



ORIGINAL PAPER

Intellectual Origins and the Evolution of Political Corectness – A Critical Perspective

Victor Stoica¹⁾

Abstract:

Today, the world is undergoing massive and very rapid changes. Following the conflicts that the West has gone through, especially in the last century, a new ideology has emerged, a postmodern one, inspired by the old ones, more precisely by Marxism and the theories of the Frankfurt school, namely cultural Marxism or cultural neo-Marxism. This ideology has no economic basis for its goal of changing and revolutionizing society, but a socio-cultural one, wanting to standardize cultures and ethnicities by eliminating any individual differences. The most powerful weapon of this current is political correctness or PC, a tool that aims to censor any opinions contrary to neo-Marxists, a tool that has come to have legal status in some Western countries such as Canada, Sweden, France and others. Based on postmodern elements, this current seeks to relativize any truth and to take advantage of the nihilism and anomies that have emerged in the societies in which it makes its presence known. Most often associated with the political "left", political correctness seeks to eliminate any contrary opinion, any opposition and automatically free speech and thus erodes the basis of democracy and the Enlightenment values that led to the formation of the West as we know it today.

Keywords: *Political correctness Marxism; neo-Marxism; ideology; culture.*

¹⁾ MA Student, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Iasi, Romania, Email: victorstoica06@gmail.com.

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According to the Oxford Dictionary (2020) the term political correctness (usually abbreviated CP in Romanian or PC in English) is used to describe language, policies or measures aimed at avoiding offenses or highlighting the disadvantages of members of certain groups in society. In public discourse and in the media, the term is generally used pejoratively with the implication that these policies are excessive or unjustified (Friedman; Narveson, 1995). In the late 1980s, the term came to refer to a preference for inclusive language and to avoid language or behavior that can be seen as excluding, marginalizing or insulting groups of people considered disadvantaged or discriminated against, especially gender-defined groups or race, again the emphasis being on certain identity groups. Initially, the intentions of applying political correctness were perceived as noble, its explanations being true, and the attempt to eliminate discrimination and marginalization of people only on ethnic, religious or sexual grounds was seen as a struggle for human progress. Over time, this approach has developed connotations with extremist tendencies, advocates of political correctness coming to practice exactly what they wanted to eliminate, discriminating against people they assume would discriminate against others (Western, 2016: 69- 84).

We can thus consider that although the initial intentions of political correctness were reasonable, correct and fully socially justified, over time many of its transformations from what should have been to what it is now have followed, its origins being identifiable.

I consider a paper on this subject to be of major importance, studies in this direction being often avoided precisely because of the taboo element around it. In most cases, in higher education institutions in the West, the theme is either avoided or politicized to impose a certain way of seeing it, this contributing to the achievement of the objectives of some interest groups or politicians, without taking into account the serious social and psychological repercussions that this phenomenon can cause.

The objectives of my paper are to study the role of cultural neo-Marxism in creating political correctness and to identify the characteristics of political correctness.

When talking about classical Marxism, what elements it is composed of, a brief history of it, who contributed to its formation and how it has evolved over time, we can say that Marxism is a method of socio-economic analysis that uses a materialist interpretation of the evolution of history to observe class relations and social conflict and a dialectical view to analyze social transformation. It has its origins in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century. A first component of Marxism is materialism. Substance is considered to be the main factor of reality and not consciousness, and dialectical materialism would be the struggle of opposites as the governing law of reality. Derived from this, historical materialism represents the understanding of history through the prism of economic conditions, which are considered to determine social, political, cultural life and to constitute the basis and superstructure of social reality (Fromm, 1961: 20).

Another component would be the dialectical method, which is in principle the discussion between two or more people who have different points of view on a particular subject and who want to reach a common truth through rational arguments (Corbett, Connors, 1999: 1). Derived from this, through the Marxist vision, the Marxist dialectic or the materialist dialectic is a research method opposed to metaphysics, and which wants to analyze reality through the prism of its constant change and by studying the results that appear as a result of internal contradictions and the struggle of opposites (Engels, 1970). Marxism uses the methodology of historical materialism to analyze and

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critique the development of capitalism and the role of the struggle between social classes to produce systematic economic change (Seligman, 1901: 612-640). Socialism is the first stage that the world should go through after the capitalist phase and followed by the communist "utopia", even if it is assumed that socialist ideas and models that describe public or common property have existed since antiquity. The socialist political movement includes a series of political theories that are based on the revolutionary movements of the late nineteenth century that dealt with the social problems allegedly due to capitalism at the time (Marx; Engels, 1967: 5-14; Newman, 2005: 5).

Going further towards cultural Marxism and how it came to exist, I will highlight its origins and connections with classical Marxism, but also an essential component element that precedes the various hypostases of cultural Marxism, namely, the critical theory. Cultural Marxism is considered a Marxist movement that seeks to apply the critical theory to several elements, such as family, gender, race, culture, identity within Western society, having the same Marxist ideal but applying different techniques and of less physically violent nature, compared to the initial ones, more subtle elements that take effect over time (Bolton, 2018).

The origins of cultural Marxism can be found in the Frankfurt School. This is a school of social theory and critical philosophy associated with the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (IfS) of the Goethe University in Frankfurt. The school was established during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), during the interwar period, and consists of intellectuals, academics and political dissidents who criticized all socio-economic models of the time (capitalism, fascism, communism). The Frankfurt School theorists considered social theory to be inadequate to explain the unstable fractional politics and reactionary policies prevalent in liberal capitalist societies of the twentieth century. The sociological works of the school were derived from syntheses of the relevant thematic works of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Georg Lukács. Like Karl Marx, the Frankfurt School was concerned with the conditions (political, economic, social) that allow for social change through rational social institutions (Held, 1980: 14).

Critical theory was created as a school of thought primarily by Frankfurt School theorists Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm (Outhwaite, 2009: 5-8). Since the 1960s, the development of critical theory within the Institute for Social Research has been led by Jürgen Habermas, in the field of communicative rationality, linguistic intersubjectivity and the philosophical discourse of modernity. Critical theory is a social theory oriented towards criticizing and changing society as a whole, unlike the traditional theory oriented only towards understanding or explaining it. As a term, critical theory has two meanings with different origins and histories: the first derives from sociology and the second derives from literary criticism, which is used and applied as an umbrella term that can describe a theory based on criticism that would have as its ultimate goal "the liberation of human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Kompridis, 2006).

In sociology and political philosophy, the term "critical theory" describes the Western Marxist philosophy of the Frankfurt School, which was developed in Germany in the 1930s. Critical theorists of the Frankfurt School drew attention to the critical methods of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud's. Critical Theory argues that ideology is the main obstacle to human liberation (Geuss, 1999). Marx explicitly developed the notion of criticism in his analysis of ideology and integrated it into the practice of social revolution, which, new theorists, such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas, have

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transposed it into a socio-cultural plan (Adorno, Horkheimer, 2002: 242). Characterized by a new form of enslavement or slavery, the only solution for liberation being critical, combined with the deconstructionist technique of Jacques Derrida, thus relativizing the meaning of words in the hope of finding freedom. Here appears the postmodern version of critical theory, which politicizes social problems, and places them in certain historical and cultural contexts to relativize their conclusions. Meaning itself becomes considered unstable due to the rapid transformation of social structures (Gnanasekaran, 2015: 211-214).

To understand political correctness, we also have to talk about certain component hypostases and complementary elements of cultural neo-Marxism, which cannot be understood without taking them into account. Cultural neo-Marxism emerged with the emigration of representatives or supporters of the Frankfurt School to the United States. They were warmly received by the local academic environment and their ideas were taken up by both teachers and students who at that time had a high collective tendency towards rebellion and rejection of authority and norms. The ideas they supported gradually merged with the social tendencies of the Americans and led to the emergence of this new current and so, Western society and politics will be significantly penetrated by this current, especially by imposing political correctness and critical theory in society. Given the specific elements of Marxism and cultural Marxism as well as the differences between the two, we have identified a number of complementary elements or embedded in the latter ideology. Some emerged as separate, independent movements and then incorporated into the ideology of cultural Marxism, others started from the beginning with the same goals only in a different form and with different motivations, often emotional and / or politicized rather than rational. The postmodern version of critical theory politicizes social problems “by placing them in historical and cultural contexts”, in order to engage in the process of collecting and analyzing data in order to relativize conclusions (Lindlof; Taylor, 2002: 49).

First, postmodernism, which is a twentieth-century movement characterized by skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism, a general suspicion of reason, and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power or rejecting meta-narrations and ideologies of modernism, often calling into question various hypotheses of Enlightenment rationality. Postmodernism denies the existence of an objective natural reality, considers that there is no knowable truth, reason and logic being considered conceptual constructions that can be socially modified by language and its meaning, using the method of deconstruction. Relativism, apparently so characteristic of postmodernism, proposes a certain line of thinking regarding the nature and function of discourses of different kinds. If postmodernism is correct in reality, knowledge and value are relative in terms of discourse and then the established discourses of the Enlightenment are no more necessary or justified than alternative discourses. Part of the postmodern answer is that the predominant discourses in any society reflect the interests and values, generally speaking, of the dominant groups or the elite, an idea held by Marx that the ideas that govern each age have always been the ideas of its ruling class. “Because the established discourses of the Enlightenment are more or less arbitrary and unjustified, they can be changed, and because they more or less reflect the interests and values of the powerful, they should be changed” (Lyotard, 1984:Xix).

Another element, nihilism, can be defined as an attitude, tendency, conception or manifestation that denies the rules, institutions, morals, cultural traditions existing in a

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given society, without opposing them, instead, with a superior or a specific way of thinking to any philosophical doctrine that aims to radically deny a system of values. We can speak of a form of extreme initial skepticism, discussed by Demosthenes (1852: 57). Then we come to the more modern era, we can consider existential nihilism and we can see that it is similar to postmodern relativism in that it denies any meaning once validated but still does not want to replace it with another, philosophy similar to that of Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 2015: 126-128).

Complementing nihilism, atheism increases the distance between the individual and a meaning, a direction of his life. It can be defined as a doctrine of denying the existence of any divinity. In this direction, we can find another form of atheism, namely the militant, activism that not only gladly adopts this vision but forms a goal to spread it, to "liberate" people from outdated values and so said "mental barriers" that slow down evolution. However, in this case we can hardly speak of a situation of nihilism, but we can still speak of one of postmodernism. Although we can find many arguments for supporting atheism but also for refuting it, the relevance of nihilism for this paper is its contribution to the spread of cultural Marxism in society.

Another complementary element to Marxism is anarchist philosophy. Anarchism, or rather the anarcho-communist movement is considered an extreme leftist ideology such as the activist group Antifa (Bray, 2017), and much of the anarchist economy and legal philosophy reflects anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist interpretations of communism, collectivism, trade unionism, mutualism or participatory economy, hence the connection with classical Marxism but also with the cultural one (McLaughlin, 2007: 59).

Anarchist elements are also components of contemporary feminist movements. After the first feminist wave, and the second, the third, and later in the fourth, the discussion began to move more and more towards a modern class struggle, a struggle against the oppression of a patriarchy that would constantly oppress certain minorities, including women. The sexual liberation enjoyed by the West has anarchist and communist origins, the fourth wave being rather one of anarcho-feminism. The struggle for equal rights and freedom has turned into a magnifying glass against the state, men, whites, heterosexuality and capitalism, or as Susan Brown puts it, "since anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all power relations, it is inherently feminist"(Brown, 2002: 208).

The Marxist vision of oppressor versus oppressor continues to be developed in terms of the term intersectionality, which involves a combination of oppressive factors, increasing the moral value of the individual victim and automatically giving any person who does not capitalize on this narrative, a lower social value, one of racist, xenophobic, sexist, misogynist etc (McCall, 2005: 1771-1800; Kelly, 2009: E42-E56).

There is also the phenomenon of identity politics, which perfectly complement the others mentioned. This term refers to a tendency of people who share a certain racial, religious, ethnic, social or cultural identity to form exclusive political alliances, instead of engaging in a traditional party policy. Examples include identity politics based on age, religion, social class or caste, culture, dialect, disability, education, ethnicity, language, nationality, gender, gender identity, generation, occupation, profession, race, political affiliation, sexual orientation, settlement, urban and rural housing and others. Identity politics, as a way of classification, is closely linked to the fact that some social groups are assumed from the outset to be discriminated against (such as women, ethnic minorities and sexual minorities); that is, the claim that individuals belonging to these

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groups are, by virtue of their identity, more vulnerable to forms of oppression, such as cultural imperialism, violence, labor exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241-1299).

The new class struggle is between the oppressed minorities and the supposed “dictatorship” of the majority, and in order to achieve their goals, the activists who support these movements often use different forms of identity politics. However, although these civil rights movements aim at the acceptance and full integration of marginalized groups into current culture, by exacerbating differences, they only perpetuate the marginalization of the groups they claim to defend (Calhoun, 1994: 131-150).

About multiculturalism and the idea of social and cultural diversity, although they are not direct descendants of Marxism or similar ideologies, but rather of globalization tendencies, these currents have been strongly promoted and supported by adherents of the many other components or complementary elements of cultural Marxism. Multiculturalism is the final state of either a natural or artificial process (for example: legally controlled immigration) and takes place either on a large scale at the national level or on a smaller scale in communities within a nation. On a smaller scale, this can happen artificially when a jurisdiction is established or expanded by combining areas with two or more different cultures (e.g., French Canada and English Canada) (Baofu, 2012: 22). On a large scale, it can occur as a result of legal or illegal migration to and from different jurisdictions around the world. If we analyze multiculturalism and diversity through the philosophical, social and political spectrum, we can show how these elements can create social anomie and segregation (Nagle, 2009: 129).

Political correctness, which origins can be found both in the Frankfurt School, in Maoist China, therefore also in the philosophies of the communists Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, who wrote about some of its characteristics. Proponents of this ideological current claim that most conservatives use this concept to reduce and distract from substantially discriminatory behavior toward disadvantaged groups (Wilson, 1995: 26). The aforementioned authors argued that the revolution could first be achieved through a revolt at the linguistic level that should culminate in a methodical reversal of any meaning. To these origins are added Derrida's deconstructive method, critical theory, Freudian psychoanalysis, and classical Marxist analysis.

Following this merging, goals have been reached that seek to remove traditional meanings and replace them with new ones that aim to eliminate a form of discrimination, the verbal one, and replace it with the constant desire to change reality so that it coincides with the theory and not to change the theory to coincide with reality, and then to change any social roles because they would be consequences of cultural indoctrination, nature being completely disregarded, even reaching the change of gender significance, it is now considered an assumed identity and not something with which an individual is born. In the same sense, sexual orientation, race, personal pronouns used for addressing and even age are called into question, being rather elements related to a person's identity and which can be changed at will. Failure to respect the imaginary identity assumed is considered oppression and ends up being socially damned if not punished by law. The features of this new form of liberalism would be a radical egalitarianism, equality in terms of results rather than opportunities, but also extreme individualism, more precisely the drastic reduction of any limits that could limit personal satisfaction, this being more important than anything else in the vision of generation Z or

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that of millennials. In most cases, modern revolutionaries are the young people of today and the elites of the boomer generation, early followers of the New Age trend (Atkinson, 1996). Probably the most important characteristic element of political correctness is a form of censorship, of language restriction, which the supporters of this current apply nonchalantly. Another method used by them is to associate a form of social stigma to anyone who does not want to adopt their language and their own interpretation of social reality or to support in their turn the identity politics that would give them moral superiority.

Conclusions

Going through classical Marxism which had material bases, we came to cultural Marxism which no longer has the same bases, the material element being in principle replaced by a cultural one. Although their ultimate revolutionary goal is the same, the methods and tools used to achieve this goal differ. I showed the connections between them and explained the emergence of a new form of cultural Marxism and how it led to the emergence of political correctness.

Starting from theory, we can say that certain literary critics have used deconstruction as a tool to transform literature, philosophy and culture into nonsense. If deconstructivist theories had at least a little accuracy, then any verbal communication but also other forms of communication would tend to lose their meaning. The adoption of the theory of deconstruction not only compromises philosophical logic, but makes it practically impossible to write literature. Since words no longer mean anything concrete, they are reduced to sounds only.

Continuing with cultural Marxism, we can say that it is increasingly present in contemporary Western society especially in education and the corporate environment, where relativism, atheism, nihilism, anarchism, feminism and identity politics are increasingly supported and practiced. To these are added political correctness with other elements such as censorship, language change, almost fanatical support for multiculturalism and diversity and the emergence of new concepts such as safe space, trigger warning that radicalizes students and / or turns them into self-proclaimed victims, even if they did not go through any serious trauma. However, given the capitalization of irresponsibility, it can be seen that just a look or a word at the right time of emotional oversensitivity of these individuals can generate states that can be considered even traumatic.

A problem of political correctness is that real competition diminishes and positive discrimination takes the place of meritocracy. The West is constantly blamed for its history instead of being praised for the civilization it created. This message is conveyed through education to the new generations and combined with a form of fear of violating the new rules imposed by political correctness, thus stopping many humanist intellectuals from expressing themselves freely.

An empirical research is needed to analyze the penetration of the ideas of political correctness both in the university environment and in the Romanian society.

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