
RESEARCH

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THE IMBRICATION AND DISSOLUTION OF THE MASS IN THE PUBLIC, ITS CONSEQUENCES: THE POLITICAL INSTABILITY OF LIBERAL SYSTEMS

La imbricación y disolución de la masa en el público, sus consecuencias: la inestabilidad política de los sistemas liberales

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ABSTRACT

A quick look at the current political conjunctures in the liberal political systems that were successfully organizing Western societies from the end of World War II until the last economic crisis of 2008, allows us to verify the more or less chaotic state in which many of them are found. What was once with few exceptions a bipartisan political backwater of alternations between two major and hegemonic political forces today is a gibberish of atomized and dispersed political forces throughout the political spectrum. Without removing its responsibility for the crisis, there are certain causes related to changes in the social composition of Public Opinion and the emergence of new Information and Communication Technologies that explain the great instability that has gripped Western political systems. This qualitative research develops a pertinent explanatory argument that reveals the way in which institutional changes have been affecting the traditional public social sphere, from which the governments of liberal systems are still legitimized during political processes.

KEYWORDS: politics - ideology - society - public opinion - mass - public - CIT - information - news.

RESUMEN

Un rápido vistazo a las actuales coyunturas políticas en los sistemas políticos liberales que con tanto éxito estuvieron organizando hasta la última crisis económica del 2008 a las sociedades occidentales desde la conclusión de la II Guerra Mundial, permite comprobar el estado más o menos caótico en el que se encuentran muchos de ellos. Lo que en otros tiempos fue con contadas excepciones un remanso político bipartidista de alternancias entre dos fuerzas políticas mayoritarias y hegemónicas,

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hoy es un galimatías de fuerzas políticas atomizadas y dispersas en todo el espectro político. Sin quitar su responsabilidad a la crisis, existen determinadas causas relacionadas con los cambios en la composición social de la Opinión Pública y la irrupción de las nuevas Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación que explican la gran inestabilidad que se ha apoderado de los sistemas políticos occidentales. La presente investigación cualitativa desarrolla una pertinente argumentación explicativa que revela la forma en la que los cambios institucionales han venido afectando a la tradicional esfera social pública, desde la que todavía se legitiman los gobiernos de los sistemas liberales durante los procesos políticos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: política - ideología - sociedad - opinión pública - masa - público - TIC - información - actualidad.

A IMBRICAÇÃO E DISSOLUÇÃO DA MASSA NO PÚBLICO, SUAS CONSEQUÊNCIAS: A INSTABILIDADE POLÍTICA DOS SISTEMAS LIBERAIS

RESUMO

Um rápido olhar para as atuais conjunturas políticas nos sistemas políticos liberais que com tanto sucesso estiveram-se organizando até a última crise econômica de 2008 as sociedades ocidentais desde a conclusão da II Guerra Mundial, permite comprovar o estado mais ou menos caótico no que se encontram muitos deles. O que em outros tempos foi com contadas exceções um remanso político bipartidário de alternações entre duas forças políticas majoritárias e hegemônicas hoje é um galimatías de forças políticas atomizadas e dispersas em todo o espectro político. Sem tirar sua responsabilidade na crise, existem determinadas causas relacionadas com as mudanças na composição social da Opinião Pública e a irrupção das novas Tecnologias da Informação e da Comunicação que explicam a grande instabilidade que assumem os sistemas políticos ocidentais. A presente pesquisa qualitativa desenvolve uma pertinente argumentação explicativa que revela a forma na qual as mudanças institucionais chegaram afetando a tradicional esfera social pública, a partir da qual ainda se legitiman os governos dos sistemas liberais durante os processos políticos.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: política - ideología - sociedade - opinião pública - massa - público - TIC - informação - atualidade.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis on the transformation of the social institution of Public Opinion that we offer below is the result of a critical and complemented reading of the work of Jurhen Habermas *History and criticism of Public Opinion*. We consider that these specific changes, and the institutional transformations in general, all of which took place over time, are the key that explains the historical emergence and subsequent evolution of Public Opinion, as we know it today.

What is relevant about Habermas' work in monitoring this institution throughout its history is that, appropriately reinterpreted with other new criteria, it offers us a fundamental key to understanding this crisis of increasingly manifest political legitimation to which we are attending.

On the one hand, we have the expansion in the social base that made up the original public and that is the result of the social extension of the rationality that characterized it from its beginnings, then a minority. On the other hand, today the institution of Public Opinion is also affected by the loss of the monopoly of the influence exerted on it by the traditional media, press, radio and television, from its emergence in modernity to the irruption of digital social networks.

Political control over a citizenship, which once had a different social base and was defenseless due to its lack of rationality in view of its exposure to some media whose messages, besides could not be answered on the same massive scale in which they were disseminated, today becomes an unmanageable dispersion of political preferences. A significant portion of voters currently opt for options on the margins of the political spectrum or an abstention questioning all the liberal constitutional framework, threatening the stability of those formally democratic systems have been characterizing Western societies.

2. OBJECTIVES

What we offer below is an explanation of these changes in the social composition of the original public to the present in order to understand how critical rationality served to legitimize a liberal political order that today faces its institutional crisis. Our objective will therefore be to conclude by presenting these changes as one of the causes of this crisis.

Despite its important role as another cause of this crisis, the second part on the effect and contribution of networks to political instability will not be the subject of this paper.

3. METHODOLOGY

The character of this qualitative research is descriptive. Although this categorization should suffice to understand the clearly explanatory nature that it

develops, making a brief methodological contextualization will undoubtedly help to locate better its research object.

Social institutions, such as public opinion and governments in liberal societies, are treated by structural-functionalist theory as parts of a system in which the duly delimited functions of their subsystems and their interaction must contribute to the reproduction of their homeostasis or balance to guarantee their continuity and survival. As we anticipated, below we offer an explanation of the currently problematic interaction between the institution of Public Opinion and the government, starting from the breakdown of the balance between them due to changes in the social composition of the former.

One might think that this is why we can only ascribe this development exclusively to structuralist and functionalist methodology, but this is not so true. Precisely, despite the controversy between both approaches on both sides of the Atlantic, the reference to Habermas, a prominent figure at the Institute of Social Sciences in Frankfurt, allows us to ascribe also this explanation to Critical Theory. So much so that throughout the discussion at all times we adjust to this brief methodological statement by Max Horkheimer:

[...] because the truth is formed in an evolution of ideas that transform and fight each other. The thought remains largely true to itself insofar as it is willing to contradict itself, while preserving –as immanent moments of truth– the memory of processes to which it owes its own existence. (Horkheimer 2002, p. 93)

In general, all the investigation that we develop in the following discussion section follows what is literally meant by this brief sentence.

4. DISCUSSION

In fact, the starting point of this analysis is another previous study on the concepts of mass and public carried out by those authors who, at the time, we considered the most relevant to offer us the most complete and contrasted notion of both. Most of these authors are referred from the beginning, so the recourse to their previous ideas and quotes will be constant.

All in all, we consider that the development of the ideas of mass and public contained throughout this analysis is sufficient to give it meaning and coherence until it reaches its objective, although it would be best to be able to access previous developments from its publication to complete the present.

Thus, right at the beginning, the following section refers to the classic analysis that Habermas reproduces, responding to his need to explain how advertising is transformed - understood as the public sphere, not that of commercial promotion - as consequence of the irruption of the social sectors originally excluded in the creation

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of the bourgeois state of law. The political pressure exerted by the masses, through social mobilizations, their organizations and their parties, on their political governments to intervene in commercial traffic in defense of their rights and interests is what has been erasing the clear separation between public and private. Let us not forget that it was this separation that made possible the appearance of the primordial public in the course of modernity when the bourgeois states of law were constituted.

4.1. Contrast and perfusion of the concepts of mass and public

The most convenient for our purposes is to understand that interpenetration of society in the State and of the State in society; or what is the same, to understand the progressive disappearance of the separation between the public and the private. It is the pressure of society on the State to expand its functions and to regulate the various aspects of commercial traffic that is at the origin of interventionism that gives rise to the social State and mass society.

In fact, if we think about it carefully, the limitation that the first liberalism wanted to impose on the public sphere is at the very origin of that sense loaded with negativity that the concept of mass faces.

Those first liberals, Mill and Tocqueville, to whom Habermas quotes, had already discovered alarmed the effects that, at that time, bourgeois advertising was producing after the time in which it ended up unseating representative advertising in the public domain. The irruption of the dispossessed social classes in the public sphere began to be perceived by them as a new instance of alternative domination to that of the political government of society, as a new threat. This was due precisely to the same critical and power-controlling functions attributed to bourgeois advertising. The hitherto restricted scope of bourgeois advertising had been reserved for private persons who had autonomy and therefore could be inserted into that advertising. This autonomy could only be guaranteed, within the commercial traffic understood as the properly differentiated sphere of the State - civil society -, property and education.

As Habermas very well relates, the progressive limitation in access to property that the process of capitalist accumulation entailed in the early stages of industrialization and commercial expansion on a global scale, revealed the narrow margin for the legitimization of the power subjected to criticism and control of public opinion when broad social strata struggled to access the public sphere. Criticism ended up reducing its effectiveness to the appearance of itself.

Class conflicts then manifested themselves in that public sphere. The masses, through their organizations and parties, broke into it demanding the intervention of the State by expanding their social functions and regulating commercial traffic to make effective a principle of equality only formally proclaimed by the constitutions.

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From this prejudiced and conservative consideration on the masses amply documented - to which Mill, Tocqueville and Tarde treated as crowd; Le Bon, Ortega y Gasset, Max Scheler, Oswald Spengler, Hanna Arendt despise; Canetti studies it as an untamed and destructive being; even Adorno and Horkheimer, and Habermas himself, still see them with a well-intentioned and condescending suspicion - it is from this that comes the will to establish the sharp differentiation between mass and public, and to keep the mass for the purposes of its categorization out of the political participation by census suffrage.

But in reality, the processes of social progress that have been generalized in all the industrialized democratic societies advanced by the action of the masses themselves allow a new rereading of this category that, at this point, only seems to be an essential part of a discourse with clearly conservative tints.

Quite the contrary, the term public was born with the prestigious stamp that, in times of the representative publicity of the estates, conferred on it the attribute of the king, of the nobility, and of the estates themselves. These symbolized the nation. That aura of esteem and deference towards the public will be transferred to the public properly understood with the emergence of the bourgeois liberal state of law. This occurred thanks to the discovery of the printing press and the political upheaval that was then made possible by the massive spread of literary advertising. The process ended up creating an audience with the characteristics of enlightenment, an enlightened and rationing audience. Reproducing Habermas's quote, it is as follows:

The process in which the public made up of rationing private individuals appropriates advertising regulated from above, making it a critical sphere of public power, is completed with the transformation of the operation of literary advertising, already endowed with organizations of the public and with discussion platforms. [...] (Habermas 2011, p. 88)

"[...] Finally, the developed bourgeois advertising ends up being based on the fictitious identity of the private people gathered as public in their roles of owner and man". (op. cit. 92). Only with the transformation of the bourgeois state of law the term public begins to acquire pejorative connotations. The already described irruption of the masses in the public sphere and the interpenetration of the State and society, arouse a deep suspicion among the liberals, so fearful they were that the capitalist socioeconomic order bequeathed by modernity could be compromised. So the liberal discourse elaborates an ad hoc argument to prevent the effect of the increasing role of the State in society and vice versa. The liberal political economy will try to impose, as a theoretical axiom, the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of public versus private initiative in commercial traffic with the premeditated will to bring the State back into society to its minimum dimensions, the same as those that only occurred in primeval capitalism during the transition from the class society to the liberal bourgeois state of law.

But rather it seems that the market -commercial traffic- with the passing of time is becoming increasingly incapable and inoperative in the face of the generalized social

demands that it cannot meet. Economic externalities increase. It is increasingly difficult for the liberal discourse to question before the masses themselves, turned into a public endowed with critical public notoriety through their organizations, their recognition towards the socialized state instances that are in charge of guaranteeing attention to their social rights.

The public is revalued for its own social performance against the propensity of the private towards the profit of an initiative that is often extinguished due to its inability to satisfy it. Increasingly, the private is perceived as a private business and the public as a service to the community. This is precisely part of the process that leads to the blurring of the separation between the public and the private to which Habermas refers. Although he explains it in a much more extensive and detailed way, the potential beneficiaries of the social action of the State perceive themselves as private persons due to the same origin and evolution of privacy embedded in commercial traffic. But they accept and demand from the State that it subtract them from that traffic so that it meets their needs of a different order in the face of their own inability to satisfy them on their own in the inequitable market conditions.

Good proof of the prevalence in the social estimation of the public is provided by the meanings of the term public that according to the DRAE are still preserved in the most common language. None of the seven meanings contained therein has pejorative connotations. In any case, to us, more than the public-private dialectic, what should concern us is the contrast between mass and public, and better than that the tendency to disappear the separation between both concepts.

4.2. The public as mass and the mass as public

On more than one occasion, some of the authors we have cited wanted to use mass / public differentiation to establish their own categories. That happened with Tarde, although he used the term crowd and not mass in front of the public. It also happened with James E. Gruning and Todd Hunt. In his work *Public Relations Directorate*, they cite the sociologist Herbert Blumber and the philosopher John Dewey as the presumed authors of a concept of public obtained by contrast with that of the masses:

For example, social scientists, business research companies and public relations “measure public opinion” through surveys or polls. Blumer and Dewey's definition of “public” makes it clear that these polls can measure opinions, not those of the public, but those of the masses.

[...] The mass is heterogeneous, an audience is homogeneous. Individuals form a mass not because they have something in common, but because they all tune into the same means of communication or simply happen to live in the same city or country. Members of an audience, by contrast, have something in common. They are affected by the same problem or issue. (Gruning and Hunt 2003, pp. 234-235)

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Blumer and Dewey decide that the demoscopic measure of opinion is not that of the public, but that of the mass. To establish this differentiation, they attribute different properties to one and the other. According to Grüning and Hunt, the mass is heterogeneous and the public homogeneous.

In reality, to the forced limitation of reduced mass, thus to those who tune in to the same means of communication or who simply happen to live in a country, a limitation impossible to match with the broad and sophisticated criteria that practically all the authors asked about the concept of mass, refer to., in addition to this, it also follows that the public only constitutes itself at a very precise moment and already segregated as a group to which exclusively the existence of a common problem joins.

Without a doubt, the restrictions on the notions of mass and public that they could take from Blumber and Dewey were very convenient for Grüning and Hunt to carry out their later typology of publics with the intention of explaining their design of strategies for persuasive communication or adaptation of institutional policy and practice according to criteria of economic profitability for the construction of good will. But John Dewey in his work refers to the public, in the singular, as a key element of the State, the extent of which is far from being limited or homogeneous, as stated by these authors.

In his case, if this were as Grüning and Hunt maintain, then the entire theory that Habermas develops to explain the constitution of the public would be invalidated. In fact, it seems that Dewey and Habermas are referring to precisely the same political subject of opinion: “ [...] *Finally, the developed bourgeois advertising ends up based on the fictitious identity of the private persons gathered as public in their roles of owner and man*”. (Habermas 2011, p. 92)

Alternatively, and in line with Grüning and Hunt's proposal, it can be assumed that the “only” common problem that unites the public in its constitution is the critical control of political power in the liberal bourgeois state of law; But this, obviously, is not only that it cannot be a precise moment, it also turns out that the critical control of power breaks down in the course of a permanent debate and discussion on all the issues that have to do with commercial trafficking. This explanation can be perfectly validated with Dewey's same idea about the scope of the indirect consequences of transactions (Dewey 2004, p. 65).

The universe of interests in permanent struggle demands that this public have by definition a very heterogeneous composition, exactly the one that Habermas states when he explains to us the enormous social variety of private people that concur in that primordial public: aristocrats and enlightened bourgeois, merchants, artisans, scientists, writers and editors, critics of art, literature, public and private morality... Sometimes, in that fictitious identity with which the public perceives itself, the same requirement that Dewey imposes on it for its mere existence, Habermas speaks of

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audiences to explain that it is known as much broader and more heterogeneous than it appears.

But even more critical and inconsistent will become the consideration of a homogeneous audience as the basis of advertising expands enormously with the transformations of the bourgeois liberal state towards the social state. However, it is still worth subscribing to Habermas' objection to his consideration as a public of masses incorporated into the public sphere due to the loss of the critical public notoriety that accompanies the process. We will try to give an account of this question later. Here we are now interested in solving that other public / mass contrast that closes Habermas's work when he quotes CW Mills. We think that the enumeration of characteristics that the latter performs when referring to the public lacks an essential function. We consider that opinion –at all times we have referred to the public as the bearer of public opinion– can only be carried out among private individuals that make up a public mediated by current affairs.

Much less we think that the present is the only structural substrate on which opinion rests and grows. The media do not determine opinion, they only influence it. The process is much more complex and other factors are involved in the origin of opinion, such as rationality or, more specifically, ideology. In his case, we do not conceive that public criticism can be constructed without an object that, as a general rule, is the present or one of its most peculiar aspects.

We would accept here that part of the news is not dictated by the agenda of the conventional mass media - especially with the spectacular development of mass self-communication (Castells, 2009, *passim*) on the web and through social networks. - But in any case there would still be an almost obligatory arbitration of the traditional mass media that are, by definition, the bearers of today.

We have no doubt that this consideration of the role of the mass media among an opinion-bearing public, critical or not, cannot be ignored in the characterization of that public. This way, the strict separation between public and mass - for the latter he exclusively reserves the mediatization of the mass media itself - to which CW Mills refers, does not really exist, because the mass media are essential in the constitution of the opinion-bearing public. That is why we will have to refer to the public / mass interweaving, as we have set out to demonstrate, and also why we maintained that, only in part, we accepted a temporary public/mass opposition.

Furthermore, we will have to speak of mass/public interweaving if we refer to mass self-communication; Castells himself, who coined the expression, attributes that same property to the masses by referring to it this way. We assume that he does so, first, by extending the concept of mass media to his object of study. We also assume that he does so knowing that, at present, this is the only way in which the public made up of rationing private persons can meet the same requirements that CW Mills lists for that category of public versus mass; but, finally, we also suppose that he does so in full awareness that the phenomenon is not limited only to a public or to the

public, but that, indeed, its sociological base is much broader and also includes the masses due to the extensive and increasingly heterogeneous social composition of those who access and participate in social networks.

4.3. Ideological biases in the notion of mass

In an attempt to synthesize how Habermas tells us the history of public opinion, if we go back to the key moment in which, according to him, the public emerges as a self-perception of rationing private people gathered in their roles as man and owner, it is perfectly clear the bourgeois foundation of the institution in its beginnings. The institution of bourgeois advertising was masculine because then the patriarchal family structure was generalized among the population. This patriarchal family was the one that, in its quality of intimate sphere, guaranteed the privacy inserted in the public.

Thus, bourgeois advertising from its origins brought about a strong social restriction in its composition that excluded non-proprietors, the uneducated, and women. In the period in which it was genuinely in force, it excluded, almost nothing, the entire rural population, which was practically all illiterate, the entire female population and broad urban social strata that generally had no other means of living that offer for sale their manual labor force in commercial traffic.

The institution of bourgeois advertising was born with an undoubted elitist vocation fueled by a then incipient capitalism that saw the growth and expansion of commercial traffic to the point of forcing the recomposition of the old social class states in order to accommodate in the game of political power the interests of the increasingly wealthier and more influential bourgeois.

The detonating ideology of these changes was the liberal ideology. The ideas of freedom and equality among men ended up catching the people's heads in the new social layers enriched by commerce and enlightened thanks to the extraordinary effect on literary production brought about by Gutenberg's invention. It was this set of circumstances what caused the automation of a rationing and critical public of power.

Now, equality of opportunity - as a formal basis of equality - which only apparently made available to all people the possibility of access to property, autonomy and the public as a private person inserted in bourgeois advertising, it began to reveal itself more and more limited and impossible to achieve for the bulk of the population. That same institution then progressively became the preferred area to settle all conflicts of interest that concurred in commercial traffic precisely because of its functions of criticism and control of power. The enlightened bourgeoisie, which until then had exercised the functions of critical control of power already in the liberal bourgeois state of law, realizes that its scheme of domination begins to be questioned from the public sphere by the irruption of the masses in it and by the

progressive expansion of the social base of bourgeois advertising. It is when public opinion that had been an instrument of emancipation with respect to the domination, begins to be considered by the liberal bourgeoisie as a new instance of domination, as a threat.

Seen this way, then, it is worth asking what can be negative in the fact that this process continues its natural course until the social whole integrates this public sphere of critical control of power? Would not this imply the absolute democratization of society? Is it not that, as logically as predictably, that is what has been happening to the same extent that progress and social guarantees widely claimed by contemporary societies have been spreading?

What happened then is that the reaction of the liberals was radical. Doctrinal liberalism elaborates an ad hoc discourse with which to exclude the proactive masses from the sphere of publicity before they could ruin a social and economic order for them as appropriate to the functions of critical control of state power as instance of domination so that it cannot intervene in commercial traffic. In their contemptuous consideration of the social layers hitherto excluded from the public sphere, they coined the category of mass to refer to them, a category that would become nuclear in their discourse.

What is surprising is the success that this category has had, and that still largely maintains, as a sociological paradigm on which to explain the process of economic, social and political transformation of the bourgeois state of law into the social state.

The term mass has an abstract and dark origin straddling among philosophy, sociology, and psychology, but it was not actually defined by opposition to the public. Doctrinal liberalism wanted to define it in opposition to one of its ideological precepts, individualism. As it is easy to see what happens to Le Bon and his cohort of acolytes, the mass appears from its first formulations as the opposite of the individual, and still in the course of the discussion between Canetti and Adorno, the latter is particularly concerned about:

[...] that the real pressure of the categories of mass and power - whose deep interrelation you have well observed - has been increasing to such a degree that they greatly hinder the resistance of the individual against them, as well as their self-assertion as an individual [...] (Canetti 2002, p. CXIX)

We also know that liberalism tried to exclude a large part of the people from its political participation, and Adorno will still insist on this idea radically defended from Le Bon to Hanna Arendt: « [...] I mean the pressure exerted by that countless number of people [...], that is, the pressure of the real masses on the formation of political will. [...]» (op. Cit. P. CXVIII).

It is clear that this was due to the great effort made by those nineteenth-century liberals and those who lived at the turn of the century in the first decades of the

twentieth century to preserve their elitist order. This was the result of a huge theoretical legacy whose weight left an indelible mark on human thought that will mark successive generations of scholars and researchers. We believe that the most extreme reaction in this regard was that of the universal Hispanic philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in his work *La Rebelión de las Masas*. The virulence with which Ortega dispatches himself against his “despised and despicable” man-mass is evident throughout this.

Undoubtedly, a reader of our time necessarily has to produce a more or less intense rejection and outrage as progressing in reading Ortega's work, for being excluding and exclusive to the general public, justifying an elitist social order. As a test, we will try in the following paragraphs to display a brief, although very illustrative, critique of Ortega's social thought, not exempt from moral judgments, which will be key in understanding the basic tendency in history towards mass and public interweaving.

4.4. Ortega y Gasset's philosophy as ideology

4.4.1. Criticism of Ortega's social thought

Ortega's basic hypothesis is to defend the social order inherited by the 19th century at all costs, and he does so thinking that all his achievements could have been compromised due to the relative material abundance and the promise of improvements in quality and standard of living. According to him, from the beginning of modernity these achievements penetrated into the average consciousness of people, projecting them towards a comfortable life, devoid of goals and the sacrifices that achieving them requires.

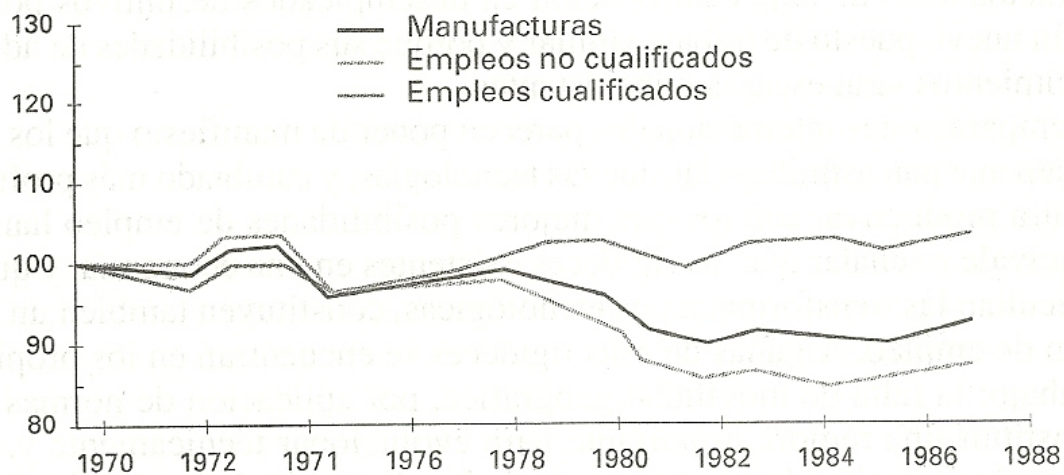
To demonstrate this, he starts from the inconsistent conviction that the majority of society cannot, and should not; achieve the excellent condition of a minority. It is the one that brings about the exclusive privilege of abundance, and for it he reserves a leading and protagonist role in front of others. He does not make the slightest effort to turn this disconcerting and preposterous 'hypothesis' into a thesis; he simply supports it, reproduces it and develops it, repeating *ad nauseam* his prejudices about a supposed and unknown 'nature' of universal order.

4.4.2. Education as a universal, non-discriminatory value and law

The most elementary common sense indicates that the generality of people are similar in terms of competences and capacities, except for the natural physical or mental limitations of a few who are not responsible for them either, and therefore deserve an adaptation to their involuntary limitations. Only very few deviate significantly above or below the average. This reality has been verified in contemporary societies precisely with the extension of the right to universal education. Today, governments are more concerned at making their education

systems effective and avoiding unwanted effects such as school failure than preparing people with different qualifications. Experience has shown that countries with the best educational systems, those that manage to extend and generalize the training of their citizens by increasing the quality and quantity of their knowledge, are also those that enjoy a better comparative advantage in global capitalism's own economic competition.

Regardless of whether or not this training contributes more or less to stratification in society, the truth is that a majority of the prepared adult population has given these countries an unquestionable advantage over others, as shown by the particular examples of Japan, Germany or South Korea. This is also, what can be inferred from the following graph on the evolution of employment in the OECD countries three decades ago:



Gráph 1.

Source: Quoted Requeijo: Chapter. 4 of *The OECD Jobs Stud: Evidence and Explanations*, OECD 1994. (Requeijo 2002, p. 303).

On the other hand, what has also become evident is that the concern for the general education of the population has also been transformed into a clamor of entire generations which have been perceived as 'losers' in the same terms that classist and liberal ideology will coin within referent societies of this ideology, such as the American. These generations, that were falsely convinced that their relative low social position was due to their lack of perseverance in the effort to complete their studies and preparation, now watch with concern that their descendants repeat their same alleged mistakes and they make sure to encourage them to achieve a higher education. In general, educational systems aim at offering an apparent equality of opportunities based on the granting of scholarships and grants to justify the fact that inequalities end up prevailing among people, although we already see that their education is not primarily the cause of this prevalence. The last straw is that even higher education today is not a guarantee of access to sufficient material living conditions in many developed countries according to OECD indicators, particularly

in terms of a social average that is highly devalued by low wages and precarious jobs.

But in addition, it turns out that this relative deception of social ascription according to training has been revealed by sociology. A lot of research on social structure has shown that equal opportunities do not exist in any unequal society like the capitalist one. (op. cit. pp. 174-182)

With few exceptions, the potential that most of us have for our human development is very similar, according to UNESCO, and if the right conditions were present, approximately all of us would contribute to the necessary common effort for the development of society and economy in equal measure. We would do it with assimilable competences without excluding disabled people.

4.4.3. Ortega's elitist prejudices

How contradictory Ortega is when he accuses the *masses* of aspiring to the life of the “excellent minorities” and at the same time searches the very existence of distinction and superiority for the explanation for the decline of Europe. It is the same decline that he ends up finding in the complacency of the time; as if from their own conception of superiority there was no other motivation to strive that was not precisely that of obtaining what has already been achieved by others or, better still for their selfish and miserable prejudices, obtaining even more than them.

Without thinking of any other way than how he does it, the reference for a majority of people should be the advantage in his enviable prosperity of the “excellent minorities”; because in reality there is no reason to suspect that the rest will not be “measured” with them if, as he himself claims, they aspire to occupy their social position. If it is so evident that the pleasures of art and other pleasures of his privileged and abundant life are, the consequence of a meritorious existence full of resignations, challenges and dares. Why should we suppose that others are called to lead a painful existence of privations and need without in any way committing to accept the challenges of improving their lives? How is it that the rest do not realize the merits they have to acquire to escape their poor and sad destiny of need and servitude? Could it not be... because destiny unconditionally “marks” the social position of each one in a social structure determined by his own, atavistic and unknown “nature”...?

Thus, Ortega does not pretend even to the modern meritocratic ideology that currently rules in liberal democracies. Today, as we explained in the previous subsection, liberal ideology persists in explaining social inequalities based on the responsibility of each person to know how to adopt the correct elections within a system that is supposed to be full of real opportunities. Regardless of the relative falsity of this last postulate, the truth is that the structural-functional sociological

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theory (Parsons-Luhmann) considers mobility within the social structure as a powerful factor of stability for the last capitalism.

Ortega doesn't even think like that. He claims a traditional, rigid and immutable social structure, based on an "ancestral natural order of the world" that selects and assigns everyone from birth to his or her social position.

It is clear that what is too much in all Ortega's reasoning is to suppose that minorities are "superior" for their own sake and the rest are "lazy and idle" because he says so. This cannot be presented before scientific rationality except as a mere ideological prejudice.

4.4.4. The origins and social evolution of liberal democracies

Without a doubt, the anachronism of Ortega's thought today is evident when verifying that his elitist and exclusive vision of the majority in the organization and government of society has been relegated to his venerated and ancient 19th century.

Today, no one genuinely competent dares speak of democratic society without referring to one of its fundamental ingredients, the "middle classes". These citizen majorities within the structure in the most democratic contemporary societies would be the correlate of the vulgar *mass-man* in the Ortega scheme. Today, these majority middle classes fortunately are the ones that decide the course of the most advanced democracies on the planet and are the ones that give the necessary legitimacy and stability to the governments constituted by universal suffrage through their vote. The political decision-making processes, the design and implementation of public policies, electoral calculations, public declarations, State budgets... all government initiatives seek the acquiescence of the social majorities represented by the middle classes, although many times they do it in a more or less misleading way. All this, even with the exception of exceptional situations that are also treated with the same integrating will in the opinion of those majorities.

What is hidden behind Ortega's thought is nothing other than fear of the realization of the best democratic ideals: the social and political emancipation of the majority, of the peoples without internal divisions of any kind. This process, the same one that Habermas describes, launched by the liberals towards the end of the 18th century and during the first half of the 19th century with the definitive establishment of advertising and bourgeois revolutions, he sees it as a threat to the enormous achievements that come next. At no time does he understand the internal logic of the liberation of those powerful social forces that are the *masses* themselves, nor does he understand its consequences. On the contrary, he grotesquely deforms them to achieve his goal of preserving his venerated class and hierarchical social order.

What happens with Ortega is that he has a purely instrumental understanding of the representative democratic system. For him this is nothing more than a pretext for

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political stability based on the false appearance of formal government from the majority. This is why he considers it an ideal formula to “deactivate his innate propensity for violence as the sole reason of the masses” (Ortega y Gasset, 1979, 87). To this stability, and to technique, he attributes the progress made in the century before his.

Based on assumptions and conjectures, all absurdly endorsed by a very poorly systematized historical experience for its peculiar “historical reason”, his argumentation then tries to ignore the role of the masses in the process of industrialization, in achieving the food and material sufficiency of the entire society, in the generation of economic surplus, at the beginning of the path to human growth set in motion by the general literacy of society, in the progress of freedom in all aspects of social life: the cultural, the scientific, artistic...

Briefly, his vision is very narrow and timid. It is just reduced to contemplate, frightened, the first and vacillating steps of that new common destiny so promising for humankind, so full of opportunities. In such a colossal process, he only appreciates with growing alarm, for him, an undesirable social and economic equalization of the people that separates him, along with his venerated elite, from the privilege and exclusivity, which allows anyone to be as they are.

4.5. The transformations in the social state

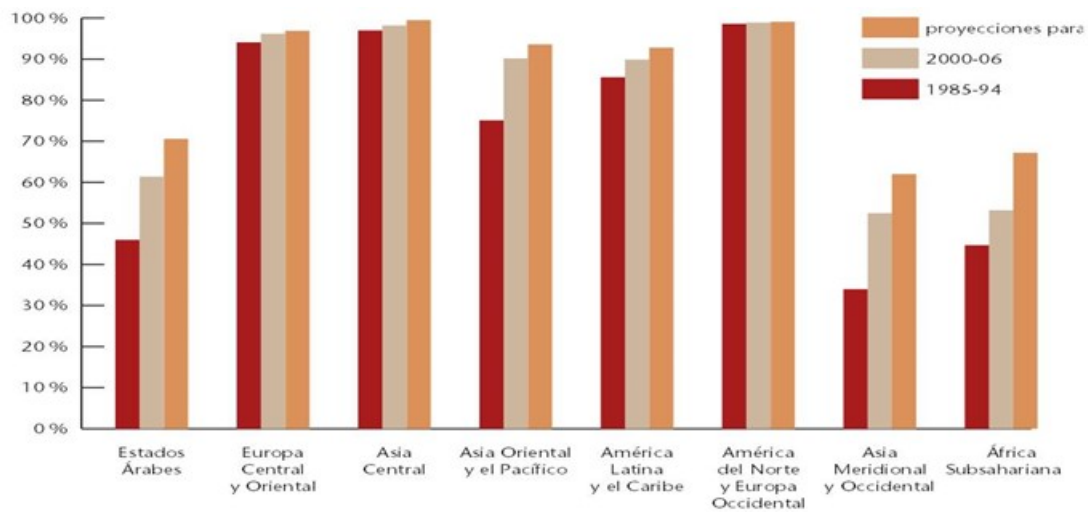
Sociology has been concerned with studying and describing the changes that have taken place in the current social state; Precisely it has done so by accounting for all these positive aspects that Ortega did not know how to see in the progress of his time. In line with this set of advances, it is easy to verify that the same mass has undergone an absolute transformation from its original social composition. Now it is made up of contemporary high-skilled workers displaced from the primary and secondary sectors of the economy due to the effect of outsourcing in a society and an economy that can hardly give any more employment in the service sector. It also appears integrated by women inserted in the commercial traffic through their massive incorporation into the labor market by the rational questioning of the traditional patriarchal family as an instance of gender domination. And, finally, the mass appears to be made up of all the people of the rural and urban world who have benefited from the generalization of an increasingly demanding instruction, pregnant with greater and better content, which has the help of novel and more effective pedagogical methods and new supports for their instantaneous diffusion in the knowledge society through CIT (new information technologies) and digital networks.

Daniel Bell is also oriented in this same direction when carrying out his exhaustive analysis of the changes that have taken place in the social structure of post-industrial societies. Although it is a conclusion obtained in the much more thorough and detailed way in which this analysis is carried out, backed by endless data,

throughout his work *The Advent of Post-Industrial Society*, the following quote is very illustrative :

The question of what constitutes *the* revolution of our time is too broad and vague. Obviously, it is a technological part. However, it is also political in that, for the first time, we are observing the inclusion in society of vast masses of people, a process that involves the redefinition of social, civil and political rights. (Bell 2006, pp. 225-226)

Even so, we consider it pertinent to offer, as proof of reality and its consequences of the process, the foreseeable evolution of women's literacy by world regions, as a genuine representative of the people originally excluded from the public. It will be the following for the first decade of the 21st century according to UNESCO:



Fuente: base de datos UIS

Graphic 2: trends in women's literacy rates, by region (%).

Source: *The global literacy challenge*.

Then, the timely and pertinent explanation offered by the School of Frankfurt on the alienating effects that the cultural industry produces on the masses, and the most specific and correct observation of Habermas on the loss of their critical functions of power in the original bourgeois advertising with the transformations brought about by the mass society, and the social state, could very well be nothing more than a price to pay and a mere stage of transition towards the coming of age of a rational public made up of a social majority, now, of citizens, not bourgeois. A public in which the masses would definitely be dissolved by exercising the function of critical control of political power.

At this point, as we had pledged, we took the opportunity to offer an explanation contrasted with the Habermasian concern for the loss of critical public notoriety and for the effects of manipulative advertising on the masses, given their apparent

acquiescence and their acclaiming and plebiscitary attitude towards the power of the State. In line with what we were already arguing, we point out as a relevant reason for this appreciation of the public to the perception that the masses themselves have for the existence of an instance of domination within the commercial traffic, that they experience as a true threat, greater than that of the State, on their social rights and on their aspirations for a better life. We refer to the permanent pressure of the markets, of capital, to diminish their conditions and social rights.

Thus, the new masses, transformed from their original social limitations during the bourgeois liberal State of law by constant social progress towards the same mass social State, proceed to constitute themselves in public with the true attribute that the private person possessed during the validity period of bourgeois advertising to legitimize himself before that instance, that of instruction. It is evident that the attributes of masculinity and property were only limitations imposed by tradition, and by the characteristics of the social and economic order typical of the liberal bourgeois state of law, and it is also evident that the generalization of education has placed the formerly excluded in possession of the precious attribute of instruction, essential for the exercise of the critical function of power as private persons who make up the rationing public. This is what Michel Foucault refers to when, in *Dialogue on power and other conversations*, he states:

[...] Now, the intellectuals have discovered, after the recent struggles, that the masses do not need them to know; they know perfectly, clearly, much better than they do; and they also say it very well. However, there is a system of power that interprets, prohibits, invalidates that discourse, and that knowledge [...] fights against power, it fights to make it disappear and hurt it where it is invisible and more insidious, or it fights for an "awareness" (long ago that consciousness as knowledge was acquired by the masses and that consciousness as a subject was taken, occupied, by the bourgeoisie) [...] (Foucault 2012, p. 32).

The important contribution that Foucault's ideas made to the Paris revolution of May 1968 is well known. This was a true demonstration of mobilization of the masses in which they gave an important lesson in civility with the express resignation of any attempt to overthrow the political power by violent revolutionary action. The social movement was content to force the calling of early elections by De Gaulle, then president of the French Republic. Thus, the qualitative change of the masses was already perfectly demonstrated at those historical dates, so Foucault had no problem proclaiming his self-sufficiency, thus freeing them from their negative condition as a monstrous myth that destroys civilizations.

To finish, we do not want to stop reviewing the facts carried out by large social sectors to face the harsh conditions created by the referred structural and systemic crisis of capitalism in 2008. The experience in massive mobilizations, of masses, has revealed in the light of such events the mature and responsible attitude of an authentic public that already counts, through mass self-communication, through the

encounter and debate on social networks in the web, on an ideal environment for the performance of its functions of critical control of power in the restrictive conditions that CW Mills required for his consideration as a public of those broad and heterogeneous social majorities .

The narrow limitation that Habermas proposed for the constitution of a public that would meet those same requirements in the conditions of the social State through the re-composition of critical public notoriety within more transparent and democratic mass organizations, no longer seems to be the only way. The spontaneous and assembly mobilizations facilitated by social networks outside the traditional parties and unions demonstrated this and have continued to be demonstrated with the mobilization of the yellow vests in France. All of them also unquestionable evidence that the interweaving of the mass and the public is increasingly clear evidence that is taking hold as a positive historical trend.

Nor can our explanation suffer from the following consideration without being clearly biased and incomplete. When it comes to referring to this phenomenon of expansion and extension of knowledge from literacy as the key to achieving public status by the masses, it is necessary to refer to the gap that occurs between the most developed countries and the vast majority of humankind residing in what are still today poorly called developing countries. Among the first ones are essentially those countries belonging to the orbit of western countries on which our history of the emancipation of public opinion has been focusing by its multiple authors.

A not insignificant problem for the rest of humankind is that of the increasing distance of knowledge that stands between them and Western countries precisely because of that liberating factor of the masses that is made possible by the widespread use of new technologies of information. However, although it is true that the delay is considerable for a majority of them, it is no less true that the speed of diffusion of CIT (Information Technology) is greater than that of its extension in OECD countries in the case of the group called BRIC.

The abrupt rebalancing of the world economy in favor of the economic power of these countries suggests this. It is to be hoped that in the near future the rest of the countries will also benefit from these important advances that favor development, and the extension of knowledge, placing their current social masses in a position to force institutional changes to free them from their condition of being excluded, for their critical participation in the political power of their societies.

5. CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of our analysis, we set out to explain one of the keys to the current crisis of political legitimation of liberal systems based on the transformations experienced by the institution of Public Opinion, specifically by the interweaving of mass and public.

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Let us remember that, after quoting Habermas, we determined the relevance of his findings to make a reinterpretation that would allow us to understand a key to the crisis of institutional legitimacy we are witnessing. Specifically, we were referring to the broadening of the social base that constitutes public opinion as a result of the transformations of the liberal bourgeois state of law, towards the social state of law.

In this sense, what we consider relevant is the socialization of the State to which Habermas refers as a complementary consequence of the nationalization of society. It is precisely this fusion of society and State that requires that the scope of opinion be extended to society as a whole to prevent that, in this conflict between political and social power, political power wants to prevail as an illegitimate instance of domination against social power.

Indeed, this may have been so in the past because the delegitimizing role of the majority in the formation of the political will, with which the category of mass has been used as opposed to that of the public as the social basis of opinion, has served its objective of concealing the unequal nature of the liberal political and social order.

Today, the inevitable and unstoppable interweaving of these categories, mass and public, a positive historical trend in the progressive consolidation of public opinion as an instance of critical control of political power, is precisely what has become the cause of the non-legitimation of that same political and social order, structurally in need of public endorsement due to universal suffrage. With the social extension of rationality, this same order is now perceived by the transformed masses into a rationing public as an instance of domination at the service of social and economic interests that are not their own.

The economic and social crisis called into question the entire institutional framework that today is perceived as never before responsible for the situation of the progressive impoverishment of the middle classes and their being turned into proletarian. This is leading them to become critically dispersed among those political options that are not those that in the past have reproduced the unequal social order, or to inhibit themselves in front of them. After all, the latter did so under the fallacious promise of equal prosperity for all supported by sustained economic growth. The result is that many of the alternative options that are breaking into the political scene today are openly contrary to the liberal institutional political order for having hidden and justified its unequal nature.

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