

THE FORMATION OF SUBJECTIVITIES AND POWER RELATIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: ART, FOLKLORE AND CULTURE.

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Abstract

*This article is a journey through the formation of subjectivities, with a view from classroom practices, since it links the transversality of teaching and pedagogical practices. Teachers of the area of Languages and students of the Bachelor's Degree in Art, Folklore and Culture, all attached to the Popular University of Cesar. Working on categories such as subjectivity, sociality, modes of production, the economy as a determinant of social structure (Balibar in Read 2016b, p. 70), the economy and its relationship with human nature, the relationship between need and economy and, in general, the relationships that are historically established between these categories allow an interesting approach to the question "How did we come to be what we are?" The production is an organic whole. It is general, so it involves instruments of production and accumulated past labor. And it is specific according to certain "periods" or historical processes. Thus, we can recognize pre-capitalist, feudal, bourgeois capitalism and colonialist modes of production. These periods are not mutually exclusive, especially the last two, between which there is a coexistence and relationship. **Keywords:** subjectivities, power relationship, education, pedagogy, power relations.*

The Formation of Subjectivities and Power Relations

We begin this approach with a look at bourgeois capitalism, Marx will point out that "bourgeois society is the most complex and developed historical organization of production." (55). Something that the German thinker emphasizes about this mode of production is that it is based on a distribution of the branches of production, in which some "contribute" capital, others the land, and others their labor power (as the only thing they have to sell). These relations are conceived by political economy as natural, immutable laws of society *in abstracto*. In this sense Marx criticizes the fact that these economists do not question why this is so, why those who have capital have it, why those who have land have it, while other people have neither, and the only thing they have to sell is their labor. Labor produces wealth, but not for those who produce it, but for those who have capital and land. And bourgeois economics conceives of this mode of production as natural. This could be connected with the Greek philosopher Plato's Republic, which exhibits and naturalizes, in the ideal state, the division of labor according to caste.

Jason Read (2016b) contextualizes this phenomenon on the basis of so-called "primitive accumulation," prior or original: "the fact that capitalist production presupposes itself presupposes wealth in the hands of capitalists, as well as a population of people with nothing to sell but their labor power" (35). But this presupposition is not natural, how does this mode of production operate to naturalize the relations and the modes that strengthen and perpetuate it? In general terms, Marx argues that the process of this mode of production originates in expropriation which is then controlled through violence and legislation (or violent legislation), which creates the working class, to reach a stage of "normalization" (Read, 2016b, p. 58). This normalization, which manages to naturalize the

capitalist mode of production and thus other matters of existence that are taken for granted, is institutionalized through education, traditions, habits, and thus incorporated into the desires, needs, and beliefs energized in everyday existence.

In other words, normalization acts on subjectivity and sociality (Read, 2016b, p. 58). An everyday example can be found in the aspiration - so Colombian - to "be someone in life". Being someone in life will mean, broadly speaking, being a professional, having a job, having a house (privately owned), and having a family (otherwise monogamous and heterosexual). Subjectivity is, then, both cause and consequence of the [capitalist] mode of production. It is because through the naturalization of the division of labor (also sexual), from the daily existence of beliefs, rituals, appearances and desires (Read, 2016b, p. 66) it perpetuates this mode of production, which implies an act of reproduction, which at the same time produces subjectivity: "producers are also modified, as they display new qualities, they develop themselves through production, they transform themselves, they construct new forces and new representations, new modes of interrelation, new needs and new language" (Marx in Read, 2016b, p. 92).

Subjectivity will appear indissoluble to "sociality." Subjectivity "is inseparable from the set of relations that make it possible" (Read, 2016b, p. 42); a phenomenon that Althusser will explain as the "society effect," in which formative elements come together to form a particular type of social existence (66). This conscious or unconscious effect implies regularity, stability, and rules. It will be an element of standardization and cohesion, a condition for the mode of production to function. And it can be associated with Deleuze and Guattari's "social machine" (Read, 2016b, p. 86), which constitutes the interaction between different elements that deploy the material conditions for the production of subjectivity.

The primordial scene where sociality and subjectivity are combined and where the capitalist mode of production is dynamized is the family. It is not in vain that this social organization divides human existence into groups and naturalizes desires and needs such as that of private property. The sexual division of labor, domestic exploitation, and the oppression of women and children operate under idealizations such as that of the bourgeois family.

A key premise for understanding "how we have come to be what we are", how this mode of production is installed in our conscious and unconscious, in our way of living and in the society we inhabit, is in Marx's definition of man (sic) as not only a social, but also a political and historical animal (34). The historical dimension of the human being explains the conditions that pre-exist him, that perpetually determine the objective and the subjective in existence: inheritances (distribution, division of labor), ways of being, destiny, aspirations, desires, needs. This historical conception resignifies what is meant by "society, materiality, power and subjectivity" (Read, 2016b, p. 34). Meanwhile, the "organic whole" of the mode of production situates the individual as conforming to nature and not as a product of history: the poor are poor because they are lazy, those who have capital because they have earned it by their labor, save money, are industrious and intelligent. These natural or divine assumptions that ignore the lineages, the inheritances, the privileges of some over others, the possession of lands that many already possess before they were born.

It is clear, then, that the mode of production, normalized and naturalized, is not a matter of human essence. The conception of the subject as a historical "entity" de-essentializes human existence. We are what we are, a product of history and, at the same time, we are producers of history. And this is how, in the organic whole in which we find ourselves immersed, economics has everything to do with subjectivity.

With regard to power relations, Michel Foucault distinguishes three types of relations in which the human subject is immersed: relations of production, relations of signification, and relations of power (Subject 3). These three types of relationships "overlap, support each other, and use each other as instruments" (12). Power relations, specifically, involve a [violent] mode of action of some people over others and at the same time are, like other types of relations, "rooted in the social fabric" (18). In this sense, the analysis of power relations can enrich the construction of knowledge around the formation of subjectivities. As Foucault proposes when he takes up Kant's *Aufklärer*: "What is

happening now? What is happening to us? What is this world, this epoch, this precise moment in which we are living?" (10).

Among his dissertations on power, its origin, its basic nature, its manifestations and, more specifically, its relations, Foucault unveils two techniques or technologies of power that, although they occur with what he calls "a certain chronological lag," are superimposed, not only in time but in the mechanisms of power in which they are articulated (Defending Society 225). These technologies are anatomopolitics and biopolitics. The first acts especially on the body of individuals and the second on the abstract mass that will be the population.

Anatomopolitics is, then, a disciplinary technology centered on the body. This mechanism produces individualizing effects and manipulates the body as a focus of forces that must be made useful and docile at the same time. This is, among others, the disciplinary technology of work, which also operates through institutions such as the family and the school. In this sense, anatomopolitics remains valid. Thus, for example, bets such as the STEAM teaching approach and the development of executive functions: working memory, inhibitory control and flexibility promoted by the Ministry of Education of Colombia (MEN), especially in preschool education, seek above all the formation of a disciplined and productive ¹workforce. Being a disciplined person is a virtue of great individual and social desirability because, in a way, it ensures professional and personal success. It could be said that the discipline that produces docility and utility at the same time also operates as a mechanism of inner order, as a kind of spontaneous disciplining of what Byung-Chul Han calls "the contemporary subject of performance" (11). In general, anatomopolitics is related to the government of the subject, of his body as the social bearer of codifications.

Biopolitics, on the other hand, is a regulating, life-centered technology. This regularization is concerned with controlling (and eventually modifying) the effects of risky events on the population. It operates through mechanisms to optimize "the state of life of the population" in the abstract. Balance, regularity, averages are categories that we can link with this technology, which deals with social problems such as birth, mortality, longevity, disease, productivity, among others.

Biopower, Foucault explains, manifests itself in modern states as the power to make live, which implies the power to let die. Thus, life and death are revealed not as natural, immediate, original or radical phenomena, but as part of the field of political power. The policy of "letting die" is in force, for example, when people in remote places do not have access to a hospital with conditions that allow them to treat those who fall ill. In addition, in those same places the roads are non-existent or impassable, so moving to another place where there are equipped health centers aggravates the situation. Who lives in these places? Who is left to die in the absence of the state?

The techniques of power, which some exercise over others, happen from "freedom". That is to say, there is no subjugation against which they fight to abolish it radically (Subject 17), but, rather, they function within a kind of pact in which individuals delegate to a sovereign an "absolute power over them" (Defending Society 219), in exchange for "salvation in this world", which can be translated into health, well-being, security, etc. (Subject 9).

This mechanism of power is visible in contemporary or everyday affairs, such as the legalization of abortion. The very fact that it needs to be legalized, that it is even fought for its approval, legitimizes the right that some have over the lives of others, legitimizes the subjection of individuals to a regulatory power. This is the above-mentioned delegated power. It is interesting how the capitalist mode of production benefits from the rights that individuals fight for. Think, for example, of all the U.S. companies that offer to pay the costs for women who want to have an abortion to travel to states where it is still legal to do so. Do they do it because they believe in women's right to their bodies or because motherhood affects the effectiveness and productivity of companies? In this way,

¹ This video is part of the training that the MEN provided to early childhood education teachers throughout the country in the first semester of 2022:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxXjxpPrXgI&ab_channel=CenterontheDevelopingChildatHarvardUniversity It explains the importance of the development of executive functions as "skills that contribute to the productivity of the workforce" (See second 40)

the relationship between biopolitics, the construction of subjectivity and the relations of production is clear.

Concern for the population is, in many ways, concern for the workers. In this way, many development and welfare policies operate in favor of the capitalist mode of production. For example, a good transportation system in cities is a "welfare policy" that allows workers to get to work on time, to be more efficient and effective. In reality, the substratums of biopolitics as a mechanism of power encourage a lot of discussion and reflection, although they are not the subject of this article: What is meant by life?, Can human rights be exercised by the mere fact of existing or is citizenship a prerequisite for the exercise of rights?, How does the life of immigrants count?, Is the life of young people (able, useful) of the same value as that of the elderly or people with disabilities?

On the other hand, and as explained above, the disciplinary mechanisms (body-organism-discipline-institutions) and the regularizing mechanisms (population-biological processes-regularizing mechanisms-State) do not function separately, but are articulated. Institutions and the state interact, like Marx's "organic whole," for the exercise of power. In this regard, Foucault distinguishes the modern Western state as an individualizing and totalizing form of power (Subject 8) that exercises power through institutions, which are at the same time tactical, such as the family, medicine, and the media.

Thus, for the sake of the economy of the exercise of power, of not eroding its potential, states materialize their controls through mechanisms such as the *mass media* (New Order 166), which facilitate, for example, through discipline, a kind of spontaneous regulation. In this scenario, inner order is set in motion through self-control and self-regulation. This makes it possible for the state to intervene in more discreet ways. The more discreet forms will be a strategy of state power to appear less omnipresent, more condescending, in short, more pastoral.

However, when witnessing the consolidation of capitalist societies, the question arises about those aspects of the construction of subjectivity that are maintained or prioritized. In this sense, the daily and increasingly fashionable "health care" is still in force in this type of society that requires a hard-working body that is "healthy, skillful and docile" (Read, 2016a, p. 222). Thus, life, knowledge and obedience are implicated in the reproduction of the worker, as a biological, technical and political subject. As has been said before, this subjection does not operate in dynamics of slavery, but requires free beings, at least what is understood as 'bourgeois freedom'. This freedom allows even the regulations and discipline that will make the body healthy, dexterous and docile to emerge from an internal order, in a kind of spontaneous social and individual regularization.

Finally, it is important to note that, in establishing relations between power and the formation of subjectivity in order to understand "what this world is", Foucault not only recognizes the mechanisms by which power is exercised by some over others, but also underlines the resistance that opposes these power relations: fissures from which the status of the individual is questioned. the right to be different is upheld and everything that makes individuals truly individual is highlighted (Subject 6). Thus, the subject is not a mere object of subjection, it is not a mere product of history, according to Marxist thought. Thanks to his historical consciousness, the individual has the capacity to resist and foster new forms of subjectivity: "there is no power relationship without resistance, without escape or flight, without an *eventual return*" (emphasis 19). Thus, like Marx, Foucault also posits hope for the human subject.

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