

FRATERNITY / SORORITY

The unbearable power of a concept that helps us to rethink poverty and human rights¹

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Abstract

The consequences of the implementation of neoliberal policies around the world and, particularly, in Latin America have generated a strong skepticism regarding the capacities of democracy to provide suitable responses to the justice problems derived from those policies. Some believe that the solution is to reinforce the empowerment of the market and, in the same dialectic game, others think that there is a need of a stronger presence of the State. Some others will say that there is no way out and they will take refuge in different nihilisms. Yet, it is worth posing a counter-hegemonic thought which, thinking from the victims' perspective, i.e. radicalizing – and not limiting – democracy, offers provisory and exploratory alternatives; not definitive but valid and possible ones. Within this framework, what role Human Rights would play? On behalf of these rights, the weak may demand to States the protection and integral promotion of life, but also the powerful people may legitimate invasion, conquest, death: Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan are some examples of the struggle, the *agon*, the agony of Human Rights.

Key words: fraternity – human rights – conflict – hegemony – radical democracy

¹ Revised version of the conference held on March 5, 2015, organized by the Philosophy and Liberal Studies Department at California State University, Los Angeles, United States. I wish to express my gratitude to Ricardo Gomez Foundation for the invitation.

FRATERNITY AS A POLITICAL CATEGORY

Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Tupi and Guarany, all around the world we find myths of origin related to struggles among siblings, especially between brothers, that sometimes end up in fratricide. The daily experience of any parent of two or more children can confirm that siblings fight with each other.

However, in spite of what mythology, daily experience, history or psychology show us, mothers insist on telling their children not to fight, but to love each other as siblings. Moreover, when two friends want to express that their relationship is very close and strong, they say that they are like brothers².

The point is that F/S³ may be understood in two different senses: what it actually is or what we think it should be. In the first case, the struggle among siblings shows us an actual fact: the horizontal relationships encourage the conflict. In the second case, what we have is a desire: to avoid the conflict in order that everyone would be happier.

If the F/S concept is extrapolated from the domestic field to the public one, when talking about universal F/S, we refer to either:

- a) the original condition of society: there is no father and no mother. Therefore, conflict is always present, in a latent or manifest way;
- b) the invoke of an ideal, an unattainable goal: a harmonious society in which everyone can freely display all their potentialities.

² For a detailed analysis of the implications of the concept of fraternity, cf. Del Percio (2014).

³ Due to the fact that the term fraternity comes from the the Latin word *fratres* that denotes brothers – not sisters – fraternity would be a strictly masculine concept and if we pretend to take this concept to a universal level, it would be be fraternity/sorority or brotherhood/sisterhood. Despite the fact that the word fraternity involves a vice of origin, we cannot cease using it. It would be the same if we leave apart the word *trabajo* (the Spanish word for work) that derives from the Latin *tripalium*, the torture instrument used by the Romans. The English word *travel* also derives from it in reference to the sufferings and pains that the travelers had to deal with in the times in which the term was coined. Apart from some academic groups, nowadays nobody seriously thinks that the fraternity concept excludes women.

Accordingly, fraternity has two faces like Janus: one face looks with hope to the future we should construct, and the other one alertly observes the past in which we have been constructing this present. One face dictates an order; the other describes a datum. Paradoxically, the realistic face gives us the *datum* (its ethos is related to “given”) that nothing is given in advance and, consequently, everything is a matter of constructions which are never definitive; but they are the dynamic result of struggles and consensus, of dialogues and impositions.

Every extrapolation from private to public field has its risks and issues. For this reason, many people have discarded this concept as a useful political category. However, it is so profitable that it is worth running the risk of using it with the due precautions. The first risk was above-mentioned: within a family, parents establish the verticality that tends to dissolve the conflict.

With respect to the public field, there is not and there has never been a father or mother: there is no person or group that can exercise “naturally” the father’s role of establishing the law; neither is there a uterus-society which dissolves every antagonism in its bosom. Universal fraternity warns us that life in common is a construction that depends on us, a primary and ideal reality to be reached: in the tension between these two ends, the collective existence is constructed, which does not allow any naivety.

There is not a *father* imposing his law, but life in common is a collective construction, neither is there a *mother-uterus* that holds us harmonically in her bosom. We are definitely not beautiful souls totally capable of living in a world free of conflicts once the “others” have been annihilated, the bastards that do not allow us to enjoy this perfect world. There is no option: we have to take responsibility for ourselves.

This is where fraternity bothers. In consequence, it tends to be relegated in comparison with “strong” principles such as freedom, equality or justice. The problem is that those principles refer to “what ought-to-be”, while fraternity forces us to confront “what is”, what we are. This fact disturbs those right-wingers who believe that societies are “naturally” stratified, as well as those left-wingers of enlightened vanguards who treat the subalternized people as children to whom

they have to explain their condition of subjugation and the means to emancipate themselves. It also annoys others who prefer to ignore their responsibility hoping that “someone else would do something”. Fraternity forces us to face the fact that always we are necessarily responsible, i.e: we must respond to it. If someone knocks at the door and there would be a father in the house, he would be the one to answer. But as there is no father, even our silence, our option of remaining silent is indeed an answer, although it is rather ineffective because we cannot live always silent and inside our houses, afraid of who can virtually knock at our doors. The excluded of the neoliberal policies knock at the doors of the satisfied people. They can enclose themselves in private neighborhoods and build walls along the highways that carry them to the city center. Yet, the poor, the indigenous, the afro-descendants, the marginalized of every kind still knock at their doors.

From this perspective, F/S as a comprehensive key of social reality interpretation leads us to resignify liberty, equality and justice, essential concepts to deal with poverty as well as Human Rights matters.

F/S AND THE DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY

1) Individualism:

Those who prefer liberty to equality conceive society as a mere juxtaposition of individuals. What is really important and what actually exists is each individual and each family, because society does not exist as such, but as the result of the interaction among individuals. This is the conception of politicians such as Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan, and thinkers like Friedrich Hayek or Robert Nozick. If society does not exist, neither does social justice. Consequently, as there is no society, social justice is a *Fata Morgana*, a distraction used by politicians to deceive voters, or maybe arguments of good-intended but innocent people who understand nothing about economic rules.

2) **Collectivism:**

In this perspective, we can find from some amateur Platonists and Marxists to leaders such as Hitler or Stalin. Society is a body, a living organism (the "volk" or the "Holy Mother Russia") and individuals are part of the organs of this mega body. Paradoxically, this conception is held by the supporters of: a) a society based on a strong hierarchy, and b) a hyper-interventionist state capable of guaranteeing full equality among its citizens. Both perspectives consider that the individual only matters as part of a higher totality.

This opposition between individualism and organicism emerges as an obstacle to understand the "essence" of society or of the individual as such, becoming both society and individuals a kind of Kantian thing-in-itself that can only be addressed through partial and distorted perceptions but whose "real essence" will always slip from us. Therefore, it is impossible to find the *aufhebung*, the sublation of the individual-society antagonism. Instead, we can forget the Western thinking obsession of finding everywhere and in everything the thing-in-itself – the substance – and we can adopt perspectives, nearer to other philosophical traditions for which Relation is previous to Substance. In this case, we can, at least, explore some alternatives to the problems that for the mentioned conceptions are not only unsolvable but even inaccessible.

3) **Society and individuals as Relation:**

This theoretical approach serves the basis for the idea of promoting fraternity as a central concept of a political philosophic reflection. It does not imply a resolution of the antinomy individual/society, but a way to make explicit the permanent tension between them. Although the two previous theories are grounded in an essentialist view, we consider that Relation is not a second level category with respect to Substance. On the contrary, we understand Relation as a central category in which reality is founded. This is the thinking, for example, of the Andean people: the forest is not a group of trees, but the trees exist because they are part of an ecosystem, whose "substance" derives from the relation of its different parts. The same happens with the Christian Trinitarian theology: the

essence of God is not present in the origin; it comes from the relation among the three Divine Persons. Hence, we may assert that the individuals exist because they are in relation with themselves, with the others and with the whole Cosmos. Consequently, the society exists as long as it is the result of the articulation of these relations.

This conception enables us to seek social justice, even assuming that its full materialization is a utopia, without annulling the individual and his/hers fundamental rights. The assumption that the constitutive relations between individuals and society are not necessary or naturally harmonious implies the existence of different and, sometimes opposed, expectations and interests.

It is worth mentioning that there are four types of relations within a society, namely: *towards*, *with*, *vis-à-vis* and *between*.

For the people of the Middle Ages, to think in terms of relation implied to think *towards*. The Medieval episteme –like those gothical cathedrals where everything was organized from bottom to up– was characterized by the belief that all things are related because, in the end, everything was arranged *towards* God, first cause of the order of the being and final cause of the order of the purposes. In the physical world, as well as in the community, the inferiority was ordered *towards* the superiority. Consequently, the lower strata were related “naturally” to the immediately higher stratum *towards* the summit, no matter whether the Pope or the Emperor was in the summit.

Besides this vertical relation, there are also horizontal relations. In first place, there is a *with*-type relation: the relation we live *with* the others. The problem is that if we confine the analysis to these two relations (*towards*-type and *with*-type), nothing prevents us from thinking society as a totalitarian one. In fact, for the totalitarian regimes, the *towards*-type relation is associated to the aims that the leader sets; and the *with*-type relation is linked to the conformation of the people (the *volk*), implying that every one marches in unison, ones *with* the others; even parading *towards* nowhere but always the ones *with* the others.

When things or people are organized *towards* something or someone or linked *with* others, the relation can continue to be thought as a derivative category

because the subjects/substances are ultimately those who relate themselves. But the inclusion of the *vis-à-vis* relation refers to dialogue and conflict; likewise, the *between*-type relations give account of the openness to the others as constitutive of the human identity. Human beings are an interweaving of relations.

The individual, society and the rest of the ecosystem are developed over time by means of the *between*-type relations of people in their families, their neighborhood, their jobs or in any other place, as well as with the rest of nature. Latin America is plenty of examples of enlightened leaders (and generally inclined to the illuminist thought) who “know clearly where we must head”, but they forget the forging of history, of generations that, from the first settlers of our lands until nowadays, have been developing an infinite interweaving based on the *between*-type relations. Indeed, the *between*-type relations do not deny the *with*-type relations but are constitutively more important. The combination of *between*-type relations and *with*-type relations over time contributes to make up “the people” as a historical-cultural category, not as a political one.

When a part of “that people” assumes the hegemony and establishes a *towards*-type relation, then it becomes a political category. To think “the people” as a primarily political category (not a derived category) involves the risk of forgetting that “the people” is a relation and, therefore, “the people” is essentialised, implying a set of disastrous consequences: “the people” as a uterus (of the mother) contains the chosen and denies “the others”; “the people” is such because it is the son of the leader/father that establishes the law and is the depository of power and knowledge. Instead, the fraternity notion shows that there is no father or mother, that the horizontal relations made of conflicts and harmonies come first; and, if there were a leadership, the leader would be such as long as he takes into account that type of ties (like the slogan “command by obeying” present in various native peoples in America). This leader differs from the leader/father that remains in his position no matter what he does: the father, like the King, the *Duce* or the *Führer*, is who gives identity and shapes “the people”. In those cases, the relation, apart from being mainly understood as a *towards*-type relation, is confined to a dual

relationship: the leader and the governed mass. Conversely, fraternity suggests the existence of the Third that precludes the legitimation of that type of leaderships.

Similarly to the difference set between politics and the political by authors like Chantal Mouffe, "the people" as an interweaving of *between*-type and *with*-type relations refers to the abyssal dimension of the political, while the *towards*-type relation establishes the link between the political and politics. Before explaining this difficult distinction, it is convenient to analyze another implication of fraternity as an analytical category.

RETHINKING FREEDOM, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

The problem of the third:

In order to approach this topic, the way in which Aristotle conceived the forms of government, comparing the virtuous and the vicious ones, may be useful. Below, we list the vices or impure forms of the three principles (freedom, equality and justice):

a) *Freedom would be selfishness*, where *the individual* shuts him/herself off.

b) *Equality would be envy*. I envy what you own: *the second person* (you) appears.

c) *Fraternity would be jealousy*: the elimination of the siblings in order to exclusively enjoy the parents' love. The *third person* appears (he/she).

The third is undetermined and, to some extent, indeterminable, allowing us to escape from the trap of the false otherness of the dual. Between an "I" and a "you" in dialogue, there is only a constant exchange of roles. When the "I" stops talking, this "I" becomes "you", and the "you" speaks as an "I". It is the third person, the "he" or "she", who makes possible the authentic opening to otherness. Martin Buber (1993) accurately points out the problem of modern Western philosophy

centered in the "I" and warns us about the preference of the "you" as constitutive of the "I".

From the very beginning of our existence we recognize ourselves in the gaze of the significant other, whom we usually call "mother" (the mother-figure). The "you" (second person) appears before the "I" (first person). But if we remain in this dual relation we risk to become a mere *alter ego* of this other (the second person) and, reciprocally, the other becomes our *alter ego*.

Mutual mirroring, reciprocal idolatry, selfishness in pairs are some of the vices to where the dual relation may easily end... and, in those cases, the otherness disappears (see Marion, J. L. 2006, p. 100). The self-closure as an *ego*, or as a part of the dual *ego - alter ego*, is one of the weakest points of modern political and social theory. In fact, the openness to the third, to the other as a real other, and not a mere "you" but as another first person, is what leads to a realistic political praxis.

Furthermore, it is the reason of the existence of institutions. In the dual relation, the payment of a debt, the compliance with obligations, the demand of justice, constitute only an ethical demand and their observance, ultimately, depends on the good will of the parties. On the contrary, when the third appears, it is possible to generate the appropriate channels to make the demand of justice enforceable. It is not only a matter of requesting justice to the "you", or of being a good person intending to be fair him/herself. Instead, the third becomes an instance before which the issue may be raised (Auat, A. 2011, p. 198).

As it was previously suggested, the dual relationship in which the leaders take actions according to the dictates or desires of the governed, it is modified by the emergence of the Third. The Third is those that are not part of the hegemonic sector, but that cannot be (actually) and do not have to be (ethically) eliminated. Thus, they impose on the decider the need to act within the normative framework. The Third does not prevent decider from making changes or transformations, but forces them to respect basic guarantees or, what can be called in general terms, human rights of minorities. This respect is not a magnanimous concession but an institutional obligation.

With regard to our topic, each vice includes the previous one: the envious person is also a selfish one who wants that nobody owns more than he/she has. The jealous person envies the greater love that he/she supposes his/her sibling receives. But the envy of a jealous sibling is different from other forms of envy, as well as the selfishness of an envious person is different from other forms of egoism. Jealousy includes and resignifies envy and egoism. Likewise, fraternity involves freedom and equality resignifying them.

Freedom becomes liberation

If we think of a political action (*praxis*) without the third, we can make the mistake of thinking that the political action is similar to the carpenter's craft: he is able to make the table exactly as he imagined it (*poiesis*) because he works alone (the first person) or with a "you" (the second person) who may be his client or his employee. Yet, as Aristotle asserted, it is convenient to conceive the political activity as the lawyer does with his profession: he cannot promise his client a certain result in a specified time, because he depends on a third: the judge. Thus, the political activity becomes experimental: it is necessary to have a strategy, which can be changed depending on the circumstances.

Therefore, freedom cannot be considered as a fixed situation, but as a process. The proverb "your freedom ends where my nose begins" does not apply here because history shows that freedom is obtained by people working or fighting side by side with the others. The other does not put a limit to my freedom; on the contrary it is a condition for the existence of my freedom. As fraternity is universal (whether we like it or not, there is no father and no mother) it is not possible to understand freedom as an attribute of an individual or of a group of individuals. At the times of the *Apartheid* in South Africa, white people lived with the constant fear of being attacked by their own servants: white people forgot the fact that the others, the "blacks", were their siblings. Consequently, white people could not enjoy even the most basic negative freedom, because they were not really free due to the interference of the other people, their "modern slaves".

The history of Western philosophy shows a constant concern in relation to the defense of individual freedom from the power of institutions, specially political and religious ones (but not so much from the economic institutions) and, in consequence, power is considered the opposite of freedom. In contrast, from our point of view, power is the opposite of impotence, and liberty is the result of a process of power construction, particularly with respect to economic and financial powers. As part of a process, freedom is not a fixed status, thus, freedom becomes liberation.

In other words, if we omit our unavoidably fraternal human condition, we can think that our freedom has been provided who knows by whom and since when, and that “your freedom ends where my nose begins”. In this case, to be completely free, the only inhabitant in the planet should be me, being the rest of the people the limit, the obstacle to the full and absolute exercise of my freedom. However, with fraternity we notice that it works otherwise. History indicates that liberty and particular liberties are conquered and kept by fighting shoulder to shoulder with others. Therefore, it is not a matter of possessing a substantial attribute but of being part of a collective process. This concept of liberty is also reaffirmed by the etymology: the root *leuth* o *leudh* – from which originates the Greek *eleutheria* and the Latin *libertas* – and the radical Sanskrit root *frya* –which refers instead to the English *freedom* and the German *Freiheit* – refers us to something that has to do with an increase, a non-closing, a flowering. This etymological origin is particularly evident in Spanish in relation to *leudar* (to leaven), *leudante* (leavening) and *levadura* (leaven). As Esposito (2006) points out “if then we consider the double semantic chain that descends from it – which is to say that of love (*Lieben, lief, love*, as well as, differently, *libet* and *libido*) and that of friendship (*friend, Freund*), we can deduce not only a confirmation of this original affirmative connotation: the concept of liberty, in its germinal nucleus, alludes to a connective power that grows and develops according to its own internal Law, and to an expansion or to a deployment that unites its members in a shared dimension”. It is not a matter of finding an alleged “essence” of liberty in its etymological origin; after Nietzsche and, specially, after Foucault, we are all aware

of not making that mistake. On the contrary, it is worth noting that there is no such essence. The definition of liberty, as it happens with every political concept, it is a construction that results from a play of power, which, when is played assuming our fraternal condition, will bring to light elements of a strong heuristic and performative nature.

Equality as Social Justice

Similarly, fraternity is also assumed as equality, but with a very different meaning: equality implies the seeking of social justice which assumes new dimensions. In fact, the fraternity perspective holds the impossibility of achieving a completely harmonious social life because conflict is always present. And it also refers to the supremacy of the relation over the substance.

a) Distributive Justice: The social democracies of the middle of the last century, and the most widespread discourse of the international agencies privileged indicators such as the Gini coefficient and other similar indicators to “measure” social justice. Nevertheless, today it is evident that they are not enough: social justice cannot be reduced to a mere equality or equity with respect to wealth or income distribution. Although the equal distribution of wealth and incomes is necessary, it is not enough to achieve social justice. Other two dimensions are also required.

b) Acknowledgement: A homosexual man or woman, indigenous native, afro-descendant person, Jewish or a Latino can have as much money as a white and straight man, but they are going to be discriminated because of their ethnic condition, religious choice or sexual orientation, not being their rights acknowledged *de jure* or *de facto*, and thus, they become victims of an injustice. This has been sufficiently analyzed by political philosophy and theory, more precisely by cultural and gender studies, therefore we will not expand on it⁴.

c) Contributive Justice: A retired professor, CEO or ambassador would hardly ever suffer one of the above-mentioned types of injustice, nor would the rich

⁴ An excellent critique towards policies of recognition of indigenous and Afro-Americans promoted by international organizations may be read on Gómez Michel, G. (2014).

man's wife whose life is devoted to "the well-being of her family". But all of them know that they can contribute much more to a society in spite of the fact that it does not offer them any chance of doing so. This dimension, called "general justice" by medieval philosophy, was forgotten by Western Modernity, because it considers the individual as a substance instead of a relation (with oneself, the others and the cosmos). We are referring to the dimension of social justice that consists in ensuring each one the right to his/her self-realization through his/her contribution to the others' realization.

Modern philosophy and science have an evident incapacity to notice this constitutive dimension of human beings. For that reason, they tend to reduce the need to do something for others to the previous dimension (seeking of recognition) or to a form of narcissism. However, this is not the case: we all know people who dedicate their free time to work as volunteers without anyone knowing it. Someone who knits warm clothes to give to charity anonymously or those who donate money in secret are examples of it. But beyond these clear cases, a doctor who saves a life, does he feel satisfied because of the mere fact that he saved a life?, or maybe is it recognition or narcissist self-contemplation that drives him? In fact, it is not necessary to give more examples of this independent dimension of justice since the reader has surely experienced sometime the feeling of being happier when giving than receiving.

To sum up, if we adopt the Western hegemonic conception of freedom, we can easily understand power as the opposite of freedom. However, thinking power in terms of liberation will lead us to interpret power as a necessary instrument for generating a social change. Likewise, the classic tension between freedom and equality will fade out since liberation is the way to achieve social justice.

Thinking from the victims' perspective

The universal nature of fraternity implies that we are not only siblings of the living people, but also of those who are not yet born and of those who are no longer with us (the dead people). Fraternity with the unborn is based on the concern for the environment and, in general, for all the duties derived from the

principle of sustainability. And fraternity with the dead reminds us that, in our countries, Afro-descendants and indigenous people have suffered and currently suffer poverty and marginalization not only as a result of their "misfortune in the natural lottery", but as a consequence of five centuries of oppression and domination.

Within the framework of this lecture, the most significant aspect of thinking from the victims' point of view - from Remus instead of Romulus, from Abel instead of Cain - is the avoidance of considering Human Rights as the ideology of legitimation of the imperialist interventions carried out by the central countries. Regarding this perspective of Human Rights, a similar experience can be found in cosmopolitanism: it started in Greece as a critique to the unfair local government – as Costa Douzinas explains (2005) - and finished as the official ideology of the Roman Empire. Thus, in the name of Human Rights, torture or invasions to other countries may be legitimized.

For that reason, it is worth examining this issue in depth. It should be noted that we are not considering this viewpoint as an ethical imperative, and far less as a sentimental or romantic proposal, but an epistemic principle. The neglect of this principle leads us to muddle the hegemonic knowledges with the truth. Let's take Weber as an example. No doubt he was one of the greatest sociologists of the history; however, his studies on the origin of capitalism ignore the importance of the commodities such as gold, silver, tobacco, sugar, coffee and cotton brought to Europe from America. If Weber had included the victims' perspective in his analysis, the margins of the system, his researches would have resulted much more accurate and substantial.

According to Walter Benjamin, it is a question of trying to "brush history against the grain", although our hands become bloodstained, because the skin of history cannot be easily brushed when the inclinations imposed by the victorious are not followed. Taking the victims' side, the universal nature of fraternity is protected, differing from the imperial universality which derives from a successful particularity that denies the other particularities. This negation condemns to

oblivion the others' suffering. On the contrary, fraternity claims that the authentic universality is a situated universality.

THE SITUATED UNIVERSAL

The universus is not the kosmos

Instead of considering a particularity as a universal and interpreting other particularities from the same point of view, it seems more convenient to approach the universal from the recognition of the differences implied in each particularity. Universality should not be understood as a result, as a point of arrival, but as a point of departure; as a universality de-Romanized: the Roman cosmology is very much related to the Greek *kosmos*, but it is not the same: the *kosmos* refers to harmony without a center. In contrast, in the Roman *universus*, the *unus* (*Roma caput mundi*) is against (*versus*) everything else. It is an imperial conception that supposedly respects the diversity, Gods and folkloric and cultural aspects of the defeated people as long as they tribute to the center (that is to say, to Rome). Then, this universality implies a mere tolerance towards those differences that do not bother and, in consequence, that can be incorporated to the totality as a valueless detail because it would not modify the domination relations.

Neither tolerance nor perspectivism

This universality implies a mere tolerance towards those differences that do not bother and, in consequence, that can be incorporated to the totality as a valueless detail because it would not modify the domination relations. However, this conception of universality is not the only one. The fraternity perspective proposes to think universality from the difference's side. The *one* does not have to be the empire, the *one* can be oneself *versus* everything and everyone else, being the *one* part of it as well without losing his/her identity, but constituting it in relation

with “everything and everyone else”. We exist because we are related to everything and everyone else.

It should be noted that the situated universal is not the same as to see the world from the *perspective* of its own location. This *perspective* implies seeing only a part of reality: the part that comes into the sight of the observer. Instead, *situationality* implies the attempt to assume totality, bearing in mind that it will always be just an attempt. Hence, it is not a totality as the result of the universalization of a particular subject (the European male conqueror who turns his own cosmovision into something universally valid), but a totality which assumes diversity and opens itself to the other people and things, to the other human beings, and to the rest of the cosmos. A totality – devoid of the illusion of completeness and with faults that could never be sutured – that emerges from the desire of going beyond its own observation field.

Then, what we cannot see, we can get to know partially if we are able to listen to who is actually seeing that thing from his/her particular perspective. In the act of listening, there will always be mistakes due to the incompleteness of the language, translation errors, observation distortions of who is talking and, especially, because of the elusive nature of every portion of reality. Listening differs from observing: the observation requires some domination while the act of listening requires an attitude of openness from the listener instead of an attitude of penetration. In consequence, *situationality* prevents us from the phallogentrism of Western thought.

Moreover, *situationality* prevents us from the perspectivism paradox: the observer cannot observe himself/herself. Instead, the other can observe us and describe what he/she is observing. In fact, to a large extent, we are the result of the others' gazes. To think the universality from our *situationality* enables us to take into account that we are not a self-sufficient substance; from birth, our self-perceptions are determined – or at least strongly conditioned – by those glazes. This happens both in the case of the individual and society.

Situationality also introduces the issue of our sensitivity and corporeality because our mind does not think from an unlocated universality. We are capable of

thinking because our bodies are situated in time and space: we are body, soul and spirit with memory and projection, but necessarily situated here and now.

Indeed, the concept of *situated universal* (Casalla, 1988) from the framework of fraternity perspective implies an epistemic liberation. Obviously, this is not the hegemonic conception of universality. Then, it is important to understand the meaning of universality when referring to human rights. Universality is the result of an hegemonic construction and its counter-hegemonic resistances; in fact, it is the result of a conflict. Thus, it is worth concluding this lecture referring to conflict and to the ways of understanding the hegemonic construction of it.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT: DENIAL, EXACERBATION OR ACCEPTANCE

If we forget, indeed, the conflictive dimension of fraternity, we can easily end up taking the following naïve stance that holds: “every conflict may be channeled if the parts involved defend their interests with intelligence”; that would be possible if the parts concerned were able to defend their interests wisely, but – as history and daily experience show- conflict tends to cloud the intelligence and frequently, it is replaced by the most destructive passions. However, this is not the main obstacle for the channeling of conflict. In fact, there could be an impartial Third that stays reasonable and somehow manages a solution beneficial to all concerned. The problem is that nobody actually knows his/her own interest. There are a lot of tales and myths about the bad luck of those who have their desire fulfilled, that is because that desire, that we think is “our own interest”, would hardly be such. Generally, it is the interest of hegemonic sectors of society.

In a remarkably didactic manner, Slavoj Žižek explains this complex matter through a story. Once upon a time, there was a bank clerk who, while shaving in his bathroom at home, was thinking how to get the money to buy the car he and his wife wanted. Suddenly, a genius reflected in the mirror. Our friend was astonished.

The genius said to him that he came to make his wish come true: he would leave the car in front of his house and with the money saved he could make a travel or spend it in whatever he wanted. The man –with a mixture of fear, anxiety and joy– asked the genius what he wanted in return: “nothing –answered the genius - I just want you to phone your brother-in-law and tell him not to move, that I am on my way to leave him the Ferrari he wants. If you do not call him, he will leave home before I arrive and I won’t be able to fulfill any of both wishes”. As the reader may have guessed, the man preferred to give up to his middle-class car rather than his brother-in-law having a Ferrari. The man was sure he wanted that car; however, what he actually wanted was to cause envy to his brother-in-law, but he had no idea of this deep feeling. Even more, probably, he would have denied it sincerely if someone would have suggested it before this episode.

It is not true that “people understand each other talking and can come to satisfactory agreements with all parts concerned”; because, to make that possible, it would be necessary that all of them: a) know what they really want; b) know how to express effectively what they want; and c) that others can understand fully that demand. When disregarding these requirements –and their psychological difficulties, the issue of economic, social and political conflict is reduced to a matter of debate, where the main point would be agreeing on proposals and definitions in order to come to an agreement and reach consensus.

Unfortunately, things are much more complex; therefore, we have no alternative but to go in depth into a matter of considerable theoretical difficulty. The great trap of neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology of consumer capitalism –differently from traditional liberalism, characterized by the capitalism of accumulation- is that it makes us believe that what we want is a new car. In this regard, the radicalization of democracy does not mean that political parties should be suppressed in order that “people decide” voting every law. On the contrary, It is about constructing a new hegemony that makes possible the production and reproduction of life (cfr. Contreras Nátera 2014, p, 352). Thus, all the inhabitants of this planet would enjoy life, creating their own destiny.

There are three ways of understanding Conflict in accordance with the three society conceptions previously mentioned: 1) as a mere opposition of forces; 2) as a dialectical contradiction; 3) as antagonism.

1) Conflict as a mere opposition of forces

In general, those who privilege individuals over society tend to consider conflict as an opposition of interests among individuals, groups or social sectors. They claim that if each one is smart enough to defend his/her own interest, every conflict may be solved or, at least, properly channeled. This may be viable because they think there is no contradiction within reality. However, it is not accurate to use the term "contradiction" for real things; it has sense only in the logic field: as it is known, the law of logic contradiction is formulated as "A is not equal to A". If we state a proposition, and then another that denies the first one, we are affirming nothing. If we say that in this precise moment this glass is moving, but this glass is not moving, we are saying nothing with respect to what is actually happening now. Thus, in a strict sense, we can only state a contradiction at the conceptual level. Therefore, it is only in a proposition where a contradiction can happen.

Furthermore we can also say that George is putting pressure on the glass to one side and Peter is exerting an identical amount of pressure to the other side and, therefore, the glass is not moving. In this second example, there is not a contradiction but a real opposition. The force that George puts on the glass has the same amount of positivity as that being put by Peter, so it cannot be understood in terms of a logical contradiction. Analyzing this situation, Kant concludes that there can only be contradictions among propositions, but not among things. Among things and people, we find opposition but not contradiction.

This perspective of approaching conflict does not consider three key aspects, namely:

- 1) Nobody knows exactly what he/she wants
- 2) Nobody can express what he/she really wants
- 3) Nobody can fully understand the other's demands.

Several examples of these three impossibilities may be found in tales and myths from different cultures. The gods grant a man his wish for immortality but then, he gets old, his strength decreases, he becomes ancient and useless; nevertheless, he has to endure forever the fulfillment of his wish. Another man wishes for eternal youth but after undergoing over and over again the death of his beloved, family and friends, he stops loving and feeling any affection in order not to suffer. But certainly, without love, eternal youth becomes an unbearable torment. This problem escalates when we refer to collective demands instead of individual wishes: the undetermined Third takes part there. Thus, even assuming that some people would know what they really want through a deep knowledge of their selves, and the other person could understand and satisfy their demand through an open and sincere dialogue, there will always be others directly or indirectly affected by that decision.

2) Conflict as a dialectical contradiction

In a nutshell, for liberalism, social conflict may be analogous to a negotiation for a used car: the buyer will try to get the lowest price and the seller, the maximum possible amount. After making several offers, both parties will reach to an agreement. Given that this analogy is untenable (because of theoretical reasons that we have analyzed before, as well as because of what every day political experience shows us), certain supposedly orthodox Marxist thinkers try to explain conflict out of the sphere of personal aspirations and within the field of structural contradictions.

There is contradiction in real life; not a simple contradiction but a dialectic one. From this perspective, the whole social reality – and consequently, the field of public policies – is interpreted from the idea that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. But we face a problem here: there is not anything like “universal history”, neither it is true that Conflict is always and necessarily a class struggle. The nineteenth-century notion of “universal history” is the secularized version of the history of salvation. There is not a sense of history. The histories of different people are diverse and rather chaotic.

In addition, what is moving history is not class struggle: sometimes, struggles are of a different nature, and many times history is the result of agreements, consensus and harmonies. Conflict is always present, either actual or latent, but this does not mean that its logic is the only one that prevails in the progression of societies. It is more convenient to interpret Marx's phrase as a provocation, than as a dogma. In agreement with Laclau (2012): "an idealistic philosophy, such as Hegel's, which reduced reality to a concept, could somehow speak about contradictions in the real world". Then, can a Marxist, and, therefore, materialistic philosophy follow the path proposed by Hegel? Laclau's answer (2012) is conclusive: "When the Marxists speak about social contradictions fall into an unfortunate confusion". If Conflict cannot be analyzed as a dialectical contradiction, we can plainly and simply assert that Marx and the Marxists are mistaken. So, we easily agree with the first stance stating that there are no contradictions but real oppositions. Unfortunately, the complexity of politics does not allow us to be content with this simple answer. The idea of opposition entails an image of fully constituted forces or objects (and, by analogy, of people or groups) which confront with each other. However, in political struggle frequently occurs that on the one hand, it is the struggle itself which precisely constitutes the subject or the group; and, on the other hand, what the struggle seeks is the elimination or negation of the enemy.

Therefore, it is bad news for those who support this position, and believe with naïve optimism that –I repeat- every conflict may be solved or channeled if the parts involved wisely defend their interest. It is very difficult to act intelligently in a conflict because of a number of reasons that we will not explain here. But, it is even more difficult to know which is our own interest. Many times, what we think it is our interest, it is in fact what our false consciousness suggests us to be, as a result of a hegemonic imposition.

Furthermore, besides the theoretical problems inherent to each of the two stances studied, there is a problem affecting both equally: the oblivion of the third. Indeed, when the conflict radicalizes, there is a tendency to subsume it in a binary logic: whether each person is on one side or on the other. The friend-enemy logic

of exclusion defines politics, that is, puts an end to it: it is war, and there is no neutrality in war. However, even in war, there is a third person: the peoples and governments of countries that do not intervene. Therefore, the contending parts try to show a relative moral superiority in order to impose a communicational hegemony; that is, even in the limit, there is a third. For this reason, we introduce Gramsci's notion of hegemony in the analysis of Conflict. We will analyze this author from Laclau's perspective in dialogue with Lacan.

3) *Conflict as antagonism*

If Conflict is not an opposition of objects or forces as in real opposition, or of concepts like in dialectical contradiction, how can we tackle it?

Kant (quoted in Laclau 2012), in his reflections about Leibniz, on the possibility of the existence of negative numbers, holds that these numbers do not actually exist. Instead, there is an opposition of contrary forces. For example, a ship travels due West at ten knots propelled by the wind; at some point, a headwind slows it down, and the ship starts to navigate at six knots. In this case, there was neither a logical contradiction nor a negative number; there was a real opposition between two opposing forces. Many thinkers and liberal politicians tend to understand political conflict in this way: as a simple opposition of forces.

But Kant gives a more useful example: a Spartan mother was filled with joy when she heard the news that Sparta had won a battle, but at the end of the day she found out that her son had died in that battle. According to Kant, there are here two positive forces facing each other, like in the case of the ship and the wind. However, we can tackle this differently: the idea of a "won battle" is a discursive construction, because there is a distance between the fact that there are people killing each other, and the conceptualization we make regarding that amount of blows, deaths and wounds that we call a battle. This will be clarified considering the second part of the example: when a mother is sitting in front of his son's corpse, the real that she is facing is a dead body; but there is a distance, that is, the difference between what a dead body and the discursive construction of her "son's corpse": the notion of son, of someone deeply loved, with a history together,

with the same blood, is not there. However, only a psychotic person could be in front of her son's corpse and only see it as a dead body.

Clearly, the point is not to condemn every use of the category "dialectical contradiction", but to warn about its improper –and very frequent- use, which omits the discursive factor in the construction of what we understand as *reality* assimilating it to the *real*.

In that distance, that hiatus, that is, the difference-deferral⁵ between the real (the dead body) and reality (the son's corpse), politics happens. Hegemonic construction of discourse is critical: the Spartan mother would hate with all her soul the homeland's enemy and accept her son's death as an inevitable sacrifice; but a postmodern mother would hate her government leaders for making war, and would consider that death as absurd and pointless.

Going back to the distinction between the political and politics: the political is the field of the real constituted by the aggregate of *between*, *vis-a-vis* and *with*-type relations throughout history. They all form the substrate or, it would be better to say, the abyss over which we move and which, in addition, today is permeated by the logic of the capital tending to homogenize all societies. Instead, politics is the result of the *towards*-type relations. Considering the same example, the Spartan rulers, who decided to declare war, could implement that policy because it was based on the substrate given by the political. In contrast, in the United States of today, the television image of a child dead in combat is enough for most people to oppose to that military adventure.

Hegemony and fraternity: radicalizing democracy

Universal fraternity entails the absence of a father that provides meaning; because meaning is the result of conflicts, struggles and agreements among siblings. It is the result of a hegemonic construction, and not a pre-existing foundation. The foundation of society as such does not lie in anything stable; it is

⁵ In the same way as Laclau, my analysis is related to the ontological difference of Heidegger, the *différance* of Derrida and the distinction between the real and the symbolic of Lacan, but, as I do not use any of these notions in a strict sense, there is no need to cite these authors.

not a “substance”, it is constituted by the relational interweaving which is, obviously, dynamic and contingent. In that dynamic, some sectors impose their conception of reality as “the reality” or, at least, as the right and true conception. We referred to this when we analyzed hegemony.

Sometimes, there are objections to the term “hegemony”, because it is associated with a mandatory negation of liberty and of solidarity. However, in the conception we are postulating here, it does not have to be so: we may think that the ideal of the construction of a society, which respects liberty and appeals to solidarity, hegemonizes the political field. In fact, there is always and necessarily an understanding of reality –a world view or conscience, assumed by the common, but conceived by only a part of the collective. Without that understanding, social life would be impossible. For example, it is necessary to have a calendar in common; without it, it would be impossible to schedule a meeting like this, or to execute a contract, or to pass sentence. But, the calendar we use is the result of the hegemony of a part of the world population: we count years since Christ birth; we use the Gregorian calendar, etc. This calendar is not the only one that exists, but it is hegemonic, and it could not be otherwise: years could be counted since Buda’s or Mohammed’s birth, or since the Bastille storming, the important thing is that we all have a way to understand each other in order to measure time.

When we propose to radicalize democracy, we do not refer to the possibility of a perfect, “pure” democracy, but to the generation of the means to show the nature of those hegemonic constructions. From this perspective, we accept the existence of inevitable antagonisms as well as the possibility of consensus, assuming that both are necessarily contingent and provisional.

The problem does not lie in constructing a society without hegemony. That would be a psychotic society. On the contrary, each member should understand that there is no behavior or institution that would be natural. Politics, economy, sexuality, as well as equalities and disparities are not given by nature. Nothing is established once and for all.

An excellent example is the deconstructive strategy used by Ricardo Gomez against the hegemonic topics like “the valorative neutrality of science”

(2014) or "the neoliberal economics has scientific basis, so every alternative is irrational" (2004). He not only refutes this topics, but works in the construction of an alternative thought.

This is about constructing a new hegemony that articulates all the demands of the victims of global and local injustices. But certainly, in practice, this articulation is not easy. Flora Tristán, a brilliant and tireless intellectual and activist, experienced firsthand those difficulties. When she started her battle for the emancipation of workers, during the Industrial Revolution, she had to deal with their resistance to accept that they could not free themselves fully if women remained in a subaltern situation. Furthermore, when she had to travel with her children due to an extreme economic situation, and discovered the horrors of slavery of black and indigenous people, she had to face the refusal of French workers and their women to assume that their struggle could not ignore the suffering of slaves. With her clear and simple style, she remembered her first contact with slavery in the Tropics as follows: "I did not know that all human beings were siblings" (2008).

The difficult articulation of the demands of justice of the subalternized groups has always led -throughout history- to the consolidation of structures of domination in which a minority profits from the efforts of all the community. In a global context, this explains why one percent of the world population has the same accumulated wealth as the remaining ninety-nine percent (Oxfam, 2014). This situation does not satisfy anybody, but the financial system has so much power that the political powers cannot reverse it. It is necessary to extend democracy to others fields, like economy and culture.

The task is not easy, but it is unavoidable if we intend to live in a better world. An advantage is that mysterious energy that peoples and individuals have shown in their eagerness to be free and happy. The incompetence of liberal democracies to comply with these demands, by breaking the ruling hegemonic constructions, is not a sign of the exhaustion of democracy, but of a political democracy being focused only on formal and procedural aspects. Obviously, these aspects should not be disregarded, but they are not enough. It is not about adding

more topics to be voted on or to have more frequent elections. It is neither about electoral reforms nor “direct democracy versus representative democracy”, but rather about generating the means so that we all can be the architects of our destiny, and not an instrument of anybody’s ambitions. In conclusion, it is about expanding, deepening and radicalizing democracy so that hegemony is considered in terms of liberation instead of domination.

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