

How to Understand and Change the ‘Global Crisis Situation’ as an Emancipatory Social Scientist:

“To be radical is to go to the root of the matter. For man, however, the root is man himself.”

Karl Marx

It appears that there are lots of various types of crises that we can talk about in this conference. I am sure that many scholars, here, have talked about many of the crises, from grand crisis of climate change to more small and specific crises in everyday life of those who have lost their jobs or those who are struggling with covid-19. But, my dear colleagues, I am going to raise our attention to another set of crises which, we believe resolving them is even more necessary and primary than giant crises we are dealing with: **Crisis of Historical Perspective on Human Self-Emancipation** and **Crisis of Theory**. We believe all different types of crises in the course of our global everyday life, are different manifestations of these two crises. In this presentation, I am going to explain these interrelated crises in our contemporary history and propose some methodological and theoretical suggestions, specifically introducing categories of **mode of existence** and **mode of collaboration**, in order to solve these crises. I am doing this investigation as practice of *mutual appropriating* Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (specially Andy Blunden’s ideas) and Iranian Marxist Tradition (specially Kamal Khosravi’s ideas). In other words, my voice is a (very compact) *critical dialogue* between one of the most **logically developed** theories of CHAT and Iranian Marxist Tradition. If you like, it is a dialogue between East and West (or between ‘*Middle Eastern Spirit*’ and rest of the world), a critical dialogue between cultures that have experienced colonialism, Imperialism and finally Globalism in different ways. I am sure, most of us would not perceive this way of theoretical research as a novel one. During the years 1814-1819, Goethe was doing a practice, which its result was a collection of poems that their concept has been created as a critical dialogue between West and East (specifically Persian Culture). I am using a specific *interdisciplinary mode of investigation* which its starting point can be found in Goethe (Blunden, 2010). Goethe Wrote “West-Eastern Divan”, I have no choice but to write “East-Western Divan! Let’s start with the eastern tradition: Iranian Marxist Tradition.

Twin Crises

What do we mean by ‘Crisis of historical perspective on human self-emancipation’? It is a global crisis. All of the participants in this conference are right now experiencing this crisis, including you, dear listeners. So, in order to understand this crisis, I recommend you, to search for these arguments, in your own *subjective experience*. In a very exceptional way, the arguments that I have abstracted from my subjective experience of Global Crisis, as a Critical Psychologist in Iran is true about your subjective experience too. It doesn’t matter you are in Europe, South America, Africa or any other continent. These arguments are true about all of our subjective experiences.

All of us, are dealing with different crises in our everyday lives, but none of us have any integrated, universal or global solution in order to put an end to this nightmare. People have no solution in order to solve the multiform contradictions between human beings themselves and also nature. In the early 21st century, we have essentially different subjective experiences compared to those who have lived in the early 20th century. In the early 20th century, people’s worldview or *Weltanschauung*, if you like, had a clear vision of what is the problem with our globe, and what is essence of the emancipatory practice that we need to do in order to historically emancipate ourselves. People had a *concept* of “how to emancipate future”. Many of these conceptual frameworks of “how to emancipate future” was based on *Metaphysical/Religious* axioms, and some of them were based on *Ontological* categories that have been developed in the history of ‘Philosophy’. *World Revolution* of early 20th century was the outcome of collaboration between all the projects, and all the activists that tried to emancipate their future. By looking at history of different regions, one can find many examples of Socialist, Nationalist, Religious and other forms of social revolutions, social movements and social non-movements¹ (Bayat, 2009) in that stage of history.

But right now, at 2020, the concept of “how to emancipate future”, the worldview or *Weltanschauung* itself is in crisis. Most of us, have abandoned all worldviews that have the vision of emancipating *human kind* and have retreated to post-humanistic theories of emancipating *individual identities*: women, black, LGBT, refugee, disability, indigenous societies, trees, oceans, jungles, rivers, penguins, pandas, technologies and so on. This retreat, whether we like it or not, is a

¹ This category has been fully explained in the presentation of Laya Hooshyari about “the role of social non-movement in investigating global crisis situation”. I suggest you to, also, listen to her presentation.

symptom of our crisis of historical perspective of **human** self-emancipation. It is worth noticing, the reason that we don't know how we can save the earth and humans, as soon as possible, is our retreat to post-humanist theories. The *entire earth*, including its problems, is, right now, the *product* of human kind. There is nothing essentially *non-human* anymore in our earth. Hence, in order to emancipate the earth from all the disastrous effects of human kind, it is necessary to emancipate human kind from the essential bases of its own civilization. In other words, human self-emancipation includes emancipation of *entire product* of human kind too.

Let me show the crisis of historical perspective on human self-emancipation in some examples:

Some of us, active in social movements related to climate change crisis, have the experience of confusion about strategies and tactics of struggling for earth. For example, it appears that oil industries have no intention of listening to climate crisis activists, states or any other authority. And no one has any feasible plan for shutting down oil production immediately. How can we solve this problem?

WHO, in late January, had called for global emergency and importance of quick, global response. Global response, includes shutting down inessential companies and economic activities, exercising global physical distancing, lockdown of effected regions, social solidarity and so on. But WHO had absolutely NO feasible plan for realizing these objects and emancipating humans from this situation. consequently, we faced global pandemic of covid-19.

All of the local, national and international projects, from a social psychological point of view, are experiencing the crisis of historical perspective on human self-emancipation.

Distinctly, but interrelated to the previous crisis, one can speak about **crisis of theory in emancipatory social science**. what is this crisis? Not only we cannot create a *unified* and *enlightening* picture of our subject matter, i.e. *humans' social life*, but also, we are unable to *transform* it. Our categories are failing to represent the *true relation* between social elements and factors of reality. Emancipatory social science in 21st century have retreated to methodological individualism: take the example of intersectionality. It is presumed in this mode of investigation, that each category that expresses a specific kind of oppression (like gender, race, class, etc.) has its own ontological origin which its essential definitions should be extracted independent of other categories that express other oppressions. It seems

that each oppression belongs to a different world and then these entities from different worlds are going to *intersect* to each other, just like some cars crashing in a crossroad! Unlike the metaphysical axioms of theory of intersectionality, we are living in a social life that all of these oppressions are internally related to each other in a single and unified totality. This is also true about apparently one of the most advanced concepts of social theories that attempts to understanding human's activities in everyday life. The Weberian concept of *life conduct* (Lebensführung), appropriated by German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology, is about understanding human's struggle to integrate contradictory **but originally independent** aspects of social life (e.g. economic activities, objectified in The Market, political activities, objectified in The State, ethical activities, objectified in Religious Institutions and so on). This concept have been appropriated by **Munich Sociological Group** and then appropriated by Klaus Holzkamp and now is the central concept in the conceptual framework of German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology (*Kritische Psychologie*). Here also one can see the problem of methodological individualism. It is true that process of everyday living consists of integrating contradictory aspects, but these aspects are all parts of a single, unified world of everyday life.

We are still failing to prepare the theory that enables us to make **Critique** of social life. What we mean by critique is not only making enlightenment about our subject matter, but also transformation of it. In early 20th century, people have the sufficient theoretical tools to make a critique of social life. 19th century social science (like Marx, Engels and Hobson's political economic studies, Hegel's Logic, rich Russian literature, like Chernyshevsky and so on) helped Vladimir Lenin and other revolutionaries in Russia to develop their understanding of the global crisis situation and to transform the global social situation. In early 20th century, theory of emancipatory social science was not in crisis. This theory enabled Lenin to write **April Theses** in April 1917. 10 direct and clear social actions which led to Russia's October Social Revolution. Now look at the last April in 2020! Trump (as a typical political leader) suggested us to inject disinfectants into our blood, and Tedros Adhanom director of WHO said that "we only have limited power to give advice to governments. It is up to them whether to take them seriously or not". And more important than those political projects that have been retreated into *real politics*, current social revolutions, social movements and social non-movements are unable to reach a global integrity in order to perform global *Ethical Politics* of 21st century. Or let's say 21st century's global revolution.

In conclusion, not only all the local, national, and international projects are psychologically experiencing crisis of historical perspective on human self-emancipation, but also, we lack proper and prepared theoretical tools to critique our subject matter, human social life.

Now allow me to enter into my next step of my presentation:

Modes of Existence of Capital

Kamal Khosravi, an Iranian Marxist Scholar, argues that in order to solve the crisis of theory, we need to start building our conceptual framework from a **social ontological** standpoint. An ontology that specifically belongs to our contemporary stage of history; i.e. Capitalism. One of the categories that has been neglected in Marx's works but is very essential in order to build the social ontological layer of our conceptual framework is '**mode of existence (existenzweise)**'. In his recent article Kamal defines this category in this way:

*“what we mean by ‘mode of existence’ is the way, estate, the space of presence, and existence of thing, event, relation, or reality in its totality; i.e. including all aspects that can be referred to root, basis, foundation, essence, **and** form of appearance, form of realization, presence, **and also** all their manifestation in collaboration with consciousness”*

Now, having this definition in mind, let's Look at this paragraph from chapter 13, volume 1 of Das Kapital:

*“Being independent of each other, the labourers are isolated persons, who enter into relations with the capitalist, but not with one another. This co-operation begins only with the labour-process, but they have then ceased to belong to themselves. On entering that process, they become incorporated with capital. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they are but **special modes of existence of capital**. Hence, the productive power developed by the labourer when working in co-operation, is the productive power of capital.”*

Marx says that laborers, in Capitalist societies, are special modes of existence of capital. It means that laborers are special way of presence of Capital itself. Just like money, capitalists, raw materials (like oil, trees, water etc.), and means of production (including technologies), which all are other special ways of presence of Capital. They are not **ontologically independent** entities, but special modes of existence of capital.

Does Marx only tell us, the scholars, that humans are social creatures? Or Communism is the final stage of history? These are not the core ideas that Marx developed in *Das Kapital*. Marx's **theory of value**, is an attempt to provide us an account of social ontology of capitalist societies, which can be used in order to rebuild the emancipatory social science of 21st century.

Now based on this social ontological layer, which specifically explains contemporary historical stage, lets build another layer of our conceptual framework: 'Unit of analysis' of capitalist societies.

Mode of Collaboration between Capitalist projects

In his preface to *Das Kapital*, Marx says that "in bourgeois society, the commodity form of the product of labour – or value form of the commodity – is the economic cell form". Marx, by introducing the category of cell form, starts its investigation of bourgeois society from its simplest social practice, which is **exchange of labor products**. In our everyday life, we are practicing exchange of labor products many times with other people. To put it more precisely, we are not doing this exchange with other people, but with other **projects** (different entities, consist of aggregate of human actions with their own motives or objects). we exchange our labor with the wage that we get from our company (a company, of course, is a project, aggregate of human actions with its own objects). And then, we exchange our wage with different commodities that we need to use. We get these commodities from different companies (consider your local supermarket, Amazon, etc.). Although, we, human beings, are doing this simplest practice in our everyday life in order to meet our needs, although we **collaborate** with different projects, in order to maintain and enhance our lives, but a special kind of this **mode of collaboration** is not only exchange of labor products, but also **valorization of capital**. In order to understand this, we need to shift our individualized subjective standpoint into standpoint of the smallest **unit of capital**: a company.

A company's main motive for collaboration with humans is accumulation of value. This motive appears to us as the main target of each company: being productive and profit-making. A company is doing this process by converting its money into commodities and then by selling those commodities, hence, making extra money. This is the first appearance of process of valorization that everybody is familiar with.

In brief, from our own subjective standpoint, the dominant mode of collaboration in our everyday life is 'exchange of labor products' *in order to maintain and*

integrate our daily life. And from the standpoint of a unit of capital (a company, understood as project), the dominant mode of collaboration is also ‘exchange of labor products’ **but in order to valorize capital.** ‘Mode of collaboration’ helps us to conceptualize everyday life, based on specific social ontology of a Capitalist society and the unit of analysis of Capitalist society in order to understand our social life in its totality.

It is obvious that every project in capitalist social life is not a ‘capitalist’ project and every collaboration that we do in our life is not necessarily ‘exchange of labor products’. However, other projects and other modes of collaboration should be understood **originally interrelated** with the dominant projects and dominant mode of collaboration in capitalist society. Projects that their main motive is **not** valorization, like projects of Surveillance, Women’s Suppression, boycott of minority communities, or other forms of oppressions, should be understood in their collaboration with capitalist projects; i.e. those projects that their main motive **is** valorization. The State, the church, and the Market do not belong to different worlds. They are constituting a single unite world.

There is no doubt, all of the issues that I have put forth above can be elaborated in much more detail. The practice of writing the above paragraphs is simply an attempt to call for attention to twin crises of ‘historical perspective on human self-emancipation’ and ‘crisis of theory’. And introducing categories of **modes of existence** (of capital) and **modes of collaboration** (of capitalist projects) in relation to our everyday life in ‘Global crisis situation’.

Global crisis situation in its essentiality, is the crisis of companies trying to maintain their deadly process of valorization even if it costs destruction of earth or lives of millions of people. Global warming, wars, pandemics, and other crises cannot be understood without their relation to process of valorization.

I believe appropriating these categories into Psychology can be a great help in refining, or rearticulating Psychology’s conceptual framework. Let’s devote our scientific investigation to reconstruct parts of the whole which we still only dream its representation. Let’s write paragraphs or even chapters of “the future *logic*” together!