THE PARROT, THE MONKEY AND THE MYTH OF EMULATION OR EXTINCTION IN IR

O papagaio, o macaco e o mito do imitar ou perecer em RI

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On April 13, 2015, one of the most iconic figures of the Latin American left, Eduardo Galeano, passed away. Among his several, pungent works, the author of the internationally acclaimed *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971) left an insightful saying for IR students worth elaborating on. When asked about the future of Latin America, he said the continent had formidable challenges ahead, which could be epitomized in some very specific questions: "Will we convert ourselves in sad caricatures of the North? Will we be like them? Will we repeat the horrors of the consumer society that is devouring the planet? Will we be violent and believe that we are doomed to endless war? Or will we will generate a different world?" (Galeano, 2011). For him, the fate of the continent was dependent upon the proper addressing of these questions. By failing to do so, Latin Americans would be ere at risk of turning into nothing more than sad caricatures of ways of life imposed on them from the outside, perennially governed by systems of power that daily convince them that there is no greater virtue than acting like a parrot; that there is no greater ability than that of the monkey. The parrot and the monkey: those that mimic; the mere echoes of other people's voices.

Paying a tribute to Eduardo Galeano's life as a political activist, this brief scenario analysis/commentary will connect his ideas to a broader discussion on the emergence of the Global South and Karl Marx's reasoning that philosophers – but certainly also thinkers, scholars and intellectuals alike – should not only interpret the world, but change it. Amid the ongoing discussions on the changing character of the

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global structures of power and the rising of new players, such as the BRICS – both as an organization and collective entity and as the moniker that defines Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa individually –, newer, farsighted Southern thinking that can support the practice of these "heavyweights of the South" is pressing. It will therefore be argued here that alternative ways of not only theorizing but also teaching, researching and publishing in IR need to be built on the foundations of the desacralization of the academic and intellectual production of the North and the bury for good of the notion that "the West" [2] is coincident with modernity and that "the non-West" can enter the modern world (and its post-modern moment) only to the extent that it emulates the norms established in Western Europe and the United States.

Neither a parrot nor a monkey, simply an Aborigine

When the British Empire invaded continental Australia and the islands around it, from the second half of the 18th century on, a strange phenomenon occurred: the Aborigines began to die. Thousands of them. Millions of them. Nearly extinction. One of the earliest and most comprehensive attempts to explain the mechanisms of the Aborigines' extinction was the evolutionary perspective. When seeking an explanation for the rapid depopulation of the Aboriginal areas and the projected annihilation of the indigenous inhabitants of the continent the British did recognize the role of violence: "It may be stated broadly that the advance of settlement has … been marked by a line of blood" (McGregor 1997, 52). However, for the colonial power violence was not sufficient an explanation for the continuing disappearance of the Aborigines. "It is clear, therefore [...] that some other causes must be in operation" (McGregor 1997, 52). Prominent among these causes was the Aboriginal's inability to adjust to the European presence. It was argued that the mass death of the Aborigines was the result of

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[2]   On the concepts of North, South, West and non-West see Ferabolli (2014): "The South" – or the periphery, the Third World or any other metageographical category that can encompass the former colonized areas of the world (as if it were even possible) [as different from – opposed to?] "the North" (or the West, the centre, the First World, or United States plus Western Europe and post-1945 Japan, or any other metageographical category that can encompass the highly industrialized and most powerful states of the system – an exercise of synthesis doomed to fail).

the cumulative influence of many and various causes, all arising out of altered surrounding conditions to which either the aborigines must become adapted, or under which they must become extinct. If the aborigine could have become physically and mentally such as a white man, he would have been in equilibrium with his new surroundings. If his physical and mental nature had been able to become modified with sufficient rapidity to come into equilibrium with the changed conditions, he could have survived. But the former alternative is self-evidently an impossibility, and probably the strength of hereditary physical and mental peculiarities has made the latter also an impossibility. The consequence has been that he is rapidly and inevitably becoming extinct (in McGregor 1997, 49).

Unable to emulate the behaviour and catch up with the Europeans, the Aboriginal peoples were merely meeting their fate: extinction.

The evolutionary perspective expressed in the above account of the survival of the fittest is one of those ideas that migrate from the natural to the social world and that find in the Western-centric/Northern-centric discipline of IR the perfect space for echoing. For as a system of thought, IR sustains itself on the widespread belief that there is a centre in the world from where power irradiates to the periphery – civilizing power, enlightening power, disciplining power. Less disseminated is the fact that these forms of power are properly sustained by military, economic and political power. Therefore, those who have the coercive means impose the features defining the end point of an evolutionary timeline for the social world – and they do so by defining themselves as the highest point in the human social evolutionary chain. This Western-centric/Northern-centric rationale is described by J.M. Blaut as the "colonizer's model of the world" an idea that rests on a "substrate of 'geographical difusionism' where progress is seen as flowing endlessly out of the centre toward the otherwise sterile periphery" (Lewis; Wigen 1997, 7).

Culturally, politically, institutionally and ideologically constrained when producing their interpretations of reality, usually referred to as "truth", Western-centric/Northern-centric – mainstream – scholars are at the same time victims and executioners of their own entrepreneurship: the production of world-widely recognized and accepted truths about the social world. They are culturally constrained because they were raised and socialized in a world that places Western Europe and the United States ("the West" and "the North" as concept and practice) in the centre of human history;

they are politically constrained because they are nationals of specific countries and as loyal citizens they defend the interests of the states where they come from – if not for loyalty, in search for governmental funding;   they are institutionally constrained because they are socialized in an environment that just accepts very particular representations of the reality and to be accepted in and recognized by "the group" they have to sing the same song; finally, they are ideologically constrained because deep down in their hearts they have the feeling that they know the truth and that it is their obligation to spread all over the world the accuracy, verity and matter-of-factness of their perceptions of the reality.

Imbued with this spirit of superiority and a mixture of civilizing mission and white man's burden, Western-centric/Northern-centric mainstream scholars, from a very comfortable perspective (well-paid, well-located, well-financed), tend to create hierarchies when dealing with the international phenomena. Starting from where they are – in the West, in the North, in the centre, in the upside of the map – they look down the world and cognitively establish relationships between "the self, the 'other that is like me' and the 'entirely other'", to use Levina's words (see Howitt; Suchet-Pearson 2003, 564). In this power-permeated relationship, the more the non-Western (the Southern?) follows "the norms established in Europe and northern North America" (Lewis; Wigen 1997, 7) the less "other" they become.

It is not difficult to associate the above with the explanations for the mechanisms of Aboriginal extinction: not being able to adapt to the changes brought about by (European) civilization and incapable of absorbing the characteristics of the civilized (European) the only possible destiny was death. Indeed, civilization as equal Europeanization or Westernization/Northernization is a basic assumption of modernity as myth, as it is the fact that

> Modern (European) civilization understands itself as the most developed, the superior, civilization; (...) This sense of superiority obliges it, in the form of a categorical imperative (…) to 'develop' (civilize, uplift, educate) the more primitive, barbarous, underdeveloped civilizations; The path of such development should be that followed by Europe in its own development; (…) Where the barbarian or the primitive opposes the civilizing process, the praxis of modernity must, in the last instance, have recourse to the violence

> necessary to remove the obstacles to modernization; (…) From the point of view of modernity, the barbarian or primitive is in a state of guilt (for, among other things, opposing the civilizing process) (Dussel 1993, 75).

Civilization as Westernization/Northernization is not just one of the possible readings of reality, it is "a political project on a global scale: a project of homogenization through imitation and catching up" (Amin 1989, 111). Adopting the features of the supposed Western/Northern superiority expressed not only in the triad free enterprise and market, secularism and pluralist electoral democracy (Amin 1989) but also in the acceptance of the Newtonian view of the world as the only legitimate way of thinking becomes an imperative if one wants to be intelligible to mainstream scholars; failing to do it so will relegate one to complete otherness, with all the political consequences associated to it. Indeed, as D. Rose elaborates, the all-knowing Western/Northern scholar, centred in a hall of mirrors,

> mistakes its reflection for the world, sees its own reflections endlessly, talks endlessly to itself, and, not surprisingly, finds continual verification of itself and its world view. This is monologue masquerading as conversation, masturbation posing as productive interaction; it is a narcissism so profound that it purports to provide a universal knowledge when in fact its violent erasures are universalizing its own singular and powerful isolation (Rose 1999, 176-177).

Edward Said speaks precisely about that when he compares the intellectual power of Orientalism with a "library" or an "archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held" (1995, 41-42). He explains that this archive is bounced together by "a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective [to explain] the behaviour of Orientals [and to supply] Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere [that allows] Europeans to deal with and even see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics" (Said 1995, 41-42). This unanimously held archive of information bounded by a unifying set of values depicted by Edward Said would keep the same powerful meaning if the word "Orientals" were replaced by "Latin Americans" or "Africans" or any of the peoples from the South. Verily, this metaphorical archive resembles the "palace of mirrors"

described by Irigaray (1985), with its "solid walls of principle" that "give form […] turn ideas into structures, edifices" producing "the absolute power of form […] the solidity of concepts, boundaries and order" (Howitt; Pearsonn 2003, 558).

Performing simultaneous roles of agents and objects of socialization in the construction of social reality, mainstream scholars "become part of the regime of truth, imbued through and through with the imperial representations that have preceded it" (Doty 1996, 166). It is not news that Western-centric/Northern-centric scholars are embedded in the imperial representations of the Arab-Muslims, the Latin Americans, the Africans, the Indians – the non-white peoples – and that these very representations precede their reading of the world's reality. Therefore, if the concept of Global South is to have any meaningful applicability beyond the university walls the tainted Western-centric/Northern-centric perspectives must be challenged, their epistemologies must be contested, and the echoes of their voices must be stopped.

Studies on the Global South by thinkers, scholars and intellectuals hailing from the South – geographically and ideationally speaking – is not only pressing, but vital. As I have said elsewhere (see Ferabolli 2014), Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães noted that the peripheral societies (the South) are isolated from each other and can only see each other under the vigilant eyes of the central countries (the North). The existence of this pervasive (Foucaultian panopticon) "third eye" is evident when it is observed the shortage and even the lack of studies of one peripheral state about another. Meanwhile, the sustained effort of the core countries to study the periphery and to formulate their own views about it – *views that are then disseminated and absorbed by the very periphery* (Guimarães 1999, 17 my italics) - is noteworthy. As insurmountable a task as it may sound, changing the global architecture of power will require more than altering the overall military, economic, and political capacity of the South vis-à-vis the heavyweights of the North; it will rather demand that the virtues of the monkey and the parrot be replaced with those of the critical, enlightened *homo sapiens.*

Conjuntura Austral

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ABSTRACT

This brief scenario analysis will argue that alternative ways of not only theorizing but also teaching, researching and publishing in IR (International Relations) need to be built on the foundations of the desacralization of the academic and intellectual production of the North and the bury for good of the notion that "the West" is coincident with modernity and that "the non-West" can enter the modern world (and its post-modern moment) only to the extent that it emulates the norms established in Western Europe and the United States.

Keywords: Eduardo Galeano; Global South; North-South divide;

RESUMO

Esta breve análise de conjuntura irá argumentar que formas alternativas de teorizar, ensinar, pesquisar e publicar em RI (Relações Internacionais) precisam ser construídas sobre os alicerces da dessacralização da produção acadêmica e intelectual do Norte e do sepultamento definitivo da noção de que apenas "o Ocidente" é coincidente com a modernidade e de que "o não-ocidental" somente pode entrar no mundo moderno (e em seu momento pós- moderno) na medida em que ele emula as normas estabelecidas na Europa Ocidental e nos Estados Unidos

Palavras Chave: Eduardo Galeano; Sul Global; divisão Norte-Sul