

Benjamin Still Makes Sense: Forum on the Actuality of Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' at Its Centenary, Introduction – Why We Need Benjamin More than Ever

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Abstract: Walter Benjamin published his influential essay 'Critique of Violence'/'Zur Kritik der Gewalt' in 1921, and the work has troubled and provoked thinkers across disciplines for over a century now. This Forum gathers a group of scholars in philosophy, political science, international relations and legal studies to reflect on the actuality of Benjamin's essay for contemporary critical theory. In this opening to the Forum, the guest editors Gabriela Azevedo and Ludmila Franca-Lipke introduce the Forum as a whole. Then in the following piece, James Martel argues that Benjamin helps us to better understand our current moment than almost any other thinker. Benjamin explains the nature of authoritarianism, the link between liberalism (and neoliberalism) and fascism and how such forces can be resisted. In his essay, Martel updates the concept of mythic violence to take into account the resilience of the liberal/fascist connection (even as it appears to be a node of struggle and mutual incompatibility). He shows that 'Critique of Violence' doesn't just diagnose our time but it also shows a way out of the abyss that we are in. Martel lists seven key points from Benjamin's essay and adds one other point from José Carlos Mariátegui to think concretely about how to apply their lessons from 100 years ago to our own time.

Keyword: Walter Benjamin; general strike; anarchism; liberalism; fascism; José Carlos Mariátegui.

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Introduction: Benjamin Still Makes Sense

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In 1921, at the age of only 28, Walter Benjamin published his controversial essay ‘Critique of Violence,’ an account of the republican model of government and development in the light of the First World War. Identifying an intrinsic relationship between law and coercion, the essay became a highly influential text in the discussion of the role of violence in politics, far beyond the German context in which it was written.

One hundred years after its original publication, the text has only gained in popularity and discussion on its ambiguities and possible reflections. Contemporary scholars such as Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler continue to engage with the ‘violence essay’ and have put forward their own, highly contrasting interpretations of ‘divine violence’ and ‘bare life,’ which we can see in the texts below.

While the world has seen profound changes since the original publication of *Critique of Violence*, both 1921 and 2021 share the rise of authoritarian forces in many countries, coupled with profound social and cultural change, and economic depression. However, many of today’s most pressing issues and challenges, such as environmental conflicts and the climate crisis, forced migration and displacement, racialized conflicts and state violence, and not least the marginalization of LGBTIQ+ people and the rollback of women’s rights, call into question the relevance of Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ and its concepts.

We aimed to organize a forum of short critical reflections on Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ 100 years after its original publication. We collected stimulating papers from renowned Benjamin scholars and young researchers from around the world working in international relations, political theory, philosophy, law, and so on.

The forum we present raises questions around many themes: ‘bare life’ in contemporary world politics; refugees, displaced persons and legally marginalized groups; postcolonial and intersectional perspectives on the ‘history of the oppressed’; (racialized) law enforcement violence, resistance and insurgent movements; ‘divine violence’ and reflections on social crisis; state and global neoliberalism; law and critique of law.

Our goal is to discuss: Can Benjamin’s Critique of Violence be updated—and how?

We divided the papers into six sections and a final interpretation, beginning and ending with two great Benjamin scholars, not forgetting the fruitful contributions of prominent researchers whose work focuses on meeting the challenges of 21st century.

Following this Introduction, the first contribution, ‘Why We Need Benjamin More than Ever: Seven Lessons from Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ and One from Mariátegui’ by James Martel, opens the discussion on the relevance of Benjamin’s essay. Martel argues that Benjamin is the most useful thinker to understand contemporaneity

and authoritarianism, as he defines the imbrication of liberalism (and neoliberalism) and fascism. He points to the urgency of adjusting theoretical lenses from a European-centred approach to one more suited to the perspective of the Global South and adds José Carlos Mariátegui's contribution to this analysis. 'Archism' is the translation Martel proposes for today's mythic violence. Liberalism and fascism, he argues, can be defined as 'the good cop and the bad cop of the same system.' After considering many aspects of Benjamin's thought, especially the need to create and develop a political attitude that is detached from mythical ends, he lists the lessons that should guide such attitude: 1) mythic violence (or archism) is the name of what we face in present; 2) liberalism and fascism are not as different as one might think; 3) the law is violent because it is actually insecure (since it is unfounded); 4) fascism is both the most frightening manifestation of mythic violence/archism and the most vulnerable; 5) divine violence is not the same as human beings acting like avatars of God's justice; 6) the General Strike is still our greatest tool for opposing mythical violence/archism; 7) today we are already living an anarchist life; and 8), from Mariátegui, human life sustains itself in the face of archism through a practice of material rights. So Martel's main goal, then, is to show this ambivalence of the present: in addition to appearing hard, our time reveals vulnerable features of capitalist violence and important resources to overcome it.

The first section, 'Myth and authority,' consists of a text by Allan M. Hillani entitled 'The Mythical Authority of Foundation: Towards a Critique of Justice.' This young researcher discusses Western mythology to argue that the same notion of authority is present in both myth and law. For Hillani's interpretation of Benjamin's essay, the critique of violence demands a critique of justice.

In the second section, 'Colonialism and Reminiscences' we find two contributions from different perspectives that deepen the discussion on the effects and possible reincarnations of the colonial phenomenon. "For the sake of the living"? Divine violence and decolonization' by Aggie Hirst and Tom Houseman provokes us to think about the perpetuation of colonial violence in a complex way. In 'Between Niobe and Edward Colston Statues: On Profane Contagion of Colonialism,' Vinícius Armele emphasizes that time is not experienced linearly and invites the reader to rethink modern problems through affectivity, violence and law in order to understand memory connections of colonialism, subjectivity and freedom in the present.

The third section approaches 'divine violence' in two different contemporary experiences in Mexico and Iranian Kurdistan. In 'The Divine Form of the Violence of Lynching in Mexico,' Melany Cruz interprets lynching as an expression of political emotions linked to neoliberal impacts on living conditions in Mexico. With regard to Benjamin's statements on mere life and mythical violence, she proposes a parallel between divine violence and the political action of lynching. In 'Divine Violence: Kurdish Struggles and General Strike,' Kaveh Ghoreishi and Sara Minelli draw our attention to the notion of general strike, exploring contemporary examples in Iranian Kurdistan as moments of suspension of the time of oppression, following Benjamin's lessons. Thus, they provoke us with the possible actualization of the notions with which Benjamin worked: what political experiences carry the energy of time suspension/interruption that general strike does?

The fourth section focuses on ‘Biopower’ with ‘Utopic Purgatory: A Critique of Border Violence’ by sasha skaidra and ‘Benjamin on Violent Piopower’ by R. Guy Emerson, both of which update Benjamin’s insights to analyze contemporaneity and the use of violence to control people. The first one analyzes Sanctuary Cities and concrete migration issues, while the second one seeks to understand today’s use of violence as a mean and end to regulate different populations differently.

The fifth and sixth sections deal with contemporary Brazilian challenges and Benjaminian uses and interpretations, with Rafael Vieira’s piece, ‘Violence/Power/Force in contemporary Brazil’ and Bethania Assy’s and Rafael Rolo’s ‘Immanent Violence and Perspectivist Difference on Legal Order: Benjamin’s Critique of Violence and Contemporary Brazil’s Housing Struggles.’ Although Benjamin analyzes a particular and different context in its fragments, he has left clues to critique the neoliberal organization of society, even in the Global South, through different approaches.

The final interpretation is offered by Jeanne Marie Gagnebin: ‘On 100 Years of “Zur Kritik der Gewalt”’. Gagnebin is interested in the concept of divine justice and violence. She points to the theoretical challenges faced by the young Benjamin, considering (1) the entanglement of the political and the theological that can be found in the word *Gewalt* and also in the concrete world: on the power that has to create the possibility of change. On the other hand, Gagnebin analyses (2) the opposition that Benjamin recognises between the structure of Law (*Recht*) and the concept of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) and also (3) the difference between the myth and the mythical for the author. Human life, Gagnebin argues, ‘constitutes therefore true life, as opposed to mere life and mere natural survival, condemned by their emptiness to be the plaything of fate or myth.’ The law does not liberate humanity from the myth, it enforces the guilty. In this way, Benjamin says something that is still useful: fear of law, legislation and myth opposes human experience to justice.

We hope that all these different and multiple provocative reflections, after the overrunning of the COVID pandemics, will illuminate new perspectives on past and present human issues, concerning the search for justice for all oppressed people and their memories, regardless of gender, origin or citizenship situation, as we understand Benjamin to have argued more than a hundred years ago. Instead of a particular interpretation, we have chosen to offer our readers only a presentation of these numerous and spectacular contributions.

We would like to thank the scholars who contributed to this forum for the brilliant reflections that are now available to all those interested not only in the thought of Walter Benjamin, but also in the issues of our time that are responsible for shaping our politics and society. We give a special thanks to Jeanne Marie Gagnebin for accepting our invitation to write a piece on the ‘Critique of Violence,’ which, in her own words, is one of Benjamin’s most difficult texts to engage with. We thank also Jimmy Casas Klausen and Paula Sandrin for inviting us to be part of the editorial board of this forum, and for trusting in our ability and judgment skills to analyse the many proposals we received, to select, assemble and organise this special issue of *Contexto Internacional*.

Why We Need Benjamin More than Ever: Seven Lessons from Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' and One from Mariátegui

James Martel

In the century that has passed since Benjamin wrote his 'Critique of Violence', we have gone through what might be considered a full cycle (or two) of the move between liberalism and fascism. Our time may feel like the most perilous moment since Benjamin's own lifetime, although that depends on who one is. For many communities of colour, especially in settler or post-colonial states, the violent face of the West is a well-known and ongoing fact of life. For more privileged communities, the white, the rich etc., the tendency towards violence and chaos that is accompanying the rise of fascism all over the world may seem novel and uniquely troubling. Either way, it seems clear that the kinds of violence that are ordinarily visited upon those groups who are targeted by the state and by global capitalism have been expanded and that the long-established orderings of the world itself are in serious jeopardy.

It is striking that we have reached this moment at the hundred-year mark of the publication of Benjamin's essay. He wrote 'Critique of Violence' while he was still quite young and had no way of knowing the terrible future he faced. Yet, his essay feels extremely prescient, not only for the fascist future that Germany would descend into, but for a yet more distant future, our own time, when – I strongly believe – we need Benjamin more than ever before.

In what follows, I will lay out seven points explaining why we need Benjamin and, perhaps in particular, the 'Critique of Violence' (hence fore 'Critique') essay, so badly in a time of neo-fascism, environmental degradation, global pandemic and the ongoing travesties of neoliberalism. Collectively, these points lay out the basis for both an explanation of our current predicament as well as a set of strategies by which we might address these dilemmas. At the end of the essay, I will tie in Benjamin's theorizing in the 'Critique' with some ideas of José Carlos Mariátegui, also writing a hundred years ago, as a way to shift from a Eurocentric idiom to one that is more focused on the global south.

Mythic violence (or archism) is the name of what we are facing

Benjamin's concept of mythic violence, fully articulated in the 'Critique', is the first key insight that he offers us. It's always important to remember that the German word that Benjamin uses which gets translated as violence is *Gewalt* which does not only mean physical violence but also something more like force or assertion. Accordingly, mythic violence is a form of projection, a mode of creating power out of nothing. He uses the term 'mythic' because this form of violence is based on principles and truths that do not actually exist; mythic violence is based on a set of lies. The purpose of mythic violence, Benjamin tells us, is not to honour the gods (who don't after all exist) but rather for the sake of human

power over other humans (he tells us that ‘power [is] the principle of all mythic lawmaking’) (Benjamin 1996: 248).

In this way, the concept of mythic violence encapsulates a great deal of what we understand as the practices of law and politics, as well as many other areas of power dynamics. Collectively, the projections that it asserts constitute a false sense of reality that Benjamin, after Marx, calls the ‘phantasmagoria’ (Benjamin 1999: 14). Mythic violence is, therefore, the name for what passes for reality itself, not just our formal political practices but also the way capitalism, which is perhaps the acme of mythic violence, insinuates itself into that fabric, the way that states and social institutions, and even art can be an expression of a larger form of projective violence. Mythic violence is dedicated, above all, to its own self-perpetuation, to the hierarchies that are produced and naturalized in its name, and to the ordering of the world that is deemed to be simply ‘the way things are.’

In my own work, I like to speak of ‘archism’ instead of mythic violence. In my view, archism is the opposite of anarchism. Where anarchism is an expression of human beings in their own interactions, even when it is under the scope and control of mythic violence, archism is about imposing an order onto that life and making that imposition seem realer than what it predates upon. Archism is like a parasite that sits atop anarchist life, and takes all the credit for that life (in part via the assumption that if the state or other archist institutions were ever to disappear, we would all be stabbing one another inside of ten minutes).

While both terms, as I said, mean essentially the same thing, I personally prefer to use the term archism precisely because it is a world system that does not want to be either named or recognized. Archism is not supposed to be a ‘thing’; its existence is meant to be part of the background, so prevalent that even to name it is to threaten the absolute hold it has on the concept of what is real (and what is not). Mythic violence, you could say, is the name for what it is, and archism is the name for what it does. With the reader’s permission, I will use these terms relatively interchangeably in what follows. In so doing, I do not want to take credit from Benjamin’s own discoveries which, after all, are the point of this essay, but rather to translate it into a contemporary idiom.

Liberalism and fascism are not as different as you think

The concept of mythic violence/archism is useful because as we move from one kind of order to another (from liberalism to neoliberalism and fascism), it helps to understand that we are only ever looking at one single phenomenon. Perhaps more accurately, we are looking at set of hugely complex, hydra-headed phenomena, where even concepts like fascism and liberalism do not have one set internal definition, but all share one central feature, namely a lack of ontological roots, a parasitical relationship to human life and a deep anxiety—and hence violent response—about its own status. The apparent huge changes we face in our own time disguise the way that the same phenomenon is continually upon us. Archism can show us a mild face or a ferocious one, depending on its requirements for power. In ordinary times (that is to say non-fascist times), archism tends to show a more benign face, at least for some. This is because activities like voting and

polling give archism's subjects a sense of their own buy in into and participation within a political system that actually entirely excludes them. In this way, the state can afford to be relatively tolerant of its privileged communities even as it continues to harry and kill those communities that it deems undesirable. In the meantime, the accumulation of capital can go on largely unopposed.

Eventually, however, that accumulation becomes too great and the *modus vivendi* becomes threatened. Leftist agitation begins to gain credibility and, to stave off this threat to capitalism, archism's fascist face is fully revealed, leading to an uptick in violence, racism and all the other modes of fascist repression. In a sense, the fascist mode has two purposes. First, it beats down any challenges to capitalism and archism more generally, and also, sometimes it forces the very richest to share a bit of their profits with their fellow, less fortunate whites. When the archist core is deemed appropriately secure, the system can afford to lower its guard (as I'll explain a bit further, the fascist mode is highly unstable and unsustainable, so a return to liberalism is a critical part of archist homeostasis).

This demonstrates the way that it is helpful to use a single term like mythic violence or archism rather than terms like 'liberalism' and 'fascism' because those terms imply some kind of ultimate and ontological division whereas they are just (literally) the good cop and the bad cop of the same system. Using one term helps us avoid getting caught up in the struggles between these apparent mortal enemies. It's not that there is no difference between these things or even between varieties of these things—say between liberalism and neoliberalism and Nazism vs. Italian or Spanish fascism or even the contemporary forms of mediatized neo fascism—but rather that their alteration gives us a false sense of choices that preclude real and radical forms of change.

The law is violent because it is insecure

Having made a fairly broad commentary on the nature of archist power, it is important to focus on one of the key elements of this power, which is, as Benjamin tells us, law. The law, for Benjamin is perhaps the place where we can see the effects of what he calls mythic violence most clearly. In the 'Critique,' Benjamin tells us that:

The assertion that the ends of police violence are always identical or even connected to those of general law is entirely untrue. Rather, the "law" of the police really marks the point at which the state... can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain. (Benjamin, 1996: 243)

Here, Benjamin speaks to the difference between what the law thinks it is (i.e just, rational, objective etc.) vs. what it's actually like (violent, racist, arbitrary, brutal). The police represent the place where the exigencies of archist power become most visible.

The problem with the law, as Benjamin makes very clear, is that, for all of the ways that it bases itself in either theological or philosophical foundations (whether that is God, 'natural law,' 'rationality' etc.), it is actually entirely self-appointed. Machiavelli exposes

the artificial grounds of law when he tells us the story of Numa, the second king of Rome. He tells us that Numa found the Romans to be uncouth and unlawful, so he lied and pretended that a goddess gave him some divine tablets that the Romans had to follow or risk the wrath of the gods (Machiavelli 1950: 147). In this way, Machiavelli is exposing, in the guise of simply telling a story, the way mythic violence works: it projects a human will out into the heavens and receive it back in the form of an alienated power that cannot be denied.

The problem with this kind of power is that, as previously noted, insofar as it is a false projection, it is eternally insecure. Benjamin tells us that the law and the state are always violent because they have to substitute threat for real legitimacy. At the end of the day the law has to resort to (physical) violence because it is empty, even dead. Without any substance of its own, it must predate upon its subjects, drawing its very existence via the dynamism and energy of those who are caught up in its maw.

This helps to also explain the rotation between liberal and fascist forms of archism explained earlier. The violent core is mostly masked over by a language of justice and rights, at least as far as privileged, white, wealthy subjects are concerned. Yet that core comes out readily when required, and in fact must come out sooner or later. That is perhaps why even during liberal periods, the law must be violent and murderous to communities of colour and the poor; someone has to bear the brunt of its constant need to prove its existence (even to itself!). If the law never killed, never engaged in actual violence, it would quickly cease to exist.

Fascism is the scariest manifestation of mythic violence/archism but also the most vulnerable

This description of the law and the state – and indeed all attributes of archism – is important in terms of understanding the way that this system, for all of its violence and ferocity, is unexpectedly vulnerable. The law and the state are always anxious, afraid of exposure. In a very important sense, the closer the archist system comes to its violent, fascist core, the more vulnerable it is. We usually think of fascism as being utterly terrifying; the very point of it, it seems, is to cow subjects into submission. And while that is true to some extent, Benjamin shows us that the ultimate point of fascism is not so much to scare us but rather to assure itself. It must ceaselessly hurt and kill because it can never rest, can never feel that it is not at risk of being instantly eliminated.

Of course, in practice, some fascist regimes can last a very long time. Franco's rule over Spain straddled four decades, so to say that fascism is a highly vulnerable state does not mean that it readily collapses. But by exposing this great secret of mythic violence more generally and perhaps of fascism more particularly, Benjamin shows us that we do not need to merely respond to fascism, to despair in the face of its show of violence and power. When we understand what we are looking at, we can instead see a form of weakness and vulnerability. Fascism needs to be read in one way and one way only. So, if we don't read and respond to it in that way, the whole edifice of archism becomes endangered, posing an existential threat for which no aspect of archism has any answer.

Divine violence does not mean human beings acting as avatars of God's justice

If we recognize the vulnerability of archism, that means that we can think about concrete ways to resist and overcome it, something which Benjamin helps us to think about further. Benjamin opposes mythic violence with that other great force that he describes in the last part of the 'Critique,' namely divine violence. As Benjamin tells us, whereas mythic violence is insecure and (therefore) violent, divine violence is entirely secure. As he tells us in that essay: 'Mythic violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake; divine violence is a pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it' (Benjamin 1996: 250).

Here, we see more clearly how mythic violence (and hence archism) is entirely self-serving. The law kills once again, not to punish criminals and promote justice but rather to perpetuate itself. Under the reign of mythic violence, human beings are reduced to 'mere life.' This is the state of being predated upon by the archist parasite.

Divine violence, on the other hand, is secure because it is based not on mythic gods but on God, who for Benjamin is a true deity. And God is not about itself but about us, the living. Indeed, whereas mythic violence demotes us to mere life as it is concerned only with itself, divine violence allows us to (anarchistically) determine our own life.

Accordingly, Benjamin's version of God does not come into the world and tell us truths. It only serves to undo the lies that mythic violence has made about God, to use that source of true externality as a way to defeat any faux externalities. It would be as if the goddess that Numa lies about actually materialized and destroyed the tablets that he had attributed to her, leaving the scene with no further explanation.

In the face of an idea like divine violence, it is very tempting to say that divine violence is a force that human beings can manifest on their own. Benjamin himself is not always so consistent on this point as when he speaks of 'educational violence,' an entirely human activity, as a form of divine violence (Benjamin 1996: 250). Slavoj Žižek fully commits to this conflation when he states: 'When those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly,' demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance, this is divine violence' (Žižek 2008: 202). Yet, to say that human beings can act as agents of divine violence effaces the critical distinction that Benjamin makes between acting on behalf of God and acting on behalf of oneself. When we think God has authorized our actions, we are reproducing the fetishism of mythic violence and archism. The only way to safeguard against that fetishism is to declare that we are acting only on our own behalf, not on behalf of God, nature or truth at all.

Benjamin's name for that kind of self-acting is 'nonviolence' (Benjamin 1996: 244). It is important to note right away that when he says nonviolence, he does not mean this in the English sense as never causing physical harm to anyone. Indeed, Benjamin argues that there are times when we must take on responsibility for our own acts of physical violence (rather than chalking it up to duty or being inspired by God). Rather, by nonviolence, he means the cessation of projection and externalization of our authority. Divine violence opens up a space within mythic violence, preventing it from becoming totalizing,

but ultimately, for Benjamin, to resist mythic violence, we must turn not to God but to one another, to our collective acts of nonviolence.

The general strike is our greatest tool for opposition to mythic violence/archism

Accordingly, for Benjamin, the forms that nonviolence takes are of necessity anti-mythic. In the 'Critique,' he promotes the idea of a 'proletariat general strike.' Contrasting this to a more conventional political strike, he writes:

Whereas the first form of interruption of work [the political strike] is violent, since it causes only an external modification of labour conditions, the second [the proletariat general strike], as a pure means is nonviolent. (Benjamin 1996: 246)

He also tells us that the general strike is 'anarchistic' (Benjamin 1996: 246). The general strike is one way that political subjects can act back against the mythic violence that otherwise overdetermines them. It is a total refusal of cooperation with the anarchist parasite.

Benjamin speaks of 'pure means' when he discusses the general strike (Benjamin 1996: 246). Such means are pure because they have been cleansed of their original connection to mythic ends. Were the workers to simply declare themselves free of laws and the state, they would betray themselves due to their ensnarement in the phantasmagoria which, as previously noted, passes for reality itself. This would allow mythic violence to reproduce itself in some new guise. Instead, the workers must directly contend with the mythic origins of archism, turning complicit means into something else. That something else is, I would argue, a return to an anarchist life that we are already living but do not always (or sometimes ever) realize. When we are predated by archism, our life is not our own and we become instruments ('means') for anarchist power but when that hold is released via the general strike and other anarchist techniques, our power is returned back to us.

We are already leading an anarchist life

In the 'Critique' Benjamin tells us that nonviolence is not some utopian project but already exists in terms of 'peaceful intercourse between private persons' (Benjamin 1996: 245). In our ordinary life, we are already practicing a form of anarchism, a collective set of conflicts, decisions, judgments and interactions that form the basis for life itself. This is the very object that archism seeks to draw from and to claim as its own. It is critical to remember that this anarchist life does not have to be created from scratch. It has always existed. This is why, when revolutions happen, people do not need to be told what to do or how to make a new society; they've always known what to do; human life is a continual practice of maintaining and sustaining a world beyond archism.

The fact that we are always living an anarchist life even under conditions of archism reveals an important truth for us that, although archism cannot survive without anarchism, that is to say, the predatory apparatuses of state, law etc. that constitute archism

require subjects to exist at all, the opposite is not true. This asymmetry is critical for thinking about ways of life and politics that exist free from archist forms of subjugation.

(From Mariátegui) human life sustains itself in the face of archism via a practice of material rights

This idea of resistance leads to a brief discussion of the work of Mariátegui and his own contribution to thinking further about how to combat the forces that I have been calling archism. In my view, reading Mariátegui and Benjamin in constellation strengthens our understanding of both thinkers. Mariátegui makes two critical interventions into Marxist theory that are germane to the way he can be read alongside Benjamin. First, Mariátegui tells us that full communism lies not in our future but in the past, in the communism of the Incas, not of the leadership but of the peasants who were then, as now, organized into social bands of mutual aid and protection called the *ayllu*. This view reverses the teleologies that can be associated with Marxism wherein the future is better than the past. Since Benjamin himself distrusted the idea of the future as smacking of Western eschatologies, an already existent communism works well with his own theorizing which looks to the past as well.

Secondly, in his understanding of Inca communism, Mariátegui recenters the world by making Peru the source of true communism, making Europe peripheral. This decentring does critical work in terms of lessening the hold of archism which, although it has many forms, has come to rest especially in the Western model via European imperialism. Furthermore, reading Mariátegui alongside Benjamin decentres the latter too insofar as he too can at times promote a Eurocentric vision that may dilute his own utter refusal of mythic violence.

Perhaps most critically for my own purposes, is a notion that comes out of Mariátegui's understanding of the *ayllu*, a notion that he calls 'material rights.' In 'The Problem of Land,' Mariátegui writes 'We begin by categorically asserting the right to land. This thoroughly materialistic claim should suffice to distinguish us from the heirs or imitators of that great Spanish Friar [i.e. Las Casas]' (Mariátegui 1988: 32). Mixing the discourses of rights and materialism as he does, Mariátegui suggests that the *ayllu* form allowed the indigenous Peruvians to (just barely) survive the ravages of colonialism and global capitalism, keeping their relationship to the land, and through that relationship, one another, intact. In this way, the 'material right' of the *ayllu* system is vastly more substantial (indeed, material) than the sorts of abstract, airy, and—because they are applied arbitrarily based on questions of race, class and gender—ultimately meaningless rights offered by liberalism.

Reading Mariátegui along with Benjamin, it becomes clear that the idea of material rights is an important addition to Benjamin's notion of nonviolence. Where Benjamin simply assumes that ordinary life inherently resists and serves as an alternative to mythic violence, Mariátegui fleshes out this theory with attention to the way that that life is organized as itself, in ways that avoid the phantasms of capitalism and archism (hence he speaks of 'Peruvian reality'). Although Mariátegui looks solely to Peru's indigenous

traditions as a source of material rights, it could be inferred that such practices exist elsewhere in the world and that such structures show a strong resilience to the violence and destruction of archism.

Given that Mariátegui's essay came out just a few years after Benjamin's 'Critique' (and hence we are nearing his own centenary as well), it makes sense to look to these two thinkers from a hundred years ago to help us in our own time and with our own seemingly intractable dilemmas. What these authors ultimately help to show us is both that the threats that we face are far more vulnerable than we tend to think but, perhaps even more importantly, that we have tremendous resources and forms of resilience that we can draw upon in order to continue to fight for realities of our own—rather than of archism's—devising.

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James Martel teaches political theory in the department of political science at San Francisco State University. His most recent book is entitled “Anarchist Prophets: Disappointing Vision and the Power of Collective Sight” (Duke, 2022). Prior to that, recent books include *Unburied Bodies: Subversive Corpses and the Authority of the Dead* (Amherst College Press, 2018) and *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Duke University Press, 2017). Earlier still, among other books, he wrote a trilogy of books on Walter Benjamin: *The One and Only Law: Walter Benjamin and the Second Commandment* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty* (Routledge, GlassHouse, 2011) and *Textual Conspiracies: Walter Benjamin, Idolatry and Political Theory* (University of Michigan, 2011).

Benjamin ainda faz sentido: Fórum sobre a atualidade da “Crítica da Violência” de Benjamin em seu centenário, Introdução - Por que precisamos de Benjamin mais do que nunca

Resumo: Walter Benjamin publicou seu influente ensaio “Critique of Violence”/”Zur Kritik der Gewalt” em 1921, e o trabalho tem incomodado e provocado pensadores de várias disciplinas há mais de um século. Este Fórum reúne um grupo de acadêmicos de filosofia, ciência política, relações internacionais e estudos jurídicos para refletir sobre a atualidade do ensaio de Benjamin para a teoria crítica contemporânea. Nesta abertura do Fórum, as editoras convidadas Gabriela Azevedo e Ludmila Franca-Lipke apresentam o Fórum como um todo. No artigo seguinte, James Martel argumenta que Benjamin nos ajuda a entender melhor nosso momento atual do que quase qualquer outro pensador. Benjamin explica a natureza do autoritarismo, a ligação entre o liberalismo (e o neoliberalismo) e o fascismo e como é possível resistir a essas forças. Em seu ensaio, Martel atualiza o conceito de violência mítica para levar em conta a resiliência da conexão liberal/fascista (mesmo que ela pareça ser um nó de luta e incompatibilidade mútua). Ele mostra que a “Crítica da Violência” não apenas diagnostica nossa época, mas também mostra uma saída para o abismo em que nos encontramos. Martel lista sete pontos-chave do ensaio de Benjamin e acrescenta um outro ponto de José Carlos Mariátegui para pensar concretamente sobre como aplicar as lições de 100 anos atrás ao nosso tempo.

Palavras-chave: Walter Benjamin; greve geral; anarquismo; liberalismo; fascismo; José Carlos Mariátegui.

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