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Japanese Manga “One Piece” and Anarchism, Coincidence or Connection?

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It has been 23 years since the One Piece was first published, one of the most popular manga in Japan and the best selling in the world. Eiichiro Oda’s work, which began to be published in 1997 in the Weekly Shonen Jump magazine, has become an icon of this genre due to its rich narrative, its extraordinary fights, and that emotion that has made more than a few people shed a tear.

To begin with, you have to give a little context. The world of One Piece is based on a planet covered almost entirely by water. The only way to get in touch with another island is by entering the ocean and its dangers. This is why within the series there is a large number of pirates who go out to sea in search of fame and treasure. However, to try to control them there is the Navy, which is a police unit in charge of monitoring the sea and is dependent on the World Government, the political entity that manages the world.

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The story of this manga is based on the life of Monkey D. Luffy, a 17 year old young man who travels around the world wearing a straw hat, looking to become the king of pirates. To achieve this goal, Luffy must put together his own crew and make a name for himself on the seas by taking on many pirates and, of course, the sailors who pursue him.

Much has been said and theorized about One Piece, however, there is one element in particular that we believe distinguishes it from other Shonen and that is its political perspective. Such a statement may sound a bit fanciful, but we believe that neither Dragon Ball, Naruto, nor even Bleach, nor any other series in this record takes politics as seriously as One Piece.

In the sleeves we mentioned above, the same structure is always presented. The protagonist is forced to become stronger and stronger in order to overcome other forces that threaten the stability of the world. One Piece does not escape this. It does not escape the codes of its genre, but it develops a world at such a level that the power that the protagonist accumulates is not the central thing in the series, not even his way of fighting is what draws the most attention to him. What stands out most from this endearing character is his political activity (in this we want to go to the width of the concept), that is what distinguishes Luffy from other iconic Shonen protagonists.

Luffy, who is destined to become the king of pirates, becomes a symbol of revolution during the series. The young man, unwittingly, becomes the bearer of a collective will that will change the order of the world he inhabits.

Usually in the Shonen, the main character must become immensely powerful to resolve the great struggle of good against evil. However, in One Piece, beyond the fact that this struggle can save the world, the triumph that Luffy is going to achieve is not a triumph for the world as a whole that must be rescued from the clutches of evil, but it is going to be the victory of certain types of communities, and certain types of identities, that are claiming their place in the world.

The author of One Piece, Eiichiro Oda has given few interviews, and has rarely spoken about the political vision that exists in his work. However, within it there are many historical references, many characters are named after pirates who really existed. This is why it would not be strange for One Piece to refer to a great myth that exists around pirates in the real world.

It is said that at the end of the 17th century a group of pirates founded a colony called Libertalia on the northern coast of Madagascar where they created a society supposedly without hierarchies and based on the idea of freedom. We could say that these pirates were, in a way, anarchists.

The pirates themselves seem to represent an agent of disorder in the world. They head out to sea to try to raid villages and accumulate treasure. They get a bad name. Some have no limbs and are ugly to look at. Their relationship with the sea makes them more savage and they are considered untrustworthy. However, this group of pirates decided to resignify their relationship with each other and dedicated themselves to freeing hundreds of slaves who were forcibly locked up in boats. This group of buccaneers had other ideals, they had a political thought. Taking this into account, is it possible to see a connection between One Piece and Anarchism?

As mentioned above, Luffy travels the seas and visits countless islands where he meets different realities and conflicts. In all the lands he visits there are problems of racism, tyranny and different types of political violence. When faced with these types of situations, Luffy always decides to put himself on the side of the oppressed and confront those who are in power. He can be an evil king, a murderous pirate, or a corrupt sailor who has been in power for years.

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side of the oppressed and confront those who are in power. It may be an evil king, a murderous pirate or a corrupt sailor who is wreaking havoc and making the population suffer.

This is why every time the future king of pirates arrives on an island something changes. Luffy's main skill is his enormous empathy that allows him to understand the injustices that surround him. In this way, he assumes a vanguard position within the social structure, which is why he is often rejected and branded as crazy by people who believe that reality cannot change. By confronting those who make people suffer, Luffy resolves the injustice, but asks nothing in return. He does not claim the island for himself, nor does he ask for treasures in exchange for his services.

In fact, he himself recognizes his position as a pirate and escapes from the islands by being persecuted by their inhabitants, making a play to make it clear that he is an "evil pirate". Thus the people have an excuse for any reaction of the navy against them. In this way, Luffy flees from those he saved to continue his journey of freedom at sea. This may be one of the first signs linking One Piece and anarchism, but there is more.

A crew without hierarchy

Another distinctive feature of Luffy is the way he sees leadership within his crew. Despite being the captain and the man who must make the decisions, his way of being leads him to consider himself an equal with the rest of his companions. He takes this attitude not only with them, but also with the rest of the characters in the series. For example, in many of the islands, the Straw Hat Pirates meet kings and princesses, whom Luffy treats as if they were ordinary people. He doesn't treat them any differently because they are part of the royalty. That attitude often causes discomfort with his interlocutors, who confront him for not respecting the social order that prevails in the territories.

However, this also leads us to one of the most profound theorizations that has been made since anarchism and that is the

principle of authority. This is a very broad discussion about the intrinsic moral legitimacy of the State as a political organization. From there, anarchists ask about the moral obligation to obey authority. In fact, Mikhail Bakunin, one of the pillars of anarchist theory, states that the only desirable authority is that of "the collective and public spirit of a society founded on equality and solidarity, and on mutual human respect for all its members.

Taking this reflection into account, we could say that Luffy's way of leading his crew is in line with an authority that seeks to emancipate men rather than enslave them. This clash of ways of seeing authority is explicitly seen in Luffy's struggle with the World Government, which represents a vision of power more linked to the type of authority that has been imposed by the Church and the State, which is based on the logic of punishment and submission.

In this way, we can say that One Piece and anarchism have many points of agreement. Luffy's journey across the seas is a search to widen the margins of his own freedom, an objective that also goes hand in hand with freeing all the people around him.