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Book Review

El Miedo en la ciudad de Rio de Janeiro: dos tiempos de una historia. (The Fear in the City of Rio de Janeiro, two times and the same story)

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There is no doubt that we live in a time when terror, one of our basic emotions, intersects with politics as never before. Even with the configuration of cultural ethos, which historically was constructed to protect people from external threats, it is no less true that each nation develops its own scary object (external enemy) to legitimize its policies and programs. While Americans are worried about the rise and expansion of Muslim terrorism, Latin Americans are afraid of the limitations of their government to deter local crime. One of the aspects that delineates politics in Latin America is associated with the needs of an internal enemy, which is conducive for the elite to control the workforce as well as those material asymmetries produced by capitalism (Korstanje 2015).

This is the background this book has in mind. Brazilian Sociologist Vera Malaguti Batista presents an extremely interesting investigation entitled *El Miedo en la Ciudad de Rio de Janeiro* [*Fear in the city of Rio de Janeiro*]. In this book, she dissects the historical allegories constructed by the status quo to demonize workers, slaves, and non-white ethnicities. In this respect, the Riots of Males (*La Rebelion de los males*) was a founding event where thousands of slaves launched to the streets to protest and struggled against white lords' oppression. Inspired by the lesson of Coran, African slaves understood the need to defy the legal scaffolding that legitimates slavery. This rebellion was controlled and eradicated by the use of extreme violence, but henceforth, a cleavage between Whiteness and the rest of Brazil persisted.

To understand the reasons why racism played a vital role in erecting a symbolic wall between Europeans and other groups, we have to delve into the ways Spain and Portugal arrived and colonized the Americas. Based on a medieval logic, which is based on the binomial friend vs. foe, Europeans claimed their superiority over other ethnic collectives leading these others to internalize their inferiority. Allegorically, the imposition of judgment was a key factor in order to persuade the native of the impossibility to defy the European lords. Not only the medieval inquisition but the hunt of witches in Europe were examples of this. This disciplining tactic was even enrooted in the cosmology of the Catholic Church. Over the centuries, Brazil as well as other Latin American nations manipulated the fear of their people so that authoritarian police who are oriented to control these undesired others is passively accepted.

This book is formed in four short yet pungent chapters, where the author dissects "an aesthetization of marginality". The first chapter, one of the best, critically discusses the conceptualizations of Jean Dulmeneau and Carlo Guinzburg to indicate how the repressive apparatuses of the state have been used by the Catholic Church to legitimize the conquest of the Americas. On one hand, this medieval institution engendered a frightening discourse to administer the salvation of souls or the requirements to enter into heaven;

these (dispositive ideologies) were manipulated to impose a ruling legal jurisprudence on earth, oriented to subdue the natives' resistance. On the other hand, it instilled the fear of dying into the minds of the natives by the articulation of pedagogic mechanisms, which changed from education to catechism of "savage peoples."

In the second chapter, Vera reminds the reader how positive science not only accompanied this process of colonization, stressing the so-called supremacy of European lords over aborigines, but also produced a conceptual framework to demonize these "criminals." The position of modern medicine to situate unworthy natives beyond the circles of exclusivity within Brazilian society reinforced the belief of the official history, while many peripheral voices were marginalized. Furthermore, Vera cites the need to discuss "psychoanalysis" as a fertile discipline created to contradict established truths. To the ruling elite, which monopolizes the symbolic resources towards the process of law-making, fantasy allows a new configuration of the already-existent legal order. This point of discussion is of paramount importance to understand Vera's argument because it highlights that the world of legal issues opposes illegality. However, these are two complementary sides of the same coin. Following the Foucauldian thesis, which Vera acknowledges is historically determined by the elite, the law pushed many ethnicities towards the periphery of civilization.

As with the previous chapter, the third chapter focuses on the idealized image of Brazil as an international tourist destination, while internal conflict, inter-class struggle, violence and drug trafficking are never covered in the media. What is more important to debate is to what extent the fabricated discourse on criminality as well as drug trafficking and the life in Favelas are opposed to the maximization of pleasure, hedonism and consumption of dream beaches at the coast.

Here, two assumptions should be made. The first and most important is that we are witnesses to the rise of a new psychopathology caused by postmodernism, with the enthusiasm of Psychiatry and the Medical Gaze to deny non-white citizens their right to singularity. To put this in other terms, far from being a problem, the consumption of legal or illegal drugs is allowed by the upper class, while restricted to poorer agents. The drug problem is not explained by its negative effects, but by its functionality to express the need to avoid drug-consumption, as it affects the bright future of privileged youths. At the time some drugs were monopolized by the pharmaceutical industry to potentiate the necessary skills of upper capitalist classes to be more competitive, stronger, smarter, or faster; a negative stereotype of drugs is ascribed to the lower classes which are called "dangerous drugs." Nowadays, the disciplinary mechanisms of the state are tilted at controlling dangerous drugs by the implementation of several institutions, but little atten-

tion is paid to those legal drugs, many of which are consumed by the elite. The expansion of the nation state, historically, has been based on its efficacy to create and administer fears, which gradually led to exclude some marginal ethnicities such as Africans, Asians and Aborigines. Criminology adjoined to Medical Gaze supported the conceptual framework that enthralled Europeans over the rest of society.

Last but not least, the fourth section was the most polemic to our end and Malaguti Vera acknowledges the “Iberian legacy” under the critical lens of scrutiny. According to her, Iberian Empires once colonized the continent and struggled to resolve a controversy which is shown by the combination of a Military Thomism and neo-Thomism with the liberal reason resulting from the Enlightenment. As a result of this, the creation of a robust jurisprudence rested on the needs of controlling “the native”, not by what they do, but what they think or feel. It produced the adoption of preventive disciplines and violence in the hands of the state to violate the rights of its citizens.

The above mentioned argument agrees with what Freddy Timmermann dubbed as “great terror”, or Guidotti Hernandez as “unspeakable violence”, which signals to “an ideological discourse where fear played a vital role in creating an estate of exemption” for Latin American oligarchies. Both scholars agree that a much deeper narrative legalized the repression over non-European groups by the introduction of fear as the main pretext. It triggers an interesting discussion which merits exploration from an inter-disciplinary perspective.

This is a must-read book, and is highly recommended for social scientists interested in the politics of Latin American states as well as the role played by criminology in enlarging the gaps produced by colonialism. While the basic economic sources of capitalism which produces inequalities are not corrected by populist governments, local crime is far from being reduced.

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