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Polarisations in the world-system

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Polarisations in the world-system

The project led by Immanuel Wallerstein’s is re-examining various aspects/dimensions of polarisations over the last 500 years is a fascinating and ambitious project: ten aspects of the transformations/trends over this long period were chosen in order to examine how matters have been transformed during this time in the core, semi-periphery and periphery of the world-system. Of course not all of the aspects/dimensions necessarily follow the same logic, sequence, time-frame or direction. Some the time-span (e.g. they emerged later or took off later) and the very concept of time does not follow a Kondratieff or other long-term types of cycles or logics and/or a longer-term linear curve; also within each there are often contradictory and alternative trends. Moreover, the distinction between core, semi-periphery and periphery of the world-system can be blurred or even nonexistent. The broad themes are the following: wealth; deruralization; urbanization; state power; citizenship; enterprises; ecology; gender; cultural practices and deviance. Not all papers are so far at the same level of advancement but they will promise to be so in a year’s time.

The paper by Patricio Korzeniewicz and Timothy Moran on inequality, wealth and income is measuring empirically the levels of inequality in the world. Their propositions, which are empirically backed, provide a global survey mapping the inequality over the last 500 years. The paper has a bearing on our deviance project in that there seems to be a complicated system that reproduces inequalities and this can be measured: the world is polarising in multiple ways but there are mechanisms of convergence. Eric van Haute’s team is working on deruralization in three different regions of the world; both the conceptual framework as well as the empirical case-studies have a bearing on deviance. Peter Taylor and Dennis Smith who are working on urbanization nicely complements Eric’s work: the urban and rural are transformed and the question of migration is a key dimension that connects to deviance in all the previous papers.

Fisun’s paper on citizenship promises to examine political/legal and social dimensions of the citizenship question aiming to see if there is polarisation or otherwise: citizenship has a shorter history span and the debates over citizenship seem to be more relevant today than before. Here I am not convinced by Immanuel Wallerstein’s argument that the [liberal] ‘march of progress’ via the expansion of ius soli as a continuing long-term tern, despite the changes over the last 30 years: at least from the experience of the EU, the post-1980 consensus is that there is a tendency not to expand but to close the ranks on ius soli [birth-right] by enhancing the ius sanguinis [ethnic/blood-based] principles in term of acquisition of citizenship. Whether this will be a ‘blip’ over a longer-term tendency or whether this is confined to the narrow confines of the European core, are empirical questions. In any case, I would argue that the insistence, if not obsession, with the ethnic or ‘blood’ connection for the acquisition of citizenship is not only morally indefensible, it is practically very problematic in the organisation of the nation-state: why should a third generation Italian from Argentian have more of right to reside in Italy than a second generation TCN born in Italy? Of course there are moves in the opposite direction: family reunification and EU-association agreements for
instance for EU; also there are moves towards the transnationalistion of citizenship or better we must speak of regionalisation of citizenship, with regional integration processes affecting citizenship rights etc. However, I am not very familiar with what is going on in China, India, Indonesia, the Arabic region etc and other Asian countries; in the American continent (particularly in the USA, Brazil/Argentina and whether neoliberal integration systems are affecting citizenship); I know a little more about the African continent (NEPAD etc; regional policies and national policies etc) but this is something to be researched. Atilio Boron, who could not make it to the meeting send a draft outline of his paper on a comparative perspective on state power by emphasising public spending, army, taxation etc. Sasha Fonseca’s paper will trace the transformations of the enterprises: are they growing in power, or being transformed? What is their relation to the state formations? Is their power growing or not? There are methodological, conceptual and empirical questions here in the locating this relationship.

Anna Esther Cecena examines ecology, indigenous peoples and movements in a paper which promises to be fascinating. We can certainly connect here with [potentially] new dimension of ‘sanitary deviance’, which is partly existential and rightly pointed out that it was born with the ‘bacterial revolution [Paster etc]. More to the point however, I think that it will be increasingly connected to the environmental crises and so-called ‘natural disasters’, which are not illustrations of ‘human’, or better ‘social’ disasters which are highly stratified and based on class, race and gender-related in terms of who is actually given the support to survive, to be evacuated etc. Linda Christiansen examines gender over the last 500 years and I presume will contend that Patriarchy is a common feature albeit transformed. Ravi Sundaram will look at cultural practices: he will focus on copyright and media which has undergone a massive transformation of the last years.

Then we did our Deviance: “The story of modernity starts from Don Quixote tilting at wind-mills. He was “deviant”. Mostly it has been told from the perspective of the bewildered mill-owners...” The question for our essay will be simply to answer whether the world has polarised or not and how; as social scientists we are inclined to say ‘things are more complex etc.’ We are forced to say more based on our assessment: Can the world change for the better?

Mostly it has been told from the perspective of the bewildered mill-owners...” A cycle goes like this moral panic, shrill and shriller; contestation of the definition of the problem; classification (e.g. Bernier- race, Linnaeus ditto); codification into rule, norm or law (e.g. Colbert or the Manchu jurists); implementation/violence; institutional reconfiguration (slave factory, prison); normalization... The question for our work on deviance and all others will be to answer whether the world has polarised or not and how; as social scientists we are inclined to say ‘things are more complex etc.’

We are forced to say much more: Based on our assessments, how does the world polarisation/convergence is affecting our goal of radically changing the world?