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VISIÓN ELECTRÓNICA

Algo más que un estado sólido

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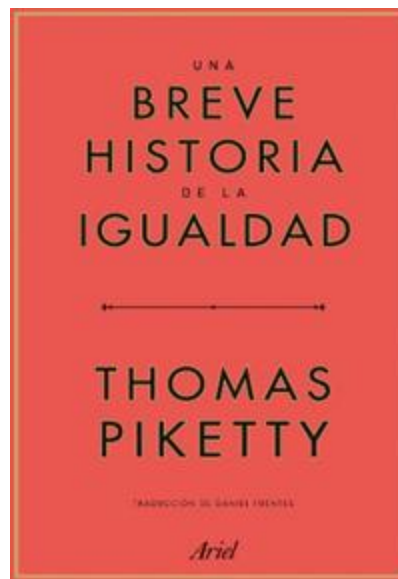


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A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL VISION

Thomas Piketty, *A Brief History of Equality*. Colombia: Editorial Ariel, 2022. 294 pages.

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In recent times, a polemic on social inequalities has come to public light. The discussion is linked to the concepts of the utopian egalitarians of the 18th century: Saint Simon (1760-1825), Robert Owen (1771-1858), and Fourier (1772-1837). Among these thinkers, Karl Marx

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(1818-1883) deserves a podium apart, for many reasons that would be too long to reveal in this very short review. In general terms, the thesis promoted throughout the book *A Brief History of Equality* is the tendency of development to advance toward equality by promoting legal contexts that allow such a possibility. Let me clarify: Piketty prefers, on the basis of history, to put things in a positive light and to express humanity's propensity towards equality of economic, political, and social rights. In order to illustrate his thesis, Piketty (2020) presents a very specific example in Figure 2.1 (p. 43-44). Nevertheless, the levels of inequalities remain unbearable; Piketty expresses his dissatisfaction with this situation. One of the researchers who began to raise the need to rethink capitalism in this century is Joseph Stiglitz. He warned about the ravages of economic globalization and its effects on the environmental crisis. Stiglitz, left a record of the above, in a number of his writings, the most important of which is *Progressive Capitalism*. The answer to the era of malaise. Now then: others have followed the path traced by Stiglitz, the also Nobel Prize winner in Economics, Abhijit. Banerjee, explains the need to rethink poverty. Among these celebrities appears dazzling Amartya Sen, who eagerly searches within capitalism for parameters other than Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with the purpose of measuring prosperity and the quality of life of people. As opposed to GDP, he proposed the idea of Human Development Indexes (HDI). Recently, Mariana Marzacotto sent a strong message in her emblematic text *Economic Mission*, she speaks of a guide to change capitalism. In Colombia, professors Luis Jorge Garay and Jorge Espitia Zamora 2019, published *Dinámica de las desigualdades en Colombia*, where they make the geography of inequalities from the perspective of those who pay more taxes. The book, *Breve Historia de la igualdad*, consists of an introduction and ten chapters. There are also acknowledgments. The introduction points out how humanity is slowly moving towards equality. There is still a long way to go. With the reservation that the road has not been easy, it has not been a gift. Piketty's call, then, is that the

trend toward change becomes permanent. Then, as any honest researcher reveals what his sources were; I highlight the following: Plato's Republic, on the one hand; and on the other, already in the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Likewise, Karl Marx, with his works in the 19th century. Also, part of the introduction, although it may seem very obvious, is the approach that relates social inequalities with social confrontations and the so-called political crises. In this aspect, the repertoire is extensive and it is advisable to read and analyze it, therefore, the explanations and interpretations of this review may fall short. The introduction ends by trying to reveal, without achieving greater clarity, in spite of the illustrations with examples, where the development of humanity should be directed, establishing comparisons between "Soviet and Chinese communism with hyper capitalism", without reaching accurate conclusions. The first chapter takes an interesting approach to the genealogy of inequality. It begins by pointing out the development of humanity taking into account two key variables: education and health. The overview of the demographic evolution of health and education over the last two centuries is interesting, with some attractive figures. However, social gaps persist. It is worth highlighting the graphs related to health and education over a fairly long period of time, from 1820 to 2020. Another aspect to highlight in the first chapter is the world population in relation to the average income; Piketty highlights how the population from the eighteenth-century onwards multiplies by ten (10) in the same way that the average income has reproduced. However, he makes the caveat: "According to available sources, it seems that the evolution of purchasing power in the eighteenth-century and during most of the nineteenth century was negligible, and sometime seven negative" (Piketty, 2022, p. 28). The chapter concludes with a beautiful discussion on the search for indices to measure human development -not without first pointing out the inefficiency of GDP. The idea is to find new indicators that include data on the environment. Chapter two (2) deals with property and power. Piketty situates the evolution of

property within historical contexts and the so-called legitimate forms of ownership, stressing that today there are no slaves. In addition, an overview is made where the evolution of the concentration of property is visualized, fundamentally circumscribed to the European continent. It shows how the legal elements that support property and tax privileges have always been linked to political power. Political power, in the Colombian case, is not always imposed by peaceful, persuasive, and democratic means. The Caribbean coast poet Luis Carlos López, in his famous poem *A mi Ciudad native* (To my native city), called these times "the times of the cross and the sword". Later on, his contemporary heir Juan Manuel Roca, speaks of the country where "rage and orchids grow in unison". In chapter three (3) Piketty recalls some reiterative "historical episodes" related to the present situation, as regards the development of Western industrial capitalism. Piketty highlights how the different industrial revolutions (the United Kingdom and Europe) are legitimate daughters of the large-scale extraction of raw materials and energy sources in the rest of the world, following an anti-ecological model, but above all coercive and colonial. Piketty immediately rubricates the primary source used to reveal the so-called "historical episodes" in order to embed them in the world from which we come. This is Ken Pomeranz's book written in 2000 entitled *The Great Divergence*. Pomeranz spreads the ecological limitations in the development of a system of supply and mobilization of the labor force. Chapter four (4) discusses restorative justice and universalist justice, with respect to slavery and colonialism, as key factors in achieving equality. Piketty, as a French citizen, documents in detail Haiti's dependence on the French state. Argumentation is closer to "magical realism" than to objective reality. There, an upside-down compensation was made. Haiti made reparations to France over a period of 75 years "with 150 million gold francs to compensate slave owners for the loss of their property" (Piketty, 2022, p.90).

Finally, with the support of the French government, the banks decided to transfer the debt to the United States, which invaded Haiti from 1915 to 1934. It should be noted that a similar situation occurred with the British colonies in the Americas. Thus, "the Abolition Act passed by the British Parliament in 1833 provided for full compensation for slave owners" (Piketty, 2020, p.94). The examples of upside-down compensation end with a thorough account of the experience of slavery in the United States. Ultimately the whole argument of chapter four is to show how slavery and post-slavery colonialism are among the most unequal cultural formations in history. The other sections of the book are equally important. However, for reasons of space, it is not possible to continue with the chapter-by-chapter detail. The book concludes, in its last unit, with an optimistic challenge to continue fighting and mobilizing for the right to equality. It also proposes a new model of society called the author: "democratic, ecological and socially mixed socialism" (Piketty, 2022, p. 271). It is worth noting Piketty's distance from "obsolete hyper capitalism" and "socialism with Chinese characteristics". Nevertheless, the differences between these two regimes, which are discussed in the final pages of the book, are of great importance. Ultimately, it ends up proposing a new model of society, which definitively puts an end to social asymmetries. The book should be read, but above all, it should be studied and consulted. In the current world situation, it gives some clues to get out of the confusion. I recommend it. It is a good book and can serve as a basis for interpreting some of the changes that the current Colombian government wishes to implement, in aspects related to the economy.