by which the issues of social and biological reproduction of the species are organized within each society.
3. Race is pivotal as the manner through which, in every social formation, the question of the struggle between ethnicities, groups, and cultures (and consequently, the social and political construction of the “other”) is addressed. These aspects have consistently played a role in the organization of material production and social reproduction. Capitalism corresponds to a historical form of organization of the economy, politics, culture, and populations that, when intricately combined in a particular way, constitute the elementary forms of social inequality. This makes them, at the same time, the elementary forms of constituting and making individuals as social subjects, embodying social categories of class, gender, and race.

This underscores the necessity for a social theory of inequality—a comprehensive framework exploring its origins and the historical methods through which its fundamental forms are constituted. In this context, Luxemburg’s thesis on the historical inevitability of socialism demands progress on two distinct yet entirely complementary (mutually imbricated) planes.

1. At the theoretical level: Involves a theoretical critique of capitalism and its foundational principles. This entails theorizing about the elementary forms of social inequality as structuring elements of the foundational relationship of capitalism—the capital-labor relation—and, consequently, the inherent social conflict, the class struggle.
2. At the political level: Entails contributing to a program of political and social emancipation—a path towards human liberation from these fundamental forms of social inequality.

At the theoretical level, the focus here is on the necessity for a comprehensive framework or theory that elucidates social inequality as an inherent structuring process within society. In this regard, the book serves as a contribution to a theory of social inequality, rooted in a philosophical and political perspective of the world and society. It fundamentally aligns with Marx and Luxemburg’s

understanding of theoretical contributions as tools for praxis—aiming to enhance comprehension for practical application and advance the formation of class as a historical subject for social change.

From this standpoint, this book contributes to unraveling the historical foundations of inequality, conceptualized not solely as social differentiation but also as processes and dynamics of *social oppression*. These processes shape classes, genders, and races, rendering them socially and politically unequal and distinct—positioned in various and conflicting roles within the social structure. These positions, in turn, arise from the interconnections and relationships established among them. They manifest as social relations characterized by *domination*, *exploitation*, and *social exclusion*, playing a pivotal role in the constitution of subjects as unequal subjects. These relations give rise to social conflict and the ongoing struggle between these categories in terms of their conflicting interests and the rights structured by these relations.

Our perspective on inequality suggests that the social subject (class, gender, race) is formed through two interrelated processes or dimensions. Firstly, it is shaped by the convergence and interweaving (the conjunction-imbrication) of various processes and social relations that structure social inequality, encompassing *domination*, *exploitation*, and *exclusion*. These elements are present in each dimension of inequality and serve as the *foundational relationships and processes underlying every form of social inequality*. Secondly, it is influenced by the combination and interweaving (the conjunction-imbrication) of various domains of social inequality, namely *class*, *gender*, and *race*. These constitute *the fundamental fields and forms of inequality*.

Within each field of inequality (race, class, gender), there is a reproduction of relations characterized by domination, exploitation, and social exclusion. Each of these social relations is shaped by the interplay and overlap of each social field: race, class, and gender.

The conjunction-imbrication of these two moments of inequality—the elementals forms of inequality, and the processes and relations that structure them—gives shape to the modes of *social oppression*. These modes, in turn, constitute the fundamental subjects that struggle among themselves; some strive to reproduce this structure of inequality and oppression, while others attempt to dismantle or destructure them. From our perspective and political positioning, it constitutes the basis for the struggles for social emancipation, in each and every one of these fields of constitution of the elementary forms of social inequality.

Thus, our theoretical-political perspective on inequality is grounded in the notion that social struggle (the struggle between classes, genders, races) is not merely a confrontation against the other, but rather against the

material structures that shape us as unequal subjects—some in positions of oppression and others in positions of being oppressed. For instance, the feminist struggle would be misguided if it were solely framed as a battle against men for mere gender equity, without progressing towards a broader struggle against patriarchy as a societal and historical structure of gender oppression.

When contemplating slavery, we can ask ourselves if it is conceivable a master-slave system that isn't rooted in the oppression of the former over the latter? Clearly not, as both social categories, the master and the slave, are products of a slave system. Similarly, why should we think that it is possible to establish a social construct of gender (marked by gender equity and equality) without contemplating the liberation (emancipation) of individuals from the shackles of gender oppression, namely, patriarchy?

Just as master-slave inequality as a system of oppression can only be eliminated with the abolition of slavery, gender inequality can only be overcome on the basis of the destructuring (abolition) of the patriarchal system that gives rise to gender inequality. It is not by making the master good and empowering the slave, neither is it by constructing modes of equity in the master-slave relationship, that the problem of the subjugation of the slave by the master is solved. It is not a matter of there being good masters, who know how to behave towards their slaves. The issue is structural and is based on the social forms, relations, and structures from which the master-slave relationship is founded and, therefore, the constitution of some as masters and others as slaves. And it is this structure and structural relations that must be deconstructed and abolished at their very root.

The inequality between men and women represents a manifestation of this oppressive and subjugating structure. These structures constitute power dynamics, relations of dominance, exploitation, and oppression that give rise to concrete subjects: men and women positioned as unequal entities across various dimensions, including power and the economy. It is ineffective to solely address the patriarchal values and machismo ingrained in men without transforming the structures and systems of relations that construct these patriarchal forms of both men and women. Feminism must remain cognizant that its objective is not only the pursuit of equality but, more fundamentally, a struggle for emancipation and liberation.

Here lies the radical nature of our proposition: because we understand the issues of inequality and oppression as comprehensive and total realities, then, the struggle for emancipation is an all-encompassing struggle. Consequently, the battle against inequality is inherently a pursuit of *liberation*, extending

beyond mere equalization. This perspective arises from recognizing that the foundational point of inequality lies in structures that bind subjects to relationships, anchoring them in positions of oppression. The primary inequality manifests in the disparate forms of freedom that characterize each societal category and subject, with some existing as liberated beings exercising control over the social forms of freedom for others.

The struggle for equality transforms into a struggle for liberation from the shackles of oppression, from those chains that tether subjects to structural positions, molding them into oppressed and subjugated entities. Inequality has deprived us of our freedom because it thrives on a foundational, inherent inequality: we face uneven circumstances in terms of freedom. The lack of equal freedom is the root cause of inequalities in other societal realms. However, this original inequality in freedom is not a natural state; it has been historically constructed. *Some* individuals have deprived *others* of their freedom. Hence, the fight against inequality is synonymous with a struggle for emancipation and liberation.

Inequality unfolds as a historical process that constitutes both oppressors and the oppressed (classes, genders, nationalities, races), delineating the foundations of their conflict. This perpetual dynamic gives rise to the *historical possibility* of a project of emancipation from those chains and social relations that fix them in such positions of inequality—some as oppressors and others as oppressed. Consequently, the struggle for emancipation doesn't revolve around the subject itself but rather targets the structures of social relations rooted in exploitation, domination, and exclusion, upon which the oppressive system is built. It is a confrontational struggle between historical subjects—classes, genders, races, nationalities—in determined historical and structural circumstances.

The political role of theory is to reveal both the structural and historical conditions, along with the modes of political formation of the subjects involved in class struggle. These dual functions of theory can only be cultivated through active engagement in the struggle itself, rather than from the confines of an academic setting or the offices of public institutions, including those affiliated with leftist parties. Struggle and knowledge (theory) emerge from the perspective and circumstances of the oppressed, the exploited, the dominated, the subjugated—those from below.

That is the purpose of the book. We neither claim to possess the answers to these questions nor do we pretend to. Our satisfaction in our work, however, lies in two aspects: firstly, raising questions that we deem relevant and essential for advance on such path; and secondly, offering analytical frameworks,

fields, and categories of analysis, modes of thought that aid in developing those answers. We acknowledge that these answers will always be constructed within and emerge from the ongoing class struggle. But we recognize too, that this theoretical and, if you will, philosophical reflection, is a crucial and indispensable element within the broader context of the class struggle.

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