Multiple Modernities and Normative Integration Spheres as theoretical and methodological concepts for comparative social studies

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Introduction

Vitor Blotta

This paper is a work in progress that has as general objectives to introduce the themes of the workshop between the Center for the Study of Violence of the University of São Paulo and the Institut für Sozialforschung from the J. W. Goethe University of Frankfurt, and to facilitate the dialogues among the papers that will be presented during the two days of the workshop. In a larger scope, through a discussion of the main theoretical grounds of the workshop, we aim to raise questions and problems that, we believe, are shared by the more comprehensive research programs of the groups involved, being hence present in the social contexts of Brazil and Germany.

We will begin by explaining why the multiple modernities approach was suggested as a possible theoretical common ground for comparative social studies between the NEV and the IfS, followed by brief remarks and problematizations of this concept such as formulated by S. N. Eisenstadt in his essay Multiple Modernities (2000). Secondly, we will problematize in similar fashion the concept of normative integration spheres as it is being used by the IfS and the NEV research programs.

In order to illustrate some impacts of these theories and problematizations in the history of Brazilian sociological and political thought, we will briefly discuss the contributions of two scholars who propose critiques of the theory of modernity in order to understand the characteristics of the Brazilian modernization process: they are Francisco de Oliveira (or “Chico” de Oliveira) with his works Crítica à Razão Dualista (Critique of the Dualist Reason, 1972) and O Ornitorrinco (The Playtipus, 2003).

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These discussions will be oriented by the question of whether the concepts of multiple modernities, normative integration spheres and the critiques of modernity by Oliveira and Souza are capable of enabling comparative social studies between Brazil and Germany without reproducing some of the vices they themselves identify in classical theories of modernity.

As a partial result of the paper, we will try to situate the impacts of this debate in the theoretical and methodological approaches proposed by the new NEV research program “Building democracy daily: human rights, violence and institutional trust” (CEPID-FAPESP, 2011), and the post-doctoral research project “The Legitimacy of Human Rights through the Political Public Sphere”, developed by Vitor Blotta within the NEV comprehensive program.

In section II of the paper, we will attempt to connect the idea of multiple modernities to the concept of paradoxes of capitalism, such as proposed by the IfS research program. A similar problem is discussed as well by the NEV, with the idea of paradoxes of Brazilian democratization.

By making use of the texts “Paradoxes of Capitalism” (Hartmann & Honneth, 2006) and the summary of the IfS research program “Paradoxes of Capitalist Modernization”, we will explain the exact meaning of the term “paradox” as conceptualized by Honneth and Hartmann, and its historical development in the so called networked capitalism.

Given these explanations, we will describe two examples of these paradoxes as they have occurred in Brazil: i. the transformations of the freedom of press principle in the last three decades, with facts concerning the end of the military dictatorship in 85, the election of President Collor in 1992, and the present debate on freedom of press and media regulation; ii. the transformations of the social welfare and income distribution principles, with social perceptions towards the Federal Government program “bolsa familia” (family aid).
In conclusion, we contrast more recent reflections that Hartmann has raised towards the paradoxes of capitalism thesis with Brazilian scholar Vladimir Safatle’s point of view on the issue in his *Cinismo e a Falência da Crítica* (*Cynicism and the Failure of Critique*, 2008).

We hope that these first remarks and the problems raised will facilitate our discussions during workshop, in a way that the contributions to be presented can help the others advance their particular challenges, but also that the outcomes of the workshop may result in a more or less general common reflection.

I - Multiple modernities and normative integration spheres

Vitor Blotta

In the first work meeting of the partnership between the NEV and the IfS, which took place in Frankfurt, in June 2010, Axel Honneth suggested that before NEV attempted to appropriate categories from the Critical Theory paradigms aiming to analyze problems in Brazilian social reality, or the IfS utilized theses and research findings from NEV to understand similar phenomena in Germany, both institutes needed to take a “step back” and make an effort to understand the normative expectations formed in similar normative integration spheres that were institutionalized in each country’s modernization processes, such as family, work, the state and the public sphere.

In this sense, the theoretical approach over which this common effort could ground itself had to be a non-linear and non-evolutionary conception of modernity, one that was not constituted by a singular group of ideals that had to be followed by any other society that wanted to consider itself modern.

With this orientation in mind, researchers of the NEV made a proposal to participate in a round table on multiple modernities in the 2010 Critical Theory Conference in Prague, when problematizations made by expressions of modernity in Brazilian culture were presented, as well as abstracts that would inspire the contributions that are now made to the first workshop of the NEV-IfS academic partnership. The theory of multiple modernities, firstly conceived by Israeli sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt in the homonymous paper published in 2000, was then accepted by the IfS as common theoretical ground for this first academic common effort between the institutes.
The concept of multiple modernities was formulated as the result of Eisenstadt’s studies on the modernization processes of several countries, including Japan and China. A collection of essays on these studies was published in his *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (II vols., 2003). In general terms, Eisenstadt attempts to refute classical theories of modernity that conceive it as an inevitable and singular program that has been followed by other societies, having the European model as the authentic form of modernization. Eisenstadt includes in these classical conceptions Weber’s theory of the disenchantment of traditional worldviews, but we also believe that Norbert Elias’ “civilizational process”, an institutionalization towards a legitimate Rule of Law, one of the major influences of NEV’s original research program, could also fit into this category.

Differently from these conceptions, the multiple modernities approach argues that modernity simply never existed as a singular program that emerged in Western Europe and was disseminated throughout the world. In contrary to that, we can interpret from Eisenstadt that modernity only began when a multiplicity of diverse programs of modernity emerged, more or less simultaneously throughout the world. This thesis highlights a peculiar use of the modern *reflexivity* concept, given that for Eisenstein, it does not seem to occur only within the internal criteria of each “institutional arena” of modern societies, such as economy, politics and culture, but especially when the differences among programs of modernity reflect on one another. It is thus through the reflection of different modernities that modernity itself began to exist.³

A first problematization that can be made to Eisenstadt’s theory is that he still considers the European program to be the paradigm to every other model, with all of them in a certain way stemming from it, or at least reflecting it. In this sense, it is hard to say that he does not still utilize in his analysis the same concepts he aims to refute, such as the center-periphery perspective. This has impact on Eisenstadt’s own pictures of the several modernizations he studied, interpreting them with unreflected presuppositions that may have ended up undermining the discovery of more peculiar aspects.⁴

Another aspect of Eisenstadt’s theory that can be problematized is the nature of what he calls “institutional arenas” of modernity, considering that he does not develop more

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³ This conception reminds us of the Habermasian thesis that ideology only began to exist with the critique of ideology, such as Marx’s critique of political economy. In the same logic, modern self-comprehensions only become what they are when other self-comprehensions begin to distinguish themselves from them. See, Habermas, Technik und Wissenschaft als ‘Ideeologie’, 2006 (port. Version).

specifically how they intersect with one another, aside from seeing these intersections as examples of continuous tensions between tradition and modernity. We highlight this point because it relates to the concept of normative integration spheres, used by both IfS and NEV scientific programs, being therefore one of Honneth's suggestions for a common theoretical ground for comparative social studies between Brazil and Germany.

The question we must address to the uses we make of this concept is if the separations between the spheres do not in any way compromise the precise identification of complex social problems that seem to occur precisely in the "spaces between", or in the "frontiers" of two or more spheres, such as economy and family, or economy and the State. In this sense, is it sufficient to analyze these "spaces between" spheres as intersections of each one's logics and normativities? Or do we need to go further, maybe trying to identify what are the internal connections (or "co-originalities") between these different logics in order to arrive at more precise interpretations of these problems? The difficulties that NEV's project on organized crime in the Brazilian frontiers has in order to propose more analytical explanations for the phenomena they encounter are only illustrative examples of these questions.\(^5\)

Another problem would be the definition of the institutional level of these spheres, for some of them may not fit into the category of a properly institutionalized arena, such as the public sphere. We will come back to this example at the end of this first part.

Now we turn to two theories from Brazilian scholars that are also aimed at a critique of the singular modernity conception. The sociologist Francisco de Oliveira’s works *Critica à Razão Dualista* (*Critique of Dualist Reason*, originally from 1972) and *O Ornitorrinco* (*The Playtipus*, 2003), published in a singular volume in 2003 are examples of this attempt. Oliveira's critique of modernity is especially directed to the formation of Brazilian political economy. It tries to respond to the scholars of the “theory of dependence”, such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who sought to understand the formation of Brazilian society by identifying its structural dependencies to the dynamics of the so-called developed countries.

We cannot go here into details of Oliveira’s model, but we can say generally that he refutes the dependency thesis, denouncing that the logics of developed countries are

\(^5\) Researches on the so-called "micro-illegalities", from partner academic groups of the NEV, such as those in the National Institute for Science and Technology *Violence, Democracy and Citizen Security*, also approach problems related to these “spaces in between” integration spheres, such as work and the state (law). See. Misse, M. & Werneck, A. (orgs.). *Conflitos de (grande) interesse* [Conflicts of (great) interest], 2012.
not as “opposed” to those of “developing” countries as these theses might have pictured. On the contrary, they are internally connected, and the dualisms of the theory of dependence obliterate the identification of singularities in Brazilian economy.

Assuming here the risks of an overly generalized interpretation, we believe it is also important to question whether Oliveira’s critiques in *Critique of the Dualist Reason and The Playtipus* do not reproduce some residual elements of dependence theory, especially with his analysis of the continuity of the exploitation of Brazilian economy by developed countries, and also because the use of the Playtipus metaphor seems to be a negative result of a dualist comparison between an ideal model of economy based on developed countries, and Brazil’s model.⁶

With Jessé Souza’s works, a similar problematization can also be made, for despite identifying theoretical backlashes in Habermas’ and Weber’s modernization and rationalization theories, such as a precarious consideration for the differentiation of aesthetic and expressive rationalities and their respective institutions, and attempting to develop an alternative theory of modernity, he still seeks a theory that could be suitable for a “peripheral modernity”. That is to say, with Eisenstadt’s multiple modernities, we can ask whether Souza does not make the same mistake that he identified in classical theories of modernity, but in an internal perspective of Brazilian society.

With a critical account of Eisenstadt’s theory, the logical result would be to abandon the distinctions between center and periphery, and if this has to be done within international comparative studies, it would also have to be done in an internal perspective. Therefore, it seems that even though raising important explicative concepts such as the idea of subcitizenship as the result of naturalizations of inequalities, Jessé Souza reproduces in Brazil a similar limit that does Eisenstadt in the multinational perspective: the center-periphery paradigm.

What starts to become clear methodologically, however, is that aside from abandoning dualist perspectives such as developed and developing, center-periphery, as we learn from Oliveira’s lesson, Souza’s and Eisenstadt’s perspectives highlight negatively three levels of reflexivity of the modernization processes: an internal to each integration sphere of societies, one amongst these societies’ integration spheres, and an international one, among each diverse modernization program. Within these three levels, the interferences of the logics of one sphere/spheres/societies to the logics of

the others are seen as persistence of tradition in rationalization and emancipation processes.

We can use this triple reflexivity to approach the new NEV-USP CEPID program, for it has proposed internal and international researches with groups from countries such as South Africa and Mexico, aside from Germany. In the program, the proposal is to evaluate the relationships between social and institutional trust and support for democracy in concrete situations of “delivery” of public services. A discussion on the legitimacy criteria chosen by the project here is hence inevitable, for we cannot confuse legitimacy, as a capacity of engendering rule-abiding actions by the state and society, and legitimation, as the rule-confirming actions themselves.

Instead of proposing the dualism of tradition and modern forms of legitimacy and rule-abiding and non-rule-abiding actions, the subproject The Legitimacy of Human Rights through the Political Public Sphere, which I coordinate, approaches this domain as an intermeshing of normativities that can be analyzed by differentiation, and also by modulation of its discourses. In the first case, the differentiation of normativities is done in order to depict more independently the source of each discourse in the public sphere, and to understand in which sense they intermesh or overlap with others, for instance when economic and technical constraints in moral and ethical problems.

When considering the idea of discourse modulation, we mean the possibility of changing the approach of one discourse to the others, especially when a case of discourse overlapping is analyzed. By doing this, it becomes possible to understand the normativity of each discourse without devaluing it before even approaching the phenomena. In this case, for example, the performance principle, which is more conspicuous in the economic field, will not be previously devalued when it is interfering in a legal issue, for despite not being its main normative claim, there is no legal system that can dismiss some kind of suitable performance in order to “do justice”.

In this sense, we attempt to appropriate this concept from music theory, which uses modulation to change the “tones” of a song in order to better understand is peculiarities. However, the impacts of this appropriation in our analyses still have to be more accurately developed.

In the end of this first part, we can say that because the understanding of the self-reflection of the normative criteria of each country’s integration spheres is connected to the understanding of how their broader modernization programs reflect on one another,
if we want to understand our own societies, we also have to understand each other’s societies and how they distinguish themselves from each other.

II - Modernity, paradoxes and cynicism

Mariana Pimentel

The Workshop “Multiple Modernities, Normative Integration Spheres and Experiences of Violence: Brazil and Germany Compared”, occasioned by the academic partnership between the Institute of Social Research Frankfurt/Main (IfS) and the Center of Study of Violence (NEV)/ Universidade de São Paulo (USP), aimed to discuss conflicts between normative systems in social integrative spheres in Brazil and Germany. In this short paper, I investigate key-concepts, such as modernity, paradoxes and cynicism. My goal is to contribute to the development of epistemological grounds for future researches in the partnership.

First, I connect the idea of “Multiple Modernities” – as developed by S. N. Eisenstadt in a text discussed by the participants of NEV-IfS partnership - with the notion paradox. Then, I perform a more detailed investigation on Honneth´s and Hartmann´s (2006) concept of paradox and articulate it with examples from Brazilian’s recent political debates. In the last section, I write about impasses on the development of the discussion and expose Brazilian scholar Vladimir Safatle’s view on the relation between paradox and cynicism. I conclude with a question: is cynicism, today, an obstacle to freedom in Brazil and in Germany?

In the article “Multiple Modernities” (2000), S. N. Eisenstadt writes:

The ramifications are such as to make evident the fragility and changeability of different modernities as well as the destructive forces inherent in certain of the modern programs, most fully the ideologization of violence, terror, and war. These destructive forces – the “traumas” of modernity that brought into question its greats promises – emerged clearly after World War I, became even more visible in World War II and in the Holocaust, and were generally ignored or set aside in the discourse of modernity in in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Lately, they have reemerged in a frightening way – in the new “ethnic” conflict in parts of the Balkans (especially in the former Yugoslavia), in many of the former republics of the Soviet Union, in Sri Lanka, and in a terrible way in such African countries as Rwanda and Burundi. These are not outbursts of old “traditional” forces, but the result of the ongoing dialogue between modern reconstruction and seemingly “traditional” forces. So, also, fundamentalist and religious communal movements developed within the framework of modernity, and cannot be fully understood except within this framework (p. 25-26)
I want to stress that one of the main arguments of Eisenstadt is that there is something in common in all of those above mentioned experiences: they all relate to the framework of modernity. So, if Eisenstadt is right, we shall conclude that the various experiences that will be investigate in the NEV/IfS partnership can be understood as positions - occupied by Brazilians or Germans - connected to a more or less stable structure.

The modern program establishes normative claims; for instance, demands for autonomy and authenticity. In diverse circumstances of time and space different vocabularies express peculiar meanings of those claims. Investigating these variations on the semantics of recognition is crucial for developing a critical point of view anchored in social experiences of disrespect: as Honneth (2011) writes, it is the current task of the critical theory to unify normative and sociological perspectives.

In the article “Paradoxes of Capitalism” (2006), Honneth and Hartmann discuss how normative claims that, in their social origins, had emancipatory meaning can be incorporated and modified by the structure of neoliberal networked capitalism and, in this context, cause de opposite effects that they originally intended to have.

For instance, in the 1980’s, with the end of the Military Dictatorship, the demand for freedom of speech and freedom of press (connected with the modern idea of authenticity) in Brazil had, doubtless, a social transformative meaning. Presently, however, in the Brazilian debate about media, the claim for freedom of press became the main argument to justify the non-regulation of press. Freedom of press became its opposite: submission of forms of expression to its market value.

According Honneth and Hartmann, in the 1960’s, with the Welfare State in Europe, there were significant progresses in all main areas of normative integration. For instance, has gained force the ideas of individualism as biographic freedom (the human subject doesn’t have to follow the path defined for him by past generations) and legal equality (for example, more rights for foreigners and cultural minorities were recognized).

My interpretation of Eisenstadt’s text makes it compatible with Slavoj Zizek’s (2008) theses. The Slovenian philosopher argues that we should use the concept of modernity (singular) and not multiple modernities; he defends that the focus on the variation of experiences might hide the singular structure that determines those experiences. Eisenstadt, however, uses the expression “multiple modernities” in a very particular way and does not forget about the common framework behind the multiple versions of modernity.
In the beginning of the 1980’s, profound transformations of capitalism took place: welfare regimes were weakened, international firms gained power and financial flows became globally preeminent. These occurrences are expressions of a shift on the core issues of economy: the central questions of economy, today, revolve around consumption and not anymore around production.

With the transformation of capitalism in the 1980s, the normative achievements of the “Social-Democratic Era” were not simple ignored. They were incorporated and modified by the new pressures that emerged with the “Neoliberal Revolution”. Honneth and Hartmann write about a tendency toward a “normative charged economization of the social contexts”. The new capitalism can be successful (and cancel the political neutralization of its imperatives) because it appears to be justified by norms. The trick is: the norms still there, apparently they are the same; it´s only their effects that are the opposite from before.

Honneth and Hartmann write that “paradoxes are a type of contradiction that has a specific structure: a contradiction is paradoxical when, precisely through the attempt to realize an intention, the probability of realizing it is decreased” (2006, p 46).

The authors innovate when they substitute the more traditional schema of “contradictions” of capitalism for a different strategy of analysis which focus in paradoxes. There are two important consequence of this switch of categories:

(a) When we look at contradictions within a society, we tend to create an image of reactionary and emancipatory forces in combat and well-defined social positions that represent these forces. In the other hand, when we think of paradoxes we get a more messy image; emancipatory and reactionary forces are mixed. I believe that we actually get a very interesting blurry image, a picture that can demand us to look at more subtle aspects of experiences and ask if maybe the normative claims transformed by new structures of capitalism still hold the potential of reminding us of their original emancipatory meaning. I suspect that we may find there some sparks of recognition.

(b.) The use of paradoxes schemes (instead of contradictions of social forces) allow us to see that, despties of the growing social interdependence, the individuals increasingly look at their lives and their decisions as something disconnected to social and historical conditions.
I would like to make a few remarks about this last point. The idea of individuals who have biographical freedom and who, through experimentation, can find new forms of self-realization has been modified under new pressures of neoliberalism. In the present time, the discourse of individualism makes it seem like, no matter what is his or her social position, the individual subject is the only responsible for his or her own success and failures. It forgets that one should consider internal and external causality in order to judge the actions of a subject in the correct extent of their responsibility.

Honneth and Hartmann show that the individualistic discourse that presupposes an excessive responsibility for human subjects transforms demands that should be recognized as social rights in paternalistic gifts. Social rights (like the claim that human beings should have minimal material provision) are the recognition by social and State Institutions that the individual is not sole responsible for everything that happens in their lives. They remind us about the connection of the human subject with historical and sociological determinations.

In Brazil, the last presidential election was marked by this issue. One of the main actions of President Lula’s Administration was to create a program called “Bolsa Família” that has the purpose of transferring income to families that are in situation of extreme poverty. Unfortunately - but not surprisingly - there were many accusations of paternalism and not enough discussions about how developments of the program could became last long actions toward poverty reduction or about how those actions could be associated with actualization of social rights.

Although the discussion about paradoxes have doubtless descriptive relevance (as I have tried to show), there has been discussions about how it could help to construct a normative model and become reference for social transformation. The question is: “can the act of identifying paradoxes open possibilities for changing?”

The ideas of Brazilian scholar Vladimir Safatle may open interesting paths for that discussion. Safatle (cf. 2008, 2005) writes about a connection between paradoxes, cynicism and the demands of superego in the present time. According to his point of view, cynicism refers to a position of a human subject who has learned to laugh at norms and, for that reason, does not get surprised when the effects of those norms are the opposite from those that were intended. The lack of a serious commitment with normative principles does not, however, liberate the cynical subject from all obligations. On the contrary, it makes him even more committed to another imperative.
In the beginning of the 20a.Century Freud wrote that the superego inflicts repression of our desires. In the present time, in a context that has been diagnosed as permissive, we experience the opposite situation. Lacan shows that, today, the superego´s order is: Enjoy (jouissance)! Satisfy yourself!

It is not permission for enjoyment. It is an order that creates a demand that can never be fully satisfied. Human subjects who have to enjoy and are never satisfied are always ready to consume. In other words, the demand of the superego fits perfectly with an economy that revolves around incitation of consumption.

It is important to understand the trick of the superego: the obligation to be satisfied is not perceived as obligation, but as freedom (human subjects imagine that the possibility of choosing new things go consume makes them free). That illusion makes the cynical subject incapable of liberating himself from his commitment to the superego´s imperative.

The cynical subject, in the present time, is bounded to an order that obligates him to an unending search for satisfaction through consumption. And, since subjects think of themselves as excessively responsible for their own situation in life, they only have themselves to blame when they cannot achieve that impossible task. Safatle (2005) as well as Honneth (2006) – based on different traditions of psychoanalysis - connect that “compulsion to responsibility” to forms of suffering that are common in the present time such as depression and anxiety.

As a first attempt to answer to the previously established question about how the identification of paradoxes can open possibilities for transformation, one could say that it all depends on how social actors deal with those paradoxes. Safatle (2008, 2005) and also Zizek (1993) theses on cynicism show a problem in that response. One can only expect a reaction with transformative potential from human subjects if they are liberated of their cynical commitment to superego´s imperative. If the Slovenian and the Brazilian philosophers are right, the question that should be asked is: how can we modify the position of the cynical subject in relation to superego´s norm? We cannot forget that the order of the superego in Freudian's times was very different from today’s. That means that the constitution of superego’s imperative is intrinsically connected with the composition of normative arrangements that determines possibilities for human subjects in a particular form of life.
References


