# Diffusion of the utopias. The academy and the media in times of pandemic

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**Diffusion of the utopias. The academy and the media in times of pandemic.** *At the end of the 20th century, the disappearance of the great utopias occurs. Crises are favorable moments to imagine better worlds. Social scientists and humanists - because of their knowledge of reality and its possibilities for change - are privileged to visualize the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity for change and transfer the orientation of change to all of society. This is a transcendental translation for the consolidation of utopia in the social imaginary. This work explores the rehabilitation of utopia in the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic's start by academics. Doing this identifies, classifies, and analyzes the specific proposals that these thinkers have published in the press to move towards a happy world. We note that the pandemic has not managed to rehabilitate the utopia and that the community's proposals for change are fragmented. We consider that this fragmentation is a symptom of micro-stories, which implies a shift towards micro-routes. However, medium-range utopias proliferate in which messages appear insistently and, in that sense, may be reflected in the social imaginary.*

**Keywords:** utopia, imaginary, postmodernism, social scientists, humanists, fragmentation of thought, hyperspecialization, covid-19, media.

## Introduction

A voyage, a navigator... believes he has seen an ideal state on an island, in a place beyond the equator. Utopia as a term is an idealization of Thomas More that we use here as an excuse (not of social justice) but of social idealization. Of idealization in the social imaginary. The accounts of academics in the social sciences and humanities (academics as we call them here as they include a wide range of experts or thinkers) can convey the possibility of making idealizations real.

In reality, imagining a profoundly different and better world is a phenomenon present throughout human history because the pursuit of happiness, individual and collective, is inherent to the human condition. However, since the mid-twentieth century there has been a paralysis of "imagination of the future, an exhaustion of the avant-garde, a weakening of the great discourses of emancipation" (Di Ruzza, 2011, p. 117). The cause of this weakening is found in

the significant change in the social imaginary that marks the beginning of postmodernity: sensitivity to diversity privileged pluralism, and metanarratives were replaced by micro-narratives. Utopias, as a result of the imaginary of their time, have undergone the same evolution. Thus, the metanarrative of the human being's emancipation as a universal has lost credibility and fragmented into micro-narratives of particular groups' emancipations. The type of transformations possible, the depth of change, the agents promoting ideas, and the emancipatory action leaders are now multiple and modest. This is a characteristic phenomenon of our times. The question is whether the range of micro-utopias replacing the great utopias can lead to real social transformation. For the moment, micro-utopias have not generated transformative synergies. For this reason, some argue for the need to restore broken social unity and traditional utopianism.

Although not all social crises are accompanied by daydreams and attempts to materialize these daydreams, utopian thinking comes to fruition in times of social crisis. It is plausible to ask whether this Covid-19 crisis - bringing death, disease, unemployment, poverty, and restriction of freedoms - has fostered the imagination of a different world, helping to overcome the decline of utopian thinking at the end of the 20th century.

Among the now modest promoters of social transformation ideas, academics in the social sciences and humanities stand out. Social scientists and humanists have specialized knowledge about reality, about how it is constructed and can be modified by collectivities. This places them in a privileged position to visualize the crisis of Covid-19 as an opportunity for change; secondly, to put into practice proposals for emancipatory social transformation; and thirdly, to transfer them to society as a whole. This translation is fundamental for the creation of a new culture, a new utopian imaginary in society.

*Object and method*

In a previous study (Ribón and Pérez-González, 2020), we analyzed social scientists and humanists' discourses on the crisis of Covid-19 as an opportunity for social change disseminated in the Spanish-language press. Then, we had the opportunity to see how the few scientists who spoke of the crisis as an opportunity

did so from the hope that the world has progressed and will progress as long as there is a desire to do so. This article explores the expression of those desires. As well as identifying proposals for change, and assessing the thematic variety, this paper considers their holistic or partial character. In this sense, it looks at whether there is a rehabilitation of traditional utopianism and whether there are connections between micro-utopias that invite us to think about the creation of synergies. Furthermore, it aims to highlight whether there is the construction of a narrative capable of being reflected in the imaginary. We try to observe how scientists' discourse is reconstructed as a whole, or how different narratives are formed and whether or not they have unity. The analysis of the transformative ideas of academic and intellectual personalities is carried out using sociological discourse analysis. Sociological discourse analysis is the study of the spoken narrative of a subject or social group in which the text itself is examined and, in addition, the narrative as a process of a context that can only be interpreted within it. It is the study of messages delivered in a given cognitive, social, political, historical, and cultural situation.

Within the vast range of instruments provided by discourse analysis, a selection of tools inspired by Barthes' work (1987, 1990, 2000) has been made. These are: the identification of themes and sub-themes; the search for meaning; the establishment of the basic structure of the storyline; and the revelation of myths or ideological representations of the social in an apparently natural way. On the other hand, the use of these tools does not imply the assumption of all the author's structuralist thinking.

Discourse analysis requires, first of all, the compilation of a corpus of documents. This research selects two types of narratives: the one published in the national written press and the one reflected in social networks. The documentary corpus of the national written press includes general information newspapers in a digital format with wide circulation and more specialized and minority publications. The search was limited to texts published between 1 March and 15 July 2020 in Spanish whose protagonists were academics who belong or have belonged to university institutions or research centers dedicated to Anthropology, Law, Economics, Education, Philosophy, Geography, History, Sociology, or

Political Science. The current work shows a difference between each academic's individual production and its reflection or dissemination in the media. Sixty-four authors have been identified, of whom fifty have a mother tongue other than Spanish. This shows the interest of media in gathering opinions from abroad and confirms that most of the authors are academic media personalities and/or recognized international prestige.

### *The Fragmentation of Utopia in Postmodernity*

The concept of utopia has varied throughout history. This paper assumes the views of Mannheim and Bloch. For Mannheim (1987, pp. 178, 229-230), utopia is the search for a society incongruent with the present state of affairs in dialectical relation to the ideology that maintains the existing social order. For Bloch (1980), utopia is a radical manifestation of man's dissatisfaction with the reality around him, a proposal for a better future and an expression of hope as an innate human principle. With Bloch, utopia is inextricably linked to human welfare and emancipation, as well as distanced from any authoritarian, discriminatory, or exploitative project.

Utopia can fulfill two functions: a function of social criticism, by expressing dissatisfaction, and a function of compensation, by proposing an improvement. Not all utopias fulfill the compensatory function and lead to progress, but progress requires utopias. As Wright (2010) states, "while it may be naïve optimism to say that "when you want it, you can", it is true that without a "want" many "powers" will be impossible" (p. 22). Therefore, it is necessary to dream beyond what we believe to be achievable and move some issues from the category of unthinkable to thinkable (Wood, 2007). The exploration of real alternatives is a transformative process in itself (Levitas et al., 2003, p. 14), while the absence of utopias leads to political myopia (Sousa, 2020, p. 580), social immobilism, and the reification of the human being (Mannheim, 1987, pp. 229-230).

Utopia is a manifestation of the social imaginary. It contains what is - values, customs, beliefs of the moment - and what can be - what is desired and what can be achieved in the future (Maffesoli, 2003; Figueroa & López Levi, 2014). The imaginary is an interpretative matrix through which society organizes

its past, present and future in a consistent and intertwined manner. In this way, only the idea of a present as something transformable by man's will drives collective approaches and efforts to implement changes that transfigure the future. In this sense, we interpret Maffesoli's (2003) assertion that the imaginary gives utopia its strength.

The social imaginary underwent a historical turn that gave rise to modernity when it conceived of man as capable of achieving a state of plenitude without divine intervention. Utopia then ceased to be an exercise of the imagination, became something with a real impact on everyday life and was erected in the 19th century in programmes of revolutionary action. The relative failure of these programmes and the world wars led to disillusionment. The utopian ceased to occupy a central place in the imaginary (Figueroa & López Levi, 2014). The number of publications on the subject declined. The fall of the myth of progress and the great ideals of social transformation, the paralysis of the future's imagination (Di Ruzza, 2011) and the end of utopia was diagnosed. Nevertheless, utopia is not dead. It survives and endures. What happens is that today's utopia is not the same as yesterday's (Martorell, 2015, p. 300) because utopias express the imaginary of their time and the social imaginary experienced another historical turn in the second half of the twentieth century that has given rise to postmodernity.

Following Lyotard (1987), a central feature of postmodernity is the end of metanarratives - grand narratives or theories about what the world is like - and their replacement by micro-narratives - small narratives of a part of reality. Postmodernity is characterized by micro-narratives because we have become sensitive and privilege diversity (Lyotard, 1987; Lipovetsky, 1983, p. 19). Pluralism is imposed and with it, values, beliefs, desires and possible solutions are relativised. There are no common texts. Nobody agrees any more on what is real, desirable, and achievable. This is the end of universalism. Everyone has their own perspective of what is true, desirable, and achievable. It is the age of non-universalisable particularities.

The dissolution of metanarratives and the (accompanying) pluralism include disbelief towards metanarratives of human emancipation and the questioning of

those utopian forms that imply truth and morality claims (Levitas et al., 2003, p. 15). Modernity's yearning for the perfection of society fragments into heterogeneous utopian desires during postmodernity. There have always been different projects of happier worlds, but the projects had a universalizing character until the first part of the 20th century. Now, they do not.

The decomposition of narratives is the decomposition of society. Meta-narratives contained a unifying power that was projected onto society. The fragmentation of narratives causes the dissolution of the traditional union of the parts of the social body and its substitution by minuscule links that form the fabric of complex relations (Lyotard, 1987, p. 15). With this, the organicist metaphor of society gives way to the network society's metaphor (Baudrillard, 1984, p. 188; Bauman, 2004, p. 57; Castells, 2003, p. 175). Macro-communities are broken down into social micro-communities, groups, or tribes, as Lipovetsky would say, which are articulated according to a growing supply of feelings, experiences, emotions, subcultures, and lifestyles. The personalization of the supply of experiences allows individuals to join different groups flexibly and fluidly. Different groups identify their own injustices, hold their own goals and imagine their own utopias. Desires to emancipate humanity have become desires to emancipate groups, and utopian societies have given way to utopian groups (Misseri, 2011, p. 76).

*Interpretations and ways of dealing with micro-utopianism*

Utopian fragmentation has different interpretations. On the one hand, microutopias are seen as the appropriate utopian form in this model of society. On the other hand, they are seen as a counter-utopia because they prevent the development of major transformations. Finally, they are recognized as an acceptable but insufficient utopian form.

The good-natured interpretation of fragmentation assumes that meta-narratives are anachronistic and unjust in a plural society. They are anachronistic in that they proclaim a totalitarian and unitarist perspective on society. They are unjust in that a single theory or worldview (in a diverse world) would be the imposition of one party's view on others. The postponement of metanarratives in

postmodernity includes those that proclaim universal emancipation. Hence, Lyotard's proposal is to abandon utopias as narratives that have historically legitimized systems and have acted as obstacles that limit the unlimited deployment of the system (Jiménez, 2007, p. 102). If utopia is fragmented and sustained by a plurality of utopian groups, consequently and for the sake of coherence, emancipatory action must be equally fragmented and located in them. Society today is not a totality and therefore cannot be changed as a whole from a single center of emancipation. On the contrary, emancipatory actions have to be carried out in subsystems in a diffuse way (Heller, 1988, p. 183). From this kind of interpretation, one can only welcome this micro-utopian scenario and hope that conjunction of emancipatory actions will bring about an accumulation of social changes that alter the status quo. If enough people connect their micro-utopias, it will be possible to achieve a global synergy of change, Fuller announced in 1975. The paradox is that the abandonment of utopia that Lyotard supports is itself a utopia. At least, if one believes in the goodness of micro-utopianism.

The negative interpretation of utopian fragmentation gives a positive sense to the totalizing character of utopia. This is only possible from the concept of utopia as an emancipating element of humanity. Utopia is linked to humanism that privileges every individual's well-being over the glory of the group, the tribe, even the nation. It is individuals and not groups who feel happiness. Everyone's well-being is the true progress because if the well-being of all is not achieved, the malaise will remain. Utopia is totalizing because it pursues the perfection and well-being of the whole human race. It is also totalizing because to achieve the human race's perfection, as Levitas (2010, p. 15) states, it is necessary to look at the social, economic, political, and spatial process holistically. Moreover, she adds, there is no sign that the micro-changes achieved by micro-utopias translate into macro-changes that challenge the status quo (ibid. p. 23). Misseri (2011, p. 76) argues that microutopianism is the negation of utopianism wrapped in utopian rhetoric. Its short-term goals and its limited emancipation subjects are tied to ideology and the maintenance of the existing social order. The fragmentation of utopia would make any general proposal against it impossible. From the negative perspective of micro-utopianism, this must be overcome. To do so, the fractured

unity of social or human interests must be restored, social fragmentation must be resolved, the sense of the global must be restored and traditional utopianism must be defended (Kumar, 1995; Misseri, 2011, p. 84).

The third interpretation of utopian fragmentation admits both the need for utopian diversification and the need for a totalizing (but not totalitarian) utopia. Utopian diversification and utopia are necessary if we want a pluralistic society, which is different from a simple pluralistic society and a totalitarian society. In a plural society there is a diversity of ethics and proposals that do not have to be shared. In a totalitarian society, a single ethic and a single proposal for society are imposed. In a pluralist society, people coexist who, on the one hand, share an ethic of "minimums" capable of giving rise to utopias and, on the other hand, propose different ethics of "maximums" that give rise to micro-utopias. In a pluralist society there is a certain social cohesion and utopia guides progress within the framework of respect for legitimate difference, which respects human dignity and life (Misseri, 2011, p. 88). In a pluralistic society, there are essential margins of freedom and micro-utopias (paraphrasing Cortina, 1996, p. 38), which are not imposed on others, but, at most, are invited to be shared through dialogue and personal testimony. The latter is what utopian communities do when they initiate utopian projects in the here and now that, although they have not demonstrated the capacity to make a considerable change, evidence their possibility.

*Social scientists and humanists as agents of utopias in times of crisis*

All three interpretations of utopian fragmentation share the idea of a present transformable by human will. However, as already mentioned, once the social imaginary admits the transformative power of human beings, it has to determine what kinds of happy worlds are possible, how they can be achieved, at what pace, who is in a position to imagine them, and who is in a position to lead their execution. Levitas et. al. (2003, p. 16) complains about the difficulty of identifying mechanisms and agents of real transformation of the global economic and social system. The problem is that if there is no convincing narrative in the imaginary about who are the actors capable of envisioning better worlds, who are

capable of executing change, or what transformative processes are possible, then utopias are just illusions that do not translate into political action (Levitas et. al., 2003, p. 14). They fulfill the critical function, but not the compensatory function that materializes progress.

Social scientists and humanists are in a privileged to be identified as suitable agents for envisioning better worlds because their knowledge aims to inquire into and interpret elements of the past, present, and future. However, this alone does not lead to utopian praxis. Firstly, because two ways of interpreting academic practice coexist in the academic imaginary: one is favourable to social change and the imagination of new and better worlds, and the other is unfavourable to these issues. Secondly, because the academy is caught between, on the one hand, the need to legitimise itself socially and contribute to the solution of social problems and, on the other hand, a process of adopting a business logic that diverts it from the former. Thirdly, because the media focus their attention on the diagnosis and prognosis of the crisis and leave little space for transformative possibilities, even if these possibilities are real and concrete utopias and not utopianisms. This media outreach work is essential if utopias are to be consolidated in the new imaginary.

The first way of understanding knowledge and academic practice only looks to the future to make a prognosis based on past and present data. It discredits the work of scientists who question the now and dream of changing tomorrow. Thus, it eschews utopia. It is a vision derived from positivism that conceives science as an aid to the achievement of happiness (through social transformation, but neutrally evaluative), within a discourse alien to the context and above the society that provides it (Rodríguez, 2002, p. 45). This is an aseptic perception of science, in which science is placed above ethics (Jiménez, 2007, p. 80).

The second way of understanding knowledge and academic practice makes it possible to imagine a better and realisable future based on data from the past and the present. It impels scientists to commit themselves to progress. It thus invites utopia. This position identifies scientific knowledge as a cultural and not a neutral product (Woolgar, 1991). It understands that, when science does not fulfil the critical function of utopia, it is, contrary to popular belief, not neutral, but is directly or indirectly supporting the established social order by allowing those in

power to direct change in order to maintain their status. Scientists who yield to the allegedly aseptic vision would be, from this second position, manufacturers of consensus, controllers of social change and accomplices of counter-utopia (Martín, 2006). According to Sousa (1995), the university experienced a crisis of legitimacy as its lack of collective objectives became visible.

In order not to be complicit in the counter-utopia and to re-legitimise the university, as Sousa (2007) would say, scientists have to strive to be objective, but not neutral. Firstly, science has to investigate the functioning of social structures and institutions, unveiling the mechanisms of power, domination, violence, inequality and injustice that make a happy life impossible; mechanisms that have never been obvious, but that today more than ever resist knowledge because they take increasingly complex and diffuse forms. Secondly, social scientists and humanists have to articulate counter-hegemonic proposals. To become, as Giroux (1990, p. 178) says, transformative intellectuals who articulate both a critical discourse that denounces injustices and a discourse of the possibility of the changes that can be produced. A proposal that, on the other hand, Gramsci had already made in his time when speaking of intellectuals.

All human beings have the capacity to imagine better worlds because the search for happiness, both individual and collective, is inherent to the human condition. However, social scientists and humanists have an advantage over the rest when it comes to proposing utopias: their knowledge of the past and the present allows them to imagine viable proposals. Utopian proposals move on a continuum between, on the one hand, the fanciful, abstract and unrealistic and, on the other, the concrete and possible. Fanciful utopias or utopianism are a literary manifestation of a journey without a destination or, worse, a journey into an "unforeseen abyss" (Wright, 2010, p. 22). Because they are unrealisable or, worse, do not lead where they are meant to lead, they have come to be labelled as a delusion. This view of utopia is not only pejorative, but has functioned throughout history as a figure of speech that designates the whole by the parts: one part of utopia (the unrealisable) has been taken as the whole (that which is yet to be realised and may or may not materialise). In contrast to this utopia, as fanciful as a lie and with certain doses of irrationality, there is a realisable utopia guided by

reason and, for this very reason, approachable by science. Engels (1882) wrote From Utopian Socialism to Scientific Socialism, excluding utopia and confronting it with reason and science (although his own proposal was also a utopia). Today, the aim is to move from this counter-utopian scientism that has excluded utopia to utopian scientism that makes compatible and embraces the projection of better worlds. For Bloch, utopian reason emerges even beyond scientific reason because it allows the discovery of profound aspects of existence, not only on the theoretical plane, but also on the plane of reality. The academy distinguishes itself by striving to justify and detail realisable and true utopias. Bloch (1977-1980) advocates the "concrete utopia", which is one that specifies the elements of change and thus anticipates and enables the improvement of the world. Wright (2010) preaches the "real utopia" which is the ideal of the realistic potential of humanity "with accessible intermediate stops" that allow walking through "a world of imperfect conditions of social change" (p. 22). Real utopia is an effective proposal for pragmatic improvement of institutions and, in that sense, an accommodation to the context. It is not fixed, as realism is shaped by the way we see the world.

Realisable, "concrete" and "real" utopias can be expressed at any time, but crises are ideal moments for this. Still, not all social crises are accompanied by daydreams and attempts to realise these daydreams. A crisis is a favourable juncture for social change, but change can be projected for different purposes. It can be oriented towards the immediate past, which is what is considered habitual or natural. Those inducing this change have as their ultimate aspiration to achieve a world as close as possible to the one that existed before the conflict: a return to normality. It may be aimed at making small adjustments in order to avoid another similar crisis. It may even advance mutations that had already begun prior to the crisis. Finally, it can be oriented towards the creation, recovery or re-elaboration of utopias of social order. Some remain an expression of discontent and dissatisfaction with the current situation, or a mere evasion of the problems, while others are searches for emancipatory alternatives.

Let us look again at the exceptional circumstance of the Covid-19 crisis as a laboratory test. The pandemic is an opportune moment for social scientists and

humanists to express emancipatory utopias, concrete and real; new, recovered or reworked; systematized or fragmented; isolated or articulated to create synergies; disseminating a positive image of the future and the hope of a happy world attainable in society. Expression without diffusion has no social resonance. As Gramsci (1986) warned, change requires a new culture. It is not enough to make original discoveries individually, but it is also necessary to critically disseminate truths already discovered, to bring "those truths" to "a mass of men" so that they are not only the "patrimony of small intellectual groups" (p. 247). Dissemination, mainly through mass media, helps to consolidate the new utopias in the imaginary. Of course, social scientists and humanists' statements that the media disseminate are not equivalent to what they think or what they publish in academic circles. There is a filter of characters and messages that are of interest. In the media, there is a battle between turning the catastrophe event into a catharsis for further emancipation or a pretext for further domination. Beck (2015) calls an emancipatory catastrophe a catastrophe that not only has negative consequences, but also has positive consequences for progress. Klein (2007) calls shock doctrine a doctrine that promotes the exploitation of a catastrophe that paralyses society in order to promote policies that benefit the elites and harm the rest. The dissemination of positive and possible images of the future is fundamental in this dilemma.

*Utopian proposals from social scientists and humanists during Covid-19*

Statements by social and humanist scholars in the press abound in interpretations of the pandemic (diagnosis) and interpretations of what will come after it (prognosis). However, interpretations of moral, social, political or economic changes necessary for the progress of a post-Covid world are scarce. Wishes appear in the middle of other issues or at the end of the interviews and take up little space compared to diagnoses and prognoses. They take up little space, and yet they are the result of major reflections which, however developed they may be in their publications, are formulated here in a terse manner, which means that very concrete proposals remain decontextualised and general ideas are left unrealised. They can be found in any type of media: with greater or lesser

circulation, generalist or more specialised. Decontextualisation, generalisation and the type of media in which they are disseminated are of interest for the construction of imaginaries.

Of all the press studied, two initiatives stand out that have invited us to explore the future: one in El País, and the other in Público. In the period studied, El País is the newspaper with the largest national circulation, and Público is the seventh largest online newspaper in terms of readership. El País published on 4 May 2020, under the title El futuro después del Coronavirus, a compilation of seventy-five interviews with experts and thinkers, many of them academics in the social sciences and humanities. They asked specifically what the world will be like at the end of this crisis and what direction we should take. It is this "we must" that is of interest here. Público offered twenty-five experts from the country, with a very varied profile and a smaller presence of academics, a space to debate the future of Spain and the European Union, giving priority to the analysis of proposals with a great impact on the lives of citizens, but including those that lead to a change of paradigm. The rest of the media collect images of better worlds without systematising them. Although there is no systematisation in the collection of transformative projects, there are media, such as La Vanguardia or Ethic, in which these abound. Below, we describe the proposals for a better world expressed by academics. Since part of the value of the thoughts lies in the way they are expressed, we reproduce some of the statements verbatim. Thus, the quotations in this section correspond to the sources consulted.

In the media, academics express, above all, desires to transform part of reality. We have identified six axes around which these desires for transformation revolve: the economy and finance; the environment; democracy; global governance; the state and its policies, mainly those concerning health and work; and the human being itself. In addition, two topics are cross-cutting: social justice and solidarity. Only a minority spoke of the need for a generalised transformation of the world and of the proposal of utopias. Francisco Martorell calls for the recovery of utopia (but he is an expert on the subject). Jeremy Rifkin proposes changing everything: the way we organise our economy, society, governments, our way of being on this planet. Aurélien Barrau believes it is necessary to invent

something new, to desire the possible, to act in a revolutionary way and to obtain a new reality. Stephan Lessenich speaks of reconfiguring the system. Camille Peugny wants to design, together, a change of system and advocates the coordinated reaction of left-wing movements and parties. Timothy Garton Ash also believes that the post-Covid world needs globalised collective action.

The economic-financial sphere is the one with the largest number of suggestions. There are few strong statements in favour of a total change of the economic system. The magnitude of such change places these proposals in the category of grand utopias. Among the academics identified, outside of capitalism, Slavoj Zizek, Francisco Vázquez and Stephen Lessenich stand out. Lessenich believes that we should get rid of capitalism because it is a system based on the production of inequalities. The problem is that this is very complicated, even utopian. Firstly, because we have internalised capitalist logic. Secondly, because the system produces citizens who, even if they criticise capitalism, have an intrinsic interest in its perpetuation. Michael J. Sandel invites us to reflect on "whether to reopen the economy" and "go back to a system that has divided us for 40 years or to give ourselves a new economic system that allows us to say with conviction that we are all in this together". So, while it guides the answer, it does not impose it or develop it. Twenty academics call for either explicitly transformations within capitalism or other economies without specifying (whether this entails a displacement of capitalism or just a new kind of capitalism). This disjuncture can be resolved by studying their thoughts or by searching for earlier statements, but the interest is in what they say and what the media report during the pandemic as an opportunity for reflection and change.

Most academics agree on the desirability of moving away from neoliberalism by developing more social and greener economies. Wierviorka wants a less liberal globalisation, but does not renounce liberalism. Gilles Lipovetsky explicitly advocates a new capitalism and argues that this is the best of the current means. This does not mean that any capitalism is good, but rather that its value lies in allowing its own correction. The main correction is that the economy is a means and not an end. The ideal, for him, is a liberal economy with one very important condition: that it is subject to higher interests. These interests

include respect for the environment and the avoidance of inequalities that are difficult to overcome. Lipovetsky, in an explicit defence of capitalism and liberalism that others do not make, summarises the problem: economic logic has been imposed and its subjugation is urgent in two areas: the social and the environmental.

This approach is nothing new. It is the basis of sustainable development, which is not mentioned. However, several authors allude to it and call for something close to it: a Green New Deal. This is what Ann Pettifor, author of The Case for the Green New Deal, Jeremy Rifkin, author of The Global Green New Deal, and Noam Chomsky, co-author of Change or Die: Capitalism, Climate Crisis and the Green New Deal. Environmental degradation is the starting point of this proposal whose resolution requires new finance, new productive systems, new activities and new jobs. A mandate, as Rifkin says, for a different and responsible relationship with the planet. An economy that approaches sustainable development, but which places greater emphasis on the ecological than on the social. Some authors focus their attention on the environment (green predominates over any other colour). Others, like Chomsky, add overcoming terrible social inequalities to the formula. And some, like Jayati Ghosh, believe that "we need to think about a new multi-coloured deal", suggesting that the economy should be "greener, but also purple to emphasise the care economy and the gender economy". We know that Ghosh proposes this new multi-coloured deal as an extension of the Green New Deal of which she is a supporter, but in the Spanish-language press consulted, her proposal is not part of it. Its appearance, therefore, is diluted, especially when we have found no other references to a new deal or multicoloured economy. This absence is particularly interesting in the case of Spain, where the 15M movement was accompanied by the so-called mareas: the white tide in favour of public health, the green tide in favour of public education, the yellow tide for accessible justice, the orange tide against cuts in care for people with disabilities, and where there is also a vibrant LGTBI movement. However, there are no statements in the press by academics mentioning this multi-coloured economy.

The name Green New Deal is descriptive because of its parallels with Roosevelt's New Deal and seeks to resonate with the US citizenry, mainly among the Democratic electorate sympathetic to Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio, but with a vocation to spread to the rest of the world. It does so, moreover, with the urgency inherent in movement campaigns: "if we don't get a Green New Deal, a disgrace will happen", says Chomsky. In the interviews conducted in the days of the pandemic, he is barely described, so his contribution to the imaginary is little more than evidence of a movement in the Anglo-Saxon sphere.

The Green New Deal movement, despite being presented as a complete reorganisation of the US economy, contrasts with another more holistic reorganisation proposal made by Francisco Vázquez from Europe: participatory ecosocialism. Here, the defence of the social is made openly from the standpoint of socialism; the social and the ecological are of equal importance and are so closely linked that they are a single word and, in order to avoid confusion with respect to other socialisms, it is also linked to participatory democracy. The way to go green is to "make extensive use of social ownership mechanisms already existing in some countries, such as co-management, equal participation of workers on company boards, cooperativism, temporary ownership or means such as rent limitation and basic income". If the New Deal is sung in chorus, participatory ecosocialism is a solo. It does not have the capacity to permeate the imaginary. Zizek's voice is also sung in a solo, but with greater international projection. Zizek takes advantage of the crisis of the coronavirus to metaphorically disqualify capitalism as a virus. He advocates a new communism as a synonym for a unified humanity, based on trust in international cooperation, people and science, where the state is the protagonist. Both participatory ecosocialism and new communism are a revision of grand utopian projects. This, as we see, does not make them more popular. The opposite is true of the New Green Deal, which could be defined as a utopia of medium scope. Although it covers three areas: economic, social and environmental, the depth of the changes, however, raises doubts as a traditional grand utopia.

Environmental advocacy is popular among social scientists and humanists and therefore generates resonance is environmental advocacy. This is expressed in

different ways. Victor Gómez Pin wishes for a "society at peace with its environment powered by clean energy" and stresses the importance of having energy to continue to evolve. Yuval Noah Harari hopes "that we learn the lesson about climate change: that it is better to invest money now to avoid the worst scenario, than to wait until the crisis hits and it is too late". Bruno Latour, Franco Berardi and Emmanuele Felice agree in interpreting the pandemic as an event that helps to question the primacy of the economic over the social and the environment. Felice believes that "the pandemic shows that we can put the economic system at the service of human rights, of the environment, instead of the other way around". Berardi calls for a new awareness of human fragility "that allows for a friendlier relationship with nature and our fellow human beings", understanding that equality (which had been destroyed in the political imagination), is now presented as a closer possibility. Bruno Latour believes that the "pandemic has shown us that the economy is a very narrow and limited way of organising life and deciding who is important and who is not". He recalls that "the idea of framing everything in terms of the economy is something new in human history". He asserts that, "if I could change one thing, it would be to get out of the production system and instead build a political ecology" and that "what we need is not just to change the production system, but to get out of it altogether", not by going back to the "old climate regime".

There are other defences of the environment which, although brief, are of interest because reiteration is effective in the construction of imaginaries. Manuel Castells denounces the mistreatment of the planet. Boaventura De Sousa raises the need to change the energy and consumption strategy. Vázquez calls for an ecological fiscal policy. Richard Sennett sees in the Covid crisis an event that proves him right in his commitment to a "fifteen-minute city" in which prosperity and ecology are integrated. So much insistence and variety of approaches to the same subject invites us to think about the creation of a synergy which, moreover, does not remain in the space of nature, since the acceptance of ecological approaches implies the modification of production, work, consumption and life systems in general. Thus, although Kumar in 1995 (pp. 27-28) describes the defence of the environment as a fragmentary utopian project (because it is used by

specific groups with specific objectives), today it can be identified as an important utopia.

The pandemic is interpreted as an event that highlights the need for the provision of public goods. Mireille Delmas-Marty, Dani Rodrick and Stephen Lessenich agree that societies need public goods: starting with health services and escaping subjugation to the laws of the market (Delmas-Marty); to be provided by governments when markets fail to do so (Rodrick); and to be relied upon and called upon in times of crisis (Lessenich). Based on the need for public goods and the prominence of the social, Lessenich introduces the concept of the "economy of the necessary" and invites us to reflect on what we really need and what is superfluous, and Franco Berardi calls for rescuing the value of what is useful.

The public provision of goods requires large resources. For this reason and for the sake of social justice, fiscal and tax reform is a common theme. Ghosh calls for a fair system of taxation. Stiglitz, a fairer and more flexible tax system. Piketty calls for a tax reform for a fairer and more progressive tax system and develops his argument: the freedom of capital established by the rich countries has encouraged the flight of millionaires and multinationals, and this has damaged the construction of a social state. The construction of a social state, capable of providing public goods to its citizens, requires bringing the largest and richest companies into the system. This is Castells' argument: the financing of welfare should not mean more taxes for people. It must go to where the wealth is concentrated, which are "the global financial markets and the big multinationals that are legal tax evaders". Banning tax havens and taxing financial movements are part of this plan.

Public provision of goods refers to a reconsideration of state intervention in the economy. The pandemic highlights the need for the state. This fact makes the following statements very likely to be perceived as true. This is what, in the language of collective action, is called "empirical credibility". Empirical credibility occurs when there is a congruence between people's experience and events (Snow et al., 1986) and helps to create an imaginary. Domenico de Masi stresses the need for the state and takes the opportunity to criticise decentralisation. Sousa explains it in the pedagogical way that the construction of

an imaginary requires: "For the last 40 years we have been told that the state is inefficient and corrupt, and that markets are good, that the market is the best regulator of social life. But a pandemic comes and nobody asks about markets. Nobody asks the market to save them, to protect them, they ask the state. And the state has to assume its responsibilities, whether it is implementing policies or guaranteeing rights. Michael J. Sandel hopes for a policy of the common good that restores social bonds. Vicens Navarro and Caroline Emcke, an orientation towards the common good to improve people's lives. Yusuf Adigüzel, a welfare state. Piketty, investing in the social. Sousa, investing in education, health, transport and infrastructure. Latour, a public health system. Lipovetsky, a supranational European health system. Judith Butler, a governmental power that guarantees the right to health and equality. Della Porta, reaffirming and extending health and labour rights and achieving the global right to health. The pandemic puts access to health in the foreground and employment issues in the background. The desires that are expressed about employment are strongly influenced by the current situation: to recognise, dignify and revalue useful and essential employment (Peugny, Sandel). Only an expert in utopias such as Martorell remembers to dream of reducing working time. The work that exists must be dignified, but, in contrast to the utopia of shared and satisfactory work for all, the utopia of the right to a dignified life as something universal, independent of work, is strongly introduced (Berardi). This right is materialised in the universal basic income (Bergman, Vázquez, Martorell).

The desire for a new role of the state goes beyond a greater social orientation. There is also a dream of a state capable of maintaining a different type of relationship with its citizens and of tackling the problems of the planet together. On the one hand, there is a desire for a state that develops a closer and more cordial relationship with society (Adigüzel and Rifkin); more open, transparent and democratic (Valcárcel); capable of offering the services of the welfare state in a depoliticised and de-bureaucratised way (Castells); and with a friendlier way of doing politics (Felice).

On the other hand, there are dreams of better global governance (Rodrick, Badie). There is only one world and things that happen in some countries have

very drastic effects all over the planet (Singer). The survival of humanity depends on the resolution of global problems (such as the environmental crisis or poverty), which are not on the agenda of national governments (Luigi Ferrajoli, Massimo Cacciari). We must therefore have more global concerns and address them with greater international cooperation and global solidarity (Singer, Harari, Zizek). Or start to reinstate and broaden solidarity-based development strategies (Rodrick), with a policy open to the mobility of human beings. This would be a civilised way out of the pandemic (Nair). The challenges we face can only be solved by multilateral solutions (Pascal Boniface), as shown by the fact that "all attempts at strictly national crisis management have failed". New and better governance cannot be reconciled with nationalism, "an empty ideology that has nothing to offer", notes Bertrand Badie. Nor can it be reconciled with "ridiculous little flags that serve no purpose, such as the United Nations, stripped of all authority", adds Massimo Cacciari. Global governance is a strong desire, but it is only a means to achieve what is important: tackling the planet's problems. It is therefore a good tool for dealing synergistically with micro-utopias. It is a medium-range utopia, a non-finalist utopia.

There are three proposals to improve the governance of the planet: a world republic, a planetary constitutionalism and an organisation under the SVP banner. Cacciari affirms that imagining a world republic has a utopian element, but nothing would prevent countries from making agreements and pacts among themselves in many areas, as they already do in the economic and financial spheres. He is in favour of the UN being "the place where countries deal with common rules that are then introduced into individual systems, a political venue where these problems are discussed". Luigi Ferrajoli presents "planetary constitutionalism": an initiative to be launched in February 2020, which envisages an international public sphere to address global challenges and, in particular, supranational functions and institutions to guarantee human rights and peace. He believes that the EU could promote the transformation of the current World Health Organisation into an effective global institution and the creation of other global institutions to guarantee social rights, peace or a planetary commons. "These seem like utopian hypotheses," Ferrajoli points out, "but they are the only

rational and realistic answers to the great challenges on which the future of humanity depends. Mireille Delmas-Marty believes that the time has come for national sovereignty to turn to solidarity and subject globalisation to the rules of law. She argues that "universalism is too ambitious" and "sovereignism, which is too faint-hearted, is too reclusive". However, "only the world community will be able to define common objectives and the resulting responsibilities for global actors: states, international organisations and multinational companies" and national communities are needed "to hold the various actors, starting with health services, accountable". A better world requires coordination between the world community and national communities, operating under the principles of legal humanism and scientific knowledge, citizen will and public and private powers (SVP).

Improving democracy is another recurrent desire that is deployed in a wide variety of ways. There are highly developed (Pettifor), implicit (Rodrick) and specific (Delmas-Marty, Valcárcel) arguments in favour of democracy. There are calls for generalised democratisation (Sousa and Lessenich), for democracy within a broader project (Vázquez), for democracies in specific areas such as labour (Lafuente) or technology (Sennet, Zuckerman) and as a vaccine against populisms (Harari, Lipovetsky, della Porta). The desire for democratisation is related to the imposition of economic logic and the role of states. Beyond the need to continually deepen democracy as an unfinished process, the interest in democracy stems from its deterioration.

The most holistic democratisation project is that of Sousa. This is no coincidence. It should be remembered that the axis of his political theory is radical, emancipatory and intercultural democracy and that he is the author of the concepts of high and low intensity democracy. Sousa's merit always lies in his clear and direct discourse. "Democracy must be radicalised. The revolution has to be a total radicalisation of democracy", he says. Sousa has the ability to create metaphors that facilitate the visualisation of the problem and its solution. "The democracy that exists today is a democratic island in an archipelago of despotisms: despotisms in the family, in the factory, in the public space with racism, in the home with violence against women...". Or "There is no way to

democratise only the political space, you have to democratise society itself. That is why it is a total and revolutionary radicalisation, which is in favour of the affirmation of life and the dignity of the people".

Lessenich's democratisation project is also very ambitious. His motto is "democratising democracy". In the language of collective action frameworks, narrative fidelity is what binds together the stories and myths of inherited cultural heritage, which facilitates the understanding of beliefs and actions. If democracy is a myth that is part of our cultural heritage, the expression "democratising democracy" has the narrative fidelity that facilitates the understanding of this author's proposal. Nor is Lessenich's ambition accidental. Lessenich is the author of a theory that poses a dilemma between democracy and the environment. The dilemma is to increase inclusion, participation and social rights without abusing natural resources and fossil fuels. We are used to consuming according to a predatory model. The first step to end this model is to achieve a consensus among the industrial capitalist countries of the West to change the production model. The second step is the creation of "truly democratic spaces" in which people could exchange their thoughts "and what the alternatives that would shape the new system might look like".  Lessenich proposes a deep and participatory democracy. A democracy oriented towards the creation of an open social debate on how to reinvent society. And not a democracy in which citizens are limited to choosing between existing options. The democratic deepening Lessenich proposes concerns both formal and substantive issues in that it explains what should be included in a better democracy. He explicitly speaks of "democratising the economy". We have long known that after civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship, the next objective is economic citizenship. The financialisation of society puts the issue of economic democracy back on top of the political and social debate. Lessenich is the leading academic voice of economic democracy in the media during the pandemic. For this sociologist, democratising the economy is about people deciding what we want to be produced and what we do not.

Pettifor is adamant that we have lost democratic control over the system as evidenced by globalisation. According to Pettifor: "The world's monetary systems serve the interests of that class of people who earn financial profits or rents by

lending, speculating and gambling effortlessly. Governments do not control big corporations and big capital. A better world requires the existence of a democratic public authority capable of putting the economic system at the service of society and the ecosystem. Pettifor's message contains some particularly interesting features for promoting the creation of collective action frameworks and imaginaries. First, it does not simply say that the world needs to be democratised, but argues for it. Second, it uses a very visual metaphor: "finance must be made the servant and not the master of national and regional economies". And thirdly, it presents an us and a them (the 1%) that is already familiar from the Occupy Wall Street mobilisations.

Part of economic democracy is the democratisation of business and labour. Thus, the reasons for bringing the old idea of democracy in business and labour back into the public debate are the same as those for economic democracy: the power of capital versus the power of citizens in general and workers in particular. Sara Lafuente calls for the democratisation of business and work in order to achieve a fairer society. The way to do this is to recognise workers as having a legitimate weight similar to that of shareholders. In a globalised society, explains this sociologist, democracy at work has a transnational dimension. For Vázquez, the democratisation of business and work is part of participatory ecosocialism.

Rodrick agrees with Pettifor on the weakness of governments caused by globalisation. According to him, "the biggest problem is the lack of autonomy that countries have to be able to apply policies aimed at maintaining the social contract and aiming for growth". For this economist, the objective is for the international economy to serve the objectives of each country and for protection policies to be applied whenever necessary. Rodrick's argument contains the idea of democracy, but not the word. Other authors, however, mention the word, but do not develop the argument. Thus, Delmas-Marty wants democratic governance of the commons and Valcárcel, as mentioned above, a transparent, open and democratic state.

Other messages expressing ideas related to democracy are associated with: the power of technology and authoritarian ways out of the crisis. Ethan Zuckerman has "hope" that "the digital world will work the way we want it to work, not the way some entrepreneur thinks it should work". Richard Sennet has

"hope" in the development of more social communication networks that displace directed forms of technology. The relationship of Zuckerman's and Sennet's messages to democracy is to be glimpsed, but does not appear clearly. Lipovetsky fears that, in a context of democratic weakness, issues such as migratory pressure will not be adequately managed and will encourage authoritarian solutions. Harari believes that citizens have to control the political decision-makers who take the decisions that shape our future, because it is in our hands "whether the crisis is approached from an authoritarian or, on the contrary, a democratic perspective". Della Porta shares this civic responsibility for democracy. For her, the crisis makes "evident the need for public responsibility and civic sense, for rules and solidarity". As an expert on social movements, she identifies them as the agents that can counteract the risks of an authoritarian response to the crisis.

We qualify the desire for a new global governance as a non-finalist utopia. In principle, the defence of democracy could have the same qualification. But to do so would be to assume a vision of democracy close to the liberal tradition that understands democracy as purely formal, an instrument for electing ruling elites and perhaps an instrument in the service of individual well-being and happiness. The approaches to deepening democracy described above are related to the republican tradition that understands democracy as something to be filled with content, a fundamental element for human beings to realise their full potential (Cortina, 2001, pp. 23-24).

Finally, a better world needs a better human being: freer, more developed, more affective, but, above all, more supportive. Human beings must regain their freedom, Byun-Chul Han argues. Enhance the faculties of every being of reason through education (Gómez Pin). Reconsider their behaviour (Latour). Establish friendlier relations with our fellow human beings (Berardi). Reinventing affectivity and pleasure (Berardi). Value mutual support (Cortina). Rethink the chains we want to rebuild and the chains we want to break (Latour). Invent new solidarity behaviours (Della Porta). Develop intergenerational solidarity (Rosa) and intercultural solidarity (Carballal).

*Final reflections*

After the analysis and the thematic classification of the reflections reflected in the press, we note that the great traditional utopias do not resonate among academics, just as they do not find their way into general society. However, it is possible to observe some social scientists and humanists, such as Lissenich or Sousa, who have holistic visions of the problems and solutions leading to a better world. Most of them develop mid-range utopias. Betting on these could be a strategy that intervenes by subtracting difficulty (not to say today impossibility), between the formulation of great utopias and the value of proposing great changes. But the problem is not the scope of these transformative proposals. Rather, it is that many of them appear decontextualised, undescribed, or in isolation. All of which makes it difficult for them to be reflected in the social imaginary.

Some proposals are developed chorally, which could be considered the joint construction of a narrative. It is a group narrative tending towards a desire for transformation in the face of global challenges. This can be seen in the allusions to the Green New Deal, a very concrete concept embedded not only in the academic but also in the political sphere.

On the other hand, there are common themes, but no common development. The narrative diversifies into themes of idealisation. But within a particular theme, there are many different visions. This is what happens with the development of democracy or alternative economies.

This diversification effect does not occur because these themes are trending among social concerns, or because they are the most applauded options. It is because of the cautious attitude of academics, as demonstrated in the previous work, towards the dissemination of their ideas, which invalidates the possibility of following a fashion. Experts disappear from the public arena, only for fear of scorn (resulting from incomplete versions of their arguments), for fear of being considered by the community as visionaries, a fairground attraction, instead of thinkers with knowledge-based prognoses.

Alongside the diversification noted above, there is: the partial development of their theories to the media, and the limited resonance of these authors' approaches in the community. All this indicates that there is a discontinuity, a fragmentation of the narrative. This is so, because the themes dealt with might be common to them, but they do not form a common unit of development.

On the other hand, joint communiqués are scarce. They do not focus on change or utopia, and are disseminated on specific occasions. This also confirms fragmentation.

Among the issues addressed, it can be noted that the pandemic as an exceptional crisis situation reflects the concerns of academics on the need for the state. Most of the authors' criticisms refer to state management. For example, reorganisation, coordination. Similarly, it is only the economic aspect that garners the greatest number of suggestions. For example, for the first time during the pandemic period, the clear need to "revolutionise the economy" is expressed, and this is actually the expression of the need for a change in the system itself. In this particularity, there is perhaps a common meaning, a common denominator. This is so, because it is not only put forward by certain academics specialised in the subject (economists).

Apart from this, the suggestions found in the press and media oscillate between survival (of humanity) or improvement; but questions of change and consequently utopia are not clearly expressed. In this sense, academics do not dare to talk about utopia. Few risk suggesting changes at the global or planetary level that require collective action. A situation as exceptional as the pandemic has failed to rehabilitate utopia, and proposals for change are fragmented in academia. The proof is that those who speak clearly of utopia in times of pandemic are those authors who have previously worked on it.

Narratives are not a whole. It is true that they could never be a whole in the strict sense of the word, as they belonged to different personalities. But it is proven that at a given moment in the development of individual theoretical productions (sociological, philosophical, moral-ethical), a narrative stands out like the main tone or rhythm of a song. It happened with Bauman or Byung. Their productions transcended among others. The collectivity of academics does not

present itself in a narrative, but in a set of narratives, i.e. it presents itself in fragmented meta-narratives. Moreover, the current crisis has shown a transformation and a new rhythm in the paradigm (perhaps more functional, for humanity): there has been a shift from formulating ideas in the press and media about risk and uncertainty, self-mutilation (or self-exploitation), to others based on disbelief.

The construction of utopias with a finalist scope contributes in principle to the configuration of a non-fragmented narrative, but as we have seen, dissemination has occurred, as it is in principle a tool to face immediate challenges. If narratives are fragmented, utopias show themselves in micro-utopias. This is also seen in the development of narrative fragments isolated from each other. These fragments fall short of constituting an idea of actuality and the design of an ideal way forward. This fragmentation confirms the durability of postmodernity in which meta-narratives are replaced by micro-narratives, where utopias are replaced by micro-utopias and communities are broken down into micro-communities.

In this examination of the specific characteristics of utopian fragmentation among academics and its social impact, there are limitations. A future analysis could focus on the influence of hyperspecialisation and the criteria of scientific and academic evaluation (sponsored in the name of excellence in the constriction of imagined worlds). Analysing the formulation of suggestions or proposals in separate narratives could work on the non-existence of communities of dissent in the social sciences and humanities and the consequences of this for transformative social action.

Intellectuals (as Sousa, 2020) may have to accompany people's aspirations even more and work not only in the university environment, but also in communities. Academics have important pedagogical work to do and the media is an important avenue for this, as has been shown. This work needs to be directed at the general public in their role as political actors, in order to introduce new ideas into the debates. The future depends on what the political actors (the community) are able to think and interpret as achievable. As Wierviorka (2020) says, perhaps with the support of intellectuals able to work on knowledge. But it would be

necessary for this knowledge to be produced in a community of authors, or to be shown among all, a predominant voice in that community of authors.

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