

Critical Maritime Studies: Individualism, Emancipation, Universalism, And Rupture

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Abstract:

This article deals with Critical Maritime Studies, a field of study resulting from the encounter between traditional maritime studies and Critical Theory. Based on materialist dialectics, they promote the continuous questioning of the relationship between man and the sea, thus favoring approaches refuted or neglected by other schools of thought. Its emphasis on the notions of individualism, emancipation, and universalism also contributes to the continuous questioning of that relationship. This article's objective is to offer a definition of Critical Maritime Studies based on its essential aspects, thus contributing to filling a conceptual gap and guiding future studies on the subject. Qualitative methodology adopted in this research is based on a narrative and synthetic literature review, identifying aspects related to materialist dialectics, individualism, emancipation, and universalism in the study of the relationship between man and the sea. Results indicate the centrality of materialist dialectics, as well as the importance of individualism, emancipation, and universalism for the proposed definition and the possibility of thematic expansion of maritime studies. It is concluded that Critical Maritime Studies favors a theoretical break in relation to traditional maritime studies, allowing conclusions not normally obtained within the scope of more traditional models of maritime studies.

Key Word: *Maritime studies, Critical theory; Individualism, Emancipation, Universalism.*

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I. Introduction

Critical Maritime Studies (CMS) is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted academic field that aims to study the different relationships between man and the sea, based on the dialectical materialist logic of the permanent questioning of these relationships. The emphasis is on the notions of individualism, emancipation, and universalism. Developed within the scope of social sciences, CMS is characterized by intense thematic diversity and transversality and favors a break with traditional maritime studies, thus allowing the development of refuted or neglected approaches.

This article's objective is to offer a definition of CMS based on its essential aspects, thus contributing to filling a conceptual gap and guiding future studies on the subject. It is based on the premise that CMS results from the convergence between critical theory, or critical thinking, and maritime studies, from which its essential aspects derive. These essential aspects, namely materialist dialectics, individualism, emancipation, and universalism are presented in their correlation with the critical content of maritime studies. Future studies may use the proposed definition to expand discussions and enrich critical studies of the relationship between man and the sea.

II. Research Methodology

The qualitative methodology used in this study consists of a narrative and synthetic literature review on critical studies and maritime studies. The review sought studies in open-access academic directories, such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the Scielo database, using thematic relevance, theoretical relevance, and current affairs as criteria. The selected studies were then analyzed from a critical perspective, identifying the features of materialist dialectics, individualism, emancipation, and universalism.^{1,2}

The results of the literature review allowed us to formulate a definition of CMS that encompasses a) the central character of materialist dialectics for CMS; b) the emphasis on individualism and its correlation with the idea of emancipation; c) universalism formed from the emphasis on individualism; d) the thematic expansion of maritime studies based on the critical approach; and e) the rupture of CMS with traditional models of maritime studies.

To this end, the results section is organized into three subsections: i) centrality of materialist dialectics; ii) individualism and emancipation; and iii) individualist-based universalism. In the discussion section, the focus is on the critical content of the studies adopted as references, and the presentation of examples that highlight the relevance of CMS for understanding the relationship between man and the sea is prioritized.^{3,4}

It is concluded that CMS is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted academic field that studies the different relationships between man and the sea. A field of study that is based on the materialist dialectical logic of permanent questioning, and emphasizes the notions of individualism, emancipation, and universalism. In this context, the thematic expansion of maritime studies and the approaches that are substantially different from those adopted by more traditional models of maritime studies stand out.

III. Results

Centrality of materialist dialectics

Critical Theory, which supports CMS, has materialist dialectics as a central element. As the very essence of critical thinking, its logic can be identified in all formulations of ideas, practices, and conclusions of critical profile in maritime studies. Materialist dialectics is also present in other fields of study as a logical foundation, such as the Critical Theory of International Relations and the Critical School of International Security (Welsh School). Materialist dialectics reaches its conclusions by exploring the contradictions between the theses and antitheses that characterize practically any field of study, rejecting dogmatic conclusions that tend towards immutability.^{5,6,7}

Critical Theory is critical because it distances itself from the prevailing world order and, from an appropriate theoretical distance, questions the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and teleological foundations of this same order. By questioning, therefore, the nature, knowledge, values, and objectives of this prevailing world order, it re-discusses all essential aspects without accepting any of them in a dogmatic way. For example, it does not understand institutions as a reasoning corollary but rather as a starting point for further reflections. Their conclusions and contradictions are explored by questioning the very origin and the process of change inherent to them.^{8,9}

In CMS, the logic of materialist dialectics favors the questioning of man's relationship with the sea. Because this logic is dialectical, it explores conclusions and contradictions from a non-dogmatic perspective that allows for results that are essentially different from those that would normally be obtained following more traditional models of maritime studies. Since it is materialist, it focuses on the real conditions that underpin these relationships.

Individualism and emancipation

Individualism, a striking and essential feature of critical theory, derives from materialist dialectics and is linked to the idea of emancipation. In critical thinking, the individual becomes the center of attention, both in theoretical development and in practical aspects, shifting the center of gravity of theory and action to people. State and society, more abstract concepts that are often difficult to understand, give way in importance to people.^{10,11}

This individualism, translated into concern for people, derives from materialist dialectics. Materialism, which underlies the successive and dialectical questioning of theses and antithesis, brings critical thinking closer to the reality of human beings in a way that is different from that seen in other lines of thought. Other ways of thinking centered on the state or society also address the problems of the common man but treat him as a subject or as a member of a group, never giving real importance to his true problems. This note of reality is what makes individualism, in fact, an essentially humanist model of thought, a note that is so dear to critical thinking.^{12,13}

Emancipation, in turn, in a dialectical way, is fundamental for the individualism that characterizes critical theory to be able to generate the expected results. Emancipation concerns the individual's ability to reason critically about facts and formulate conclusions independently, detached from any intellectual or ideological ties.^{14,15}

In CMS, the human being is in the focus of man's relationship with the sea. The broader issues of a political, economic, social, and strategic nature, for example, continue to be essential, but they now include a permanent concern with practical results falling on people.

Individualist-based universalism

The universalism suggested by CMS derives from the individualism that characterizes it, once linked to critical theory, which gives centrality to the individual in its formulations. The apparent paradox in the combination of individualism and universalism is resolved by understanding that the individual centrality is, precisely, what allows CMS to overcome state borders and confer universality to its ideas and proposals for action.^{16,17}

Dialectically, universalism and individualism support each other in critical thinking. Individualism places the center of gravity of critical thinking concerns on people. People are understood as having a natural bond with each other, which arises from their innate human characteristics, and they are not differentiated by artificial limitations of any kind. People linked to different states and inhabiting different geographic regions of the Earth have similar material needs, such as water, food, clothing, and housing. This equality of human

characteristics is what makes the formulations of critical theory not limited to one or another political model but allows it to present itself as applicable to any time or place in which man is involved.^{18,19}

Thus, with its universalist proposal, CMS incorporates into the relationship between man and the sea several analytical dimensions that may have been refuted or neglected by more traditional analytical models. The materialist dialectic, the centrality of the individual, emancipation, and universalism favor a thematic expansion as vast and complex as the nature of man itself. Thus, topics such as maritime diplomacy,²⁰ territorialization of maritime spaces,²¹ blue economy from a critical perspective,²² social change based on maritime culture,²³ the feminist perspective,²⁴ and human rights at sea²⁵ come closer to discussions on this man-sea relationship.

With its universalist vision, CMS refers to the idea of the individual being perceived not as the subject of a state or the member of a structured and limited society but as a planetary being. His habitat is the entire world. The relationship between man and the sea is considered a conscious attitude, developed in an environment of freedom of thought and action. The theoretical results and proposals for action arising from CMS are conceived with the intention of universal validity, as they concern the relationship between man and the sea in terms of human characteristics. They need to be shared on a planetary scale.

IV. Discussion

CMS results from the convergence between critical theory, or critical thinking, and maritime studies. This convergence is adopted as a premise from which the essential aspects of these studies derive: materialist dialectics, individualism, emancipation, and universalism.

Materialist dialectics favors the ongoing questioning of the different aspects of man's relationship with the sea. As this logic is dialectical, it explores conclusions and contradictions from a non-dogmatic perspective that allows for results that are essentially different from those that would normally be obtained following more traditional models of maritime studies. As it is materialist, it focuses on the real conditions that underlie these relationships. This means that even its most abstract theoretical inferences are always linked to reality, especially the reality experienced daily by people, sowing the seeds of reasoning that leads to the valorization of individualism, emancipation, and universalism.^{7,10}

CMS is based on individualism and emancipation. Individualism refers to the prioritization of human aspects in the relationship between man and the sea above political, economic, social, or strategic aspects, among others. Emancipation, in turn, refers to the individual's ability to think critically about this relationship. Together, individualism and emancipation favor a more humanistic and less technocratic perspective on the relationship between man and the sea.

CMS intends to be a universalist field of study to encompass any subject that concerns the relationship between man and the sea in any society or community, whatever its level of organization, and anywhere on Earth. This universalist claim results from the expansion of individualism beyond state borders, since it considers man in his essence. Thus, the essential man, in his relationship with the sea, is not differentiated by being subject to a certain type of social organization, whether state or not, since human needs are fundamentally the same in any circumstance.^{11,13}

When they appear in maritime studies, universalism and individualism foster discussions that are very different from those traditionally addressed under more traditional approaches. These new approaches and the discussions associated with them give rise to a break with the thematic limitations of a political, dogmatic, or any other nature. They begin to consider in a more comprehensive way the inequalities inherent in the diversity and complexity of the contemporary world. CMS deal with the relationship between man and the sea in its essence, seeing man in his individuality to understand his universality.

Among the main ruptures that CMS can bring about is the promotion of a new perception of the sea that is truly sea-based and not land-based. This involves the promotion of cognitive possibilities that are distinct from the simple transposition of "terrestrial" problems to the sea, such as disputes over sovereignty between states, territorial issues, and the struggle for greater opportunities for economic exploitation. The new perception opposes the simple transfer of concepts from land to sea, seeking to promote the development of concepts specific to the maritime environment. The sea is not just a supporting role in dealing with issues already discussed on land but constitutes the proper space for discussing the issues that concern it.

V. Conclusion

Critical Maritime Studies (CMS) is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted academic field that aims to study the different relationships between man and the sea, based on the dialectical materialist logic of the permanent questioning of these relationships. Materialist dialectics favors the ongoing questioning of the different aspects of man's relationship with the sea, which is supported by the logic of materialist dialectics. Since this logic is dialectical, it explores conclusions and contradictions from a non-dogmatic perspective that

allows for results that are essentially different from those normally obtained following more traditional models of maritime studies.

CMS emphasizes the notions of individualism, emancipation, and universalism. It was developed within the scope of social sciences and is characterized by intense thematic diversity and transversality. The essential man is not differentiated by being subject to a certain type of social organization, whether state or not, since human needs are fundamentally the same in any circumstance. Henceforth, it favors a break with traditional maritime studies, thus allowing the development of refuted or neglected approaches.

CMS proposes a universal relationship between man and the sea that may have been ignored or refuted by more traditional analytical models. The materialist dialectic, the centrality of the individual, emancipation, and universalism promote a thematic expansion as vast and complex as the nature of man itself. Hence, topics such as maritime diplomacy, the territorialization of maritime spaces, the blue economy from a critical perspective, social change based on maritime culture, the feminist perspective, and human rights at sea come closer to discussions on this man-sea relationship.

The promotion of a new perception of the sea that is truly sea-based and not land-based is one of the main ruptures that CMS can bring about. This involves the promotion of cognitive possibilities that are different from the simple transfer of terrestrial problems to the sea, such as disputes over sovereignty between states, territorial issues, and the struggle for greater economic opportunities.

CMS, with its universalist vision, refers to the idea of the individual as a planetary being, not as a subject of a state or a limited society. His home is the entire world. The relationship between man and the sea is considered a conscious attitude that is developed in an environment of freedom of thought and action. The theoretical results and proposals for action arising from CMS are conceived with the intention of universal validity, since they concern the relationship between man and the sea in terms of human characteristics. They require sharing on a global scale.

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