

UNA CONVERSACIÓN SOBRE LA HISTORIA PÚBLICA

Diálogo entre Joan W. Scott y Rafael Sagredo

En el marco de la jornada inaugural del encuentro “Historia en acción. Diálogos para el futuro”, a continuación se reproduce el diálogo entre Joan W. Scott, intelectual estadounidense, y el profesor e historiador chileno, Rafael Sagredo, quien además recibió el Premio Nacional de Historia de Chile en 2022. El objetivo del encuentro fue situar las interrogantes que plantea Scott en el rol que ha tenido la disciplina histórica en Chile, profundizar en sus actuales desafíos disciplinarios y políticos, con especial atención al debate sobre el pasado en sociedades con pasados traumáticos recientes en el marco de la conmemoración de los 50 años del golpe militar en Chile. Esta conversación tuvo lugar en el Museo Histórico Nacional de Chile, en formato híbrido.

Una conversación sobre la Historia Pública

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Rafael Sagredo: Buenas tardes a todos y a todas. Joan, gusto de estar aquí conversando sobre tu libro. Lo tengo acá y se lo estoy mostrando al público. Lo he leído, por supuesto, y también escuché tu conferencia, tengo muchas preguntas y comentarios. Pero te vienen a escuchar a tí por lo que, yo solo voy a ser un intermediario. Quiero decir que mis preguntas están orientadas por la lectura del libro.

Tomé la lectura desde dos puntos de vista: uno, desde lo que debería ser la historia, como conocimiento, como ciencia, como explicación, como pensamiento analítico, como análisis, como interpretación, pero sobre todo como explicación. O sea, detrás de todo el sustrato de los tres casos presentados —el del juicio de Nuremberg, la Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación y las

reivindicaciones del movimiento afroamericano—; detrás de esos casos concretos de historia, hay una noción de historia, un alegato por la historia, diría yo. Un alegato incluso ético como lo demuestra la última frase de tu libro, que tú leíste aquí y que yo acabo de repetir al público. Entonces, uno puede hacer preguntas en función de la concepción de la historia como explicación, interpretación y que no hay que ir solo por un camino lineal, sino que hay que buscar las contradicciones, salirse de esa historia lineal, homogénea, etcétera. Pero, por otro lado, está también la hipótesis, la tesis central del libro: que el juicio de la historia en realidad no existe y nunca existirá. Nunca. Que no solo no existe, sino que lo decretan los Estados, los poderes, y no solo eso, sino que es muy insatisfactorio normalmente cuando algún Estado



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Su libro más reciente es, *On the Judgment of History*, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2020.



Rafael Sagredo es Historiador y Profesor Titular de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Premio Nacional de Historia 2022.

se pronuncia. Y yo me quiero ir por ese lado, sin desconocer lo otro. Quiero leer una cita que es del discurso de Allende el once de septiembre de 1973: “Tienen la fuerza, podrán avasallar” Se está refiriendo a los golpistas. “La historia es nuestra, la historia los juzgará”. Entonces mi primera pregunta, estimada Joan, es: ¿qué te parece esta paradoja de que la sociedad, incluso los individuos, los agraviados, los perjudicados, los perseguidos, los violentados, en caso de nuestra América Latina, y de Chile en particular, a propósito de la violación a los derechos humanos, ellos esperan siempre una reivindicación del Estado, de lo público, de lo institucional, de lo oficial? Que sea el Estado el que proclame una verdad. No les basta con que los privados o cualquier otro agente proclame la verdad de que fueron abusados, y claro, ese es un juicio de la historia. El del Estado resulta reparador. Entonces, te quiero preguntar acerca de esta idea de que el Estado, por un lado, es el único capaz de ofrecer la “verdad” y, por tanto, la reparación, pero por otro lado, ese Estado muchas veces ofrece una verdad absolutamente parcial, incompleta, insatisfactoria y que, como tú muy bien dices en tu libro, para los tres casos que analizas, agravia todavía más a los violentados anteriormente. Eso es lo que te preguntaría para comenzar.

Joan Scott: Well that’s a really good question, I think one of the things I felt in the book, and I couldn’t do it today as much as I do in the book, is that it seems to me that in calling into question the notion of the

judge of history, I’m also calling into question the notion that it is the state that can deliver it. Because, although all of these movements have looked to the state for some kind of reparation, in fact as I describe in all the chapters, it never comes from the state. Or if it comes from the state it comes in a kind of, excuse the expression, half-assed way of sort of acknowledging it but not acknowledging, looking for a way to minimize the conflicts and antagonism and the violence that the state has actually committed against the people who are claiming a different kind of history. So, I think part of it is that historians and maybe even more public historians, are in the position of having to carry that burden themselves, that is, the state’s not going to do it. But the story that needs to be told has to confront the state official story, has to find ways of bringing evidence, of sometimes documentary films these days, of documenting the interpretation, and I would still call it an interpretation, that they want to bring to the story. That is that forms of violence have been used, right, to refuse justice or equality, here’s what it means, and here are the ways in which people at different moments have tried to provide an alternative to the one in which we are living. This is the thing that Massimiliano Tomba, I don’t know if you’ve read any, it’s called *Insurgent Universality* and he has a number of chapters in which he looks at the way in which different political movements look to political movements of the past to inspire their actions. So, the Commune of Paris in 1871 looks to the Com-

mune of Paris of the French Revolution, a defeated movement in the period of, in 1789, and so on, and inspired by them formulates a set of ideas about an alternative to what the state would look like, to what an organized society which cared about its members would look like. That's the sort of, the [concepto, ininteligible 7:33] that also [nombre de un intelectual, ininteligible 7:36] refers to. But then there's the work of Gary Wilder, a book that's called *Freedom Time* which is about the end of colonialism, the French colonialism, and the proposal that's made initially by Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire the two leaders in Senegal in the activities of the independence movements, they come up with proposals, not to have independent sovereign states on their own but to recreate the French Empire as a federation of equals. And the writing that Gary Wilder has uncovered about this shows you that there were people, large numbers of people, movements of people, thinking about alternative ways to organize society, which have been written out by the notion that there is a kind of linear development of history that is necessarily leading to a particular form of the modern nation-state, leading to the ways in which the state administers justice and deals with claims against it now. So, I think it's in our hands, I actually don't think we can look to the state to do the final reparative work that our history needs to do. David Scott, the anthropologist who writes a lot about the Caribbean, talks about a moral and reparative history that has to be done, which is precisely outside, it isn't go-

ing to... It makes claims on the state that it knows the state will not answer, but what it does is document those pasts as a way of, as I said in the book and then in the talk, that calling into account the powers that be so that at least there is a kind of reservoir of information, of alternative understanding that's out there for publics, not only to learn about, but to act on. And so, I think in some ways what we are always doing is feeding in the distance, you know, it's feeding the alternative possibility. At this moment I'm feeling very pessimistic about the turn that the world is taking and certainly the turn that my country is taking. And so, I think less in terms of how we can bring them all down, then how we can sort of protect and preserve the stories that inspire resistance and alternative action. And I think in some ways, that feels to me like a job that's always one that we are going to have to do, and as I say my pessimism right now is so [se ríe] ... would disappoint my father-in-law who believed in the judgement of history and the triumph of socialism in the future. But I think that protecting these legacies is something, and the alternative story, is something that's vitally important as a source, if not for our immediate actions, for future generations actions.

RS: A propósito de tu mención a esto de la historia alternativa, la propuesta, me hace preguntar ¿cuál es la recepción, no voy a decir solo a nivel social, sino que por ejemplo, entre los estudiantes, entre el público culto, en la prensa, de precisamente esta historia revisionista, alternativa, crítica,

que muestra otra realidad, cuando en tu libro mencionas este 1619 como un hito para empezar una historia alternativa de Estados Unidos? Yo me dediqué a buscar el hito fundante alternativo de la oprobiosa historia de Chile. Y resulta que me costó encontrarlo, quizás por mi formación demasiado clásica. Pero en conversación con colegas surgen algunas ideas: cuando Pedro de Valdivia, el conquistador de Chile se manda a cambiar con el oro de todos, abusando del poder de manera espantosa en 1547 o cuando el 11 de septiembre de 1541 los españoles matan a una cantidad de indígenas indescriptible por salvarse ellos. Pero yo no sé cómo sería la recepción si uno empieza la historia así o que uno haga una historia de esa forma, como se hace de todas maneras, sobre todo para relevar a las minorías. ¿Cómo experimentaste eso en tu quehacer, en tu cotidianidad, con este tipo de propuesta? Tú muestras ahí la crítica tremenda que recibió el New York Times, creo, por el reportaje sobre 1619. ¿Eso se mantiene o ha cambiado?

JS: I don't know exactly what you mean by... You mean move forward in the sense that we rewrite a national history from the beginning? I'm not sure I understand what the question is. And probably it's the translation, I'm going to blame you Gael. But I just didn't quite understand what the question was that you were asking.

RS: ¿Cómo fue recibida tu propuesta, como ha sido recibida esta historia alternativa? ¿Cómo se aprecia por parte,

por ejemplo, de los estudiantes, de círculos académicos y los estudiantes en particular?

JS: It's a really interesting moment because, on the one hand, I'm always considered a sort of critical historian someone who is not quite acceptable as a real historian first because, I mean, as a labor historian that was OK, but when I started to do women's history, you know, the question of what kind of serious could a historian be doing women's history and wasn't this this kind of feminist politics rather than real history. And then when I started to do more theoretical work the answer was always that I didn't, that I was more interested in what somebody called "fancy French theory" than I was in real history. So I always feel that I'm in battle with my fellow historians about what counts as history and what kind of history we should be writing and at the same time as the republican right takes over in state legislature after state legislature and outlaws the teaching, for example, of the history of slavery or the history of women, we're united, I mean it's one of the moments when, in the face of terrible right wing authoritarians, a sort of scattered liberal left comes together to defend the territories that they're in, and that's the place I feel that we're in now. That we are having to spend work I would, you know, I wouldn't say it's terrible work, but work I wouldn't be tremendously excited about because I don't think of it as fulfilling the kind of critical vision that needs to be fulfilled, but it does some of that, and as long as it's doing some of that it needs to keep being done.

So I think given the heightened political moment we're in, the kind of critical work I always [ininteligible 16:04] myself as doing, it doesn't go away, but it takes a kind of second place to the need to defend the academic freedoms of faculty to do the kind of research and teaching that they want to do, even if it's not what I would think of as the best work that they could do.

RS: A propósito de la propuesta teórica del libro y el análisis de los casos, me surge la siguiente pregunta: ¿cómo conciliar, por un lado, lo que podríamos llamar esta aspiración intelectual, teórica, valórica, de cómo se debe entender la historia y cómo a través de esa forma de hacer historia deberían abordarse y explicarse estos procesos como los que tú señalas? Esa es una cosa: ¿cómo conciliamos eso con la realidad concreta, objetiva, de lo realmente ocurrido? Por ejemplo, si lo aplicamos a la Comisión Verdad y Reconciliación de Sudáfrica podríamos aplicar una misma frase que se usó acá: justicia en la medida de lo posible, pero justicia al fin y al cabo. Entonces, por un lado, el imperativo ético y teórico de hacer una historia, pero por otro lado la necesidad que tenemos de analizar lo que efectivamente pasó. Si bien nos resulta absolutamente insatisfactorio en el momento en que ocurrió, efectivamente sí sirvió para reparar, aunque fuera parcialmente, para mejorar la convivencia, etcétera, etcétera.

JS: Well, it depends, I think it depends on if, you know my... Yes, I think there are real facts that happen, I certainly don't deny

that, but I think that how we want to read, both their impact and their complexity, as theory... as historians, is always open to the questions that we have, I mean my sense of [articles/sabbatical? 18:34], the kind of research I do and the teaching I used to do before I retired is that what I want to do is bring questions to the material rather than accept the fact that some stated fact is just a fact. Of course it is, but the question is, and in fact it was the question you just raised, what about the truth and reconciliation commission of what warrants the facts and so there are many answers to that and one of them is the one you gave, that is that it did provide some way of both exposing the violence of Apartheid and giving victims some sense of, at least, a chance to testify, to bear witness to the murder of their sons or the grievances that they had to see, but so that's one set of things, but then my larger question or my other question was OK, but what was the effect of this in terms of actually transforming an apartheid state into what they always called it, a kind of, a "rainbow state". What were the problems that weren't addressed, that left in place, things that continued, it seemed to me, in South Africa today, to betray the hopes of so many people who thought that with the fall of Apartheid justice and equality would arrive. So I think it... for me it's always asking a series of questions, you know, and the more questions that you can ask the more complicated in some ways the answer becomes and that's where the side of doing the serious professional history

work we can do, on the other side is you know, I was... well I guess that's enough to say. So, yes, there are facts, the question is what questions you want to ask of them, beyond the statement that they happened.

RS: Gracias, bueno la última pregunta. Si no existe el juicio de la historia, como se postula y como yo creo que es real, pero la gente vive, mucha gente vive, como tú misma señalas en su libro, de esa esperanza. Tú das el caso de una persona por allá por mil nueve treinta y tantos, no sé si era en la guerra civil española, que estando preso, siendo torturado, acosado, sobrevivió y se mantuvo en su dignidad, digámoslo así, diciendo “bueno algún día, aunque yo ya esté muerto, aunque mis hijos estén muertos, algún día la historia va a reconocer esto”. Entonces, si no tenemos juicio de la historia ¿con qué esperanza miramos el futuro? Sobre todo tratándose de aquellas sociedades sacudidas por trauma, por la falta de justicia real.

JS: Well, I mean, I'm not going to take it away from you [se ríe]. In a way it's like OK, if you need a sense of, some kind of guarantee, then fine. What I was interested in was how that operated to, actually in some ways, foreclose solutions that would have been better. Also to inspire people, but I think you can be inspired by the sense that justice needs to be served and, you know, maybe it's the historians who deliver the judgement of history and maybe it's, you know, it's the critical radical historians who have the job of carrying out that task, that is not necessarily giving people the conclusion that they hoped history would give them but writing the story, giving the account of the at-

tempts to do that, and that is in fact preserves for history and for future activists, something that we might call the judgement of history, that you know is... So, we the historians become the judges, not in the sense of being God, but in the sense of being sort of, a servant of a particular story that we need to keep alive and that we need to keep telling even if it doesn't achieve the end that we hope it achieves.

RS: Bueno, muchas gracias. Para despedirme quería recomendar a todos los aquí presentes y a los que se enteren de esta conversación, este gran y estimulante y oportuno libro: El juicio de la historia.