

## THE SINGULARITY OF PERIPHERAL INEQUALITY

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The discussion about the relationship between the core societies of the West and an enormous periphery of societies that are being formed or fundamentally transformed based on their planetary expansion is one of the themes left in the limbo of sociological reflection. In the core societies of the Northern Hemisphere an internal perspective is still dominant. Analyses conducted in societies of the Southern Hemisphere are also dominated by provincialism. Even authors who have successfully dedicated themselves to conceptualizing the terms of this relationship, such as Samuel Huntington, or more theoretically sophisticated authors such as Shmuel Eisenstadt, present a singular disproportion between the analysis of the “great world cultures” and the subcontinents, such as Latin America, which were directly constituted, at least as complex societies, by the very dynamic of western expansion.

The study of “great cultures or world religions” such as India, China, and the Muslim world continues to be guided by Max Weber who inaugurated, in the realm of comparative sociology, the perspective that considers the internal logic of each one of these societies or specific civilizations. Meanwhile, the study of Latin America, or, that is, the “Post-Weberian” theme of understanding the unique dynamic of the societies constituted in the expansion of western rationalism, in addition to being comparatively superficial has been relegated to clichés of a sociology of personalism and patrimonialism.<sup>1</sup> Marginality and subcitizenry in these peripheral societies are explained by this paradigm by the permanence of personalist characteristics. Although the modernization theories

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<sup>1</sup> The case of Eisenstadt, perhaps the most important Post-Weberian comparative sociologist, is paradigmatic. While his analysis of the great classic Asian cultures and the Islam is innovative and stimulating, his attention to Latin America is passing and superficial, and simply repeats ancient paradigms.

which accompanied the U.S. effort to politically reorganize the “free world” after the Second World War, have lost, for good reasons, the undisputed prestige that they enjoyed until the mid-1960s, the basic presumption of perceiving the relationship between the center and the periphery of the world system as an antinomic opposition between a traditional and pre-modern nucleus and another modern nucleus, continues to survive in new and hybrid ways. This state of things shows us that the surpassing of a theoretical paradigm, even when it is obviously unsuitable and insufficient, cannot be “decreed”, but demands the explicit construction of an alternative paradigm that explains the central issues of the ancient paradigm in a more convincing form, considering the failures and silences of the previous model.

The construction of an alternative theoretical paradigm in this field must begin from the fundamental theme of the unique nature of the modernization process in societies that I would like to call the “new periphery” to distinguish them from the “old periphery” represented by the large world civilizations studied by Weber, which were not a direct product of the expansion of Western rationalism. Upon analyzing the capitalist development of Japan, in comparison with the Hindu case, Weber emphasized that the expansion of capitalism or Western rationalism as he would prefer, to the periphery, took place both more deeply and rapidly the more that the process included the exportation of the basic institutions of the West, such as competitive market and centralized State, under the form of “ready-made artifacts”. This is precisely the way that the “new periphery” - in contrast to the old periphery studied by Weber - as in the case of Latin America, was modernized.

Max Weber, by the conceptual limitations of his methodological individualism, could not penetrate to the heart of the question that he himself understood to be fundamental, or that is, that market and State are not only “material artifacts” but carry an entire world vision and a complete specific social hierarchy. I believe that Charles Taylor is the modern thinker who best explained both the genealogy as well as the singularity and contingency of the hierarchy and of the moral vision subjacent to Western rationalism and its fundamental institutions. Taylor did not link his genealogy of the moral conception implicit in our social

practices and institutions directly to the market and State. But I think that this step is essential for us to be able to use the wealth of Taylor's insight to address the specificity of peripheral modernization.

For this reason, it is essential to review the hegemonic Western notion of virtue that will be consolidated - as an implicit and naturalized foundation - from all our modern social and institutional practices: control of reason over emotions and irrational impulses, progressive interiorization of all the sources of morality and meaning and concomitant enthronement of the virtues of self-control, self-responsibility, free and decontextualized will and liberty conceived as self-remodeling in relation to heteronomous ends (those from State and Market). This is precisely what Taylor calls the "punctual self". It is this historically built, highly improbable and culturally contingent notion of personality and of life conduct that was constituted in Europe between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which comes to be the hard core of the value hierarchy encrusted in an opaque and nontransparent form in the functioning of these fundamental institutions.

To realize this central factor is to overcome the type of culturalist essentialism that taint all of the traditional and contemporary variants of the paradigm of modernization that detach "culture", perceived as a homogenous and reified whole, from the institutional effectiveness that is the sole instance that can explain in what way culture and values can influence human behavior.

Nevertheless, at the level of abstraction of the analyses utilized by Taylor, it is not clear in what way this new hierarchy that comes to be implemented by the market and State, becomes effective as the basis of social classification and of differential values among individuals and social classes. In this way, to advance one more step in our effort to concretize the analysis, I would like to use the investigations of Pierre Bourdieu, in particular his notion of habitus, as an invisible and pre-reflexive foundation both of the entire solidarity as well as of all socially produced prejudice, in order to complement the Taylorian approach. The concept of habitus in Bourdieu allows conceptualizing the fundamental question that explains in what way social recognition, objectively produced and institutionally implemented based on an invisible moral hierarchy as such, can

function as a source of differential value of human beings who are building *social distinctions based on opaque social signs that are nevertheless perceptible to all in a pre-reflexive manner.*

For the generations that were born under the aegis of the disciplinizing practices now institutionally consolidated, this contingent model of hierarchizing human beings based on the relative approximation or distance from the notions of discipline and self-control, assumes the naturalized form of a self-evident reality that dispenses justification. To respond to the empiric imperatives of the State and market comes to be as obvious as breathing or walking. But if we want to go beyond appearances, we should suspect the legitimizing discourse that these institutions make of themselves - or that is, question if they truly are objective and neutral structures that express meritocratic and egalitarian principles - and we must penetrate their contingent and hierarchizing moral nucleus.

After all, it would be the notion of discipline and control of the body and its emotions and needs that would come to imperceptibly distinguish social classes, genders, ethnicities and so on. It is more than the struggle between classes and fractions of class that comes to be decided by this opposition between the soul or reason - as the locus of the virtues of the dominant classes and the body - as the locus of the dominated and ambiguous virtues of the inferior classes - and that is exemplarily perceptible in the opposition between intellectual and manual labor. This opposition also controls all the other hierarchies that presuppose superiority and inferiority, or the notion of better or worse, such as the oppositions between man and woman or white and black, to the degree in which both the woman and the black are perceived as repositories of the ambiguous virtues of corporality, as affection and sensuality in opposition to the non-ambiguous virtues of intellect and morality. It is the mechanism of opacity and of naturalization of inferiority that will make appear to the very victim of prejudice, whether because of class, gender, or color, that his or her failure is personal, deserved and justifiable.

It is the “ideology of performance” implicit in the emotional economy based on the discipline of the body and of useful and productive work that would be, therefore, the secret basis of the entire mechanism that classifies individuals and classes into superior and inferior, citizen and sub-citizen, and at the extreme, people and non-people. If we free ourselves of the mistaken naturalist appearance that makes us associate the “European” to a physical type that is white, blond and blue-eyed, and come to understand “Europeaness” as an emotional economy based on a specific moral hierarchy, the entire expansion of capitalism on a planetary scale can be perceived in a radically new way, without the dubious help of the categories of essentialist culturalism.

Then, we can understand Western rationalism as expanding from the European center, conquering all corners of the planet and separating and distinguishing individuals and entire social classes between carriers and non-carriers of the emotional economy and contingent moral hierarchy that is the historic European product consolidated in capitalism in an opaque and invisible form based on the effectiveness of the empiric stimuli of its basic institutions. These “new Europeans” may be blacks or mulattos as in the case of Brazil in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who ascended socially through study and work or through the principal of differential performance, to the new positions in the State and the market that were implanted by external, British, influence, from the outside in. It is this process that is at the basis of a very Brazilian phenomenon, because of the intensity that it takes on there, that we can call “whitening”. It is these men of color that are Europeanized inside, who are distancing themselves therefore from the level of primitiveness associated to the black color and literally becoming white to all eyes. A Europeanized black or mulatto is still called “light skinned” among Brazilians today. This fact demonstrates the importance of the new implicit and invisible moral hierarchy at the core of the apparently neutral institutions of capitalism, that subordinate all the other social hierarchies – as in the case above of race prejudice - to their needs of expanded reproduction.

In societies such as those of Western Europe, where it was possible to have policies aimed at social homogenization, or that is, more or less successful attempts at generalization of the bourgeois emotional economy to which we

alluded above, also for the lower classes, it was also possible to expand the notion of citizenry beyond the simple letter of the law. This is contrary to what is observable in societies where this effort at homogenization never took place, such as in Brazil and Latin America. This means that the “non-Europeanized” majority in these societies not only does not have access - either as producers or consumers - to the benefits of the market and State, but that they are treated objectively as a sub-human underclass precisely because of the effectiveness and the dynamism of the impersonal modern institutions exported to these societies. Brazil, for example, was the society of greatest economic growth worldwide from 1930 – 1980. Although this growth began from a very low level, its strength indicates the undeniable vitality of the market there. Then, it is not the lack of dynamism of these modern institutions caused by pre-modern remnants, as the internationally dominant literature in this field still supposes, which is responsible for the profound marginality of many peripheral societies.

The legal rule of equality only functions in social contexts where the perception of the other as equal - at least effectively equal in the dimension of the self-discipline that guarantees useful work and peaceful public coexistence - is effectively internalized in an obvious and pre-reflexive way. An empiric example easily recognizable by all can help to clarify what I want to say. In societies such as the German or English, although inequality takes on opaque and pseudo-legitimate forms in the social-cultural dimension with important economic consequences, political and legal equality are obvious if we think of a banal and common episode such as an automobile accident in which a middle class driver hits and kills a poor person. In the English and German case it is highly probable that the middle class citizen would be effectively judged with the firmness of the law. In the Brazilian case it is highly probable that the middle class driver would be found completely innocent or would have a punishment worthy of a minor infraction, as if a chicken or dog had been hit.

My thesis is that this occurs because it is in the pre-reflexive realm that the differential value of these human beings, actualized in an opaque and non-transparent form, is realized daily by the very efficacy of market and State. For this reason, these poor Brazilians have no more effective value, in everyone's

eyes including for themselves, than a chicken or a dog. The practical result of this legal process, in reality, mirrors the effective pre-reflexive consensus about the differential value of human beings, existing in a society, such as the Brazilian, which does not homogenize the human type in an interclassist form to any significant degree.

We are not thinking here in intentional or conscious terms. It is clear that very few middle class Brazilians admit that they consider their poor compatriots to be sub-humans with the importance of a chicken. To the contrary, many of these people vote in leftist parties and contribute to campaigns against hunger, etc. Nevertheless, in the pre-reflexive dimension of the consensus shared through the effective social practices, that dispense with linguistic intermediation, the practical results point to a division that constructs citizens on one hand and under citizens on the other. I also maintain that it is these pre-reflexive and *non-juridical* consensuses that decide if the law of equality will be accepted or not.

The dominant explanation about phenomenon such as these is still marked by perspectives that begin from subjectivist and intentional points of view, as if the logic of complex and dynamic societies such as those that compose peripheral modernity could be explained by the permanence of pre-modern residues such as the relative dominance of personal relations. Personal relations are important in the definition of careers and individual chances for social ascension in all modern societies, whether peripheral or central. In the two types of society, nevertheless, it is the economic and cultural capital that are structuring, while social capital and personal relations are not. This is what makes terribly dislocated and anachronic the entire discussion about the supposedly eternal personalism, familisms, patrimonialism as pre-modern cores of peripheral countries such a Brazil.

The current chronic absence of opportunities for the future in peripheral countries such as Brazil is related to the obsolescence of the old political projects that are based on the traditional analyses criticized above. A change of paradigm in this field is urgent not only for the revitalization of the internal political and cultural life of these societies but also for the desiderata of a critical

social science that intends to offer alternatives in light of the current exclusionary standard of globalization and its inevitable consequences of increased violence and insecurity for all.