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CONTENTS

Social sciences
and social reality
in Central America

*"Familiarity is the
opium of the imagination"*
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The poverty and weakness of Central America, combined
with its potential strategic importance in world politics, have
made this region extremely vulnerable to external intellectual
and political influences. The result of these influences has
been national political processes guided by European notions
of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism, and a social
sciences tradition that is trapped in the intellectual ethos of
its mid-nineteenth century European precursors. This article
argues that the Eurocentric theoretical orientation dominating
Central American social sciences ignores the fact that the
relation between time and space that conditioned the
evolution of Europe is qualitatively different from that which
has influenced the political evolution of Central America
since 1492. Different time/space relations have produced
different kinds of States as well as different political actors
and institutions. The main challenge faced by the Central
American social sciences today is to identify these
differences and to study and treat them as Central American
normalities, rather than as deviations from pre-established
European patterns.

I

Introduction

The formal political history of Latin America has been, to a large extent, a coarse imitation of European political history. Social designs and projects for the organization of political life in this vast region of the world have been predominantly formulated and rationalized on the basis of political values, ideas and practices that originated in Europe (Davis, 1963, p. 2; Zea, 1963; Salazar Bondy, 1968). During the eighteenth century, the ideas of the Enlightenment fired the imagination of the *Criollos* and supplied them with an intellectual foundation to legitimize their pro-independence movement. In the nineteenth century, positivism provided the national elites of Latin American countries with a prescription for "order and progress", while in the twentieth century democracy became either an argument for the preservation of social order, or a reason to subvert the existing one. After the Bolshevik Revolution, socialism was transformed into a cure for all social ills. More recently, neo-conservatism has become the ideology with which the Latin American elites prepare themselves for the twenty-first century.

Latin American philosophy and social sciences have also imitated their European counterparts. Writing in 1944, Risieri Frondizi pointed out that "the so-called Latin American philosophy is nothing more than the reformulation of philosophical problems originated in Europe. Hence, to be concerned about its history is to deal with the influence that European philosophy had on it" (Frondizi, 1944, p. 95). In an analysis of the current situation of Latin American philosophy, Jorge J. E. Gracia argues that thanks to the work of philosophers such as Leopoldo Zea, Eduardo García Maynez, Juan Llambias de Azevedo, Jorge Millas, Francisco Miró Quesada and Frondizi himself, Latin American philosophy has gone beyond the stage of "uncritical absorption" and is moving "from a period of critical interaction into a period of maturity" (Gracia, 1988-1989, pp. 4-5). However, Gracia points out, Latin American philosophy "still moves to a large extent due to external stimuli: it reacts instead of acting by itself. The changes that take place in it periodically are still largely the result of the impact that European

and North American ideas have on our philosophers" (Gracia, 1988-89, p. 4).[1]

Moreover, sociology, political science, economics and anthropology have also followed a Eurocentric perspective; that is, they have developed a theoretical orientation that is "based on the narrow and rather particular experience of Western Europe (actually a much smaller nucleus of countries in central and north-west Europe) and the United States..." (Wiarda, 1990, p. 396). Ever since their inception in the post-World War II period, the Latin American social sciences have been reluctant to explore the distinct nature of the region's history after 1492, the year when Colon's arrival created a time bridge that connected the newly-discovered continent with Europe's past.[2] The history of Europe and the values, ideas and principles emerging from that history became the background against which the emerging Latin America would define its basic notions and conceptions about politics, economics and society for the next five hundred years (Wolf, 1982).

Few regions of the continent show the imitative nature of both Latin American politics and social sciences as clearly as Central America.[3] The size, fragmentation and weakness of the Isthmus, combined with its potential strategic importance in world politics, have made Central America extremely vulnerable to external intellectual and political influences. The result of these influences has been national political processes guided by European notions of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism, and a social sciences tradition that is trapped in the intellectual ethos of its mid-nineteenth century European precursors.

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[1] For a recent review of Latin American philosophy, see Donoso, 1992.

[2] I agree with Kahl that social sciences emerged in Latin America only after World War II (Kahl, 1976, p. 1). For a review of Latin American social thought before World War II see Davis, 1963.

[3] The practice of philosophy in Central America is very limited. For a review of the current situation in the region see Gracia, 1989.

This paper argues that the Eurocentric theoretical orientation dominating Central American social sciences ignores the fact that the relation between time and space that conditioned the evolution of Europe is qualitatively different from that which influenced the political evolution of Central America since 1492. Different time-space relations have produced different kinds of States as well as different political actors and institutions. The main challenge faced by the Central American social sciences today is to identify these differences and to study and treat them as Central American normalities, rather than as deviations from pre-established European patterns.

Part II of this paper outlines the relationship between the development of social sciences and the spatial-temporal dimension of European politics. The imitative and Eurocentric character of Central American social sciences, and the incongruence between social theory and social reality in Central America, are discussed in part III. Part IV contains the outline of a proposal for closing the gap between social theory and social practice in the region. This outline is based on Charles Taylor's work on interpretation and the human sciences. Finally, part V summarizes the main arguments of the paper and presents some tentative conclusions.

II

Social sciences and the spatial and temporal dimension of politics in Europe

The State, both as a concept and a political phenomenon, "contains" the historical experience associated with the organization of the territorial, social, political, cultural and economic life of the Western world over the last four hundred years. In this sense, the State is "constitutive of political reality" (Vincent, 1987, p. 224). Different views regarding the nature of the State represent different interpretations of the most essential institutional development of Western social life. Not surprisingly, the State has been the centre of controversy throughout the development of the social sciences in Europe. Class-based, elitist, and pluralist interpretations of the State compete with each other in terms of their explanatory power. All of them, however, assume the existence and centrality of a sovereign territorial and symbolic arena within which conflict over the distribution of economic and political power takes place according to legal rules and regulations that are enforced and institutionalized by bureaucratic machinery.

The emergence of modern States transformed politics into a struggle over the distribution of power within the boundaries of legally established sovereign territories. It is no accident, then, that there is a close relationship between the development and consolidation of the theory and practice of national sovereignty during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that of democracy (Beloff, 1962,

pp. 170-182; Hinsley, 1986, pp. 158-235). Reinhold Niebuhr has noted that modern democratic theories "almost without exception assume the autonomy of the national State" (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 64). F. H. Hinsley corroborates this view when he explains that:

"The rise of legislatures, the introduction of representation, the extension of suffrage and the insertion of constitutional features into the basis, the composition and the procedures of government necessitated the notion that sovereignty resided in the body politic as a means of preserving the precondition of effective action in and for the community" (Hinsley, 1986, p. 223).

The emergence of the modern concept of sovereignty is linked historically to the decline of both the Roman Empire and, later, the universal authority of the Catholic Church in Europe. Originally the concept was articulated to legitimize the concentration of "absolute" power and authority in the hands of a sovereign king. This concept evolved later "into the closer association of the developing State and the developing community, which became inevitable when it was discovered that power had to be shared between them" (Hinsley, 1986, p. 222). Therefore, the political systems of the liberal democratic societies of Europe have been the result of an historical struggle over the definition and interpretation of the concept of sovereignty. This process can be

mentally pictured as a series of concentric circles expanding from a central point which represents the scope of sovereignty *in natu nascendi*. Each circle symbolizes a re-conceptualization of the principle of sovereignty and the articulation of a new consensus among domestic power contenders with regard to political rights and the rules that govern political participation and competition. From this perspective, sovereignty is the foundation of political order at the national level. It is the "legal container" in which the turbulence of domestic political competition is balanced through the imposition of limits to both the institutional form and the substance of political competition. The most important of these limitations is that political struggles must take place within the legal and physical boundaries of the State, and with the resources available within these boundaries. Sovereignty, in this sense, does not simply regulate relations among States, but also conditions the competition for power within them, by establishing legal and territorial limits on the resources available to domestic power contenders. From this perspective, the political history of a sovereign State is, to a large extent, locally determined and the future is assumed to be an extrapolation of a geographically and temporally bound present.

The emergence of sovereign States represented the spatial expression of historical time. Time was expressed in space; the physical and legal boundaries of the State served as "containers" of a historical past, a present and, presumably, a future. Thus, sovereign States became "political spaces", that is, geographical areas "where the plans, ambitions and actions of individuals and groups incessantly jarred against each other –colliding, blocking, coalescing, separating..." (Wolin, 1960, p. 60). Sovereignty allowed territories to contain the main determinants and accumulated consequences of their political evolution within legal and geographical boundaries. As such, it came to represent what Gross c alls the "specialization of time and experience", which implies "the tendency to condense time relations –which are an essential ingredient for personal and social meaning– into space relations" (Gross, 1981-82, p. 59).

Specialization created the conditions for the emergence and consolidation of national political histories, with national political actors and institutions. In Europe, this political history evolved around the

expansion of citizenship and the challenge it represented to national class structures (Gross, 1985, p. 93). Both class and citizenship constitute evolving historical realities associated with the struggle over the distribution of power within sovereign States. In this sense, the concept of class has a relative meaning *vis-à-vis* citizenship and, conversely, citizenship is a category which has an explanatory value that is intimately linked with that of class. From this perspective, the democratic political history and institutions of the West are the result of the conflictive relationship between these two principles. This conflictive relationship produced civil rights (liberty, freedom of speech, equality before the law, and the right to property ownership) in the eighteenth century; political rights (political participation through universal manhood suffrage) in the nineteenth century; and social rights (welfare, security and education) in the twentieth century (Lipset, 1977).

The actors involved in the struggle for the definition of citizenship and democracy had to justify their social desires and preferences. In so doing, they self-described their roles as actors and articulated explanations that served as the moral foundation for the adoption of specific political institutional arrangements. The relationship between these "self-descriptions" and explanations on the one hand, and the production of social theory on the other, is an intimate one. Charles Taylor points out that "the practices which make up a society require certain self-descriptions on the part of its participants" (Taylor, 1983a, p. 3). The understandings articulated in such self-descriptions "can be called pre-theoretical, not in the sense that they are necessarily uninfluenced by theory, but in that they do not rely on theory" (Taylor, 1983a, pp. 3-4). From this perspective, social theory is made "when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norms which are essential to it" (Taylor, 1983a, p. 4). A theory is, then, "the making explicit of a society's life, i.e., a set of institutions and practices" (Taylor, 1983a, p. 11).

Western social sciences have made explicit the self-descriptions and explanations articulated by the actors involved in the historical development of Western societies. From this perspective, they are the intellectual offspring of the history of the West. They emerged as an intellectual response to the historical conditions of nineteenth-century Europe, and more

specifically to the need for social order in the aftermath of the French and the Industrial Revolutions (Bottomore, 1983, p. 40). The roots of Western social sciences, however, extend beyond the immediate historical circumstances that led to the birth of those fields of study. In fact, their metatheoretical foundations are contained in the production of at least three hundred years of political theory. Comte's view of society derived from philosophy, and he conceived of sociology as a philosophic movement (Martindale, 1960, p. 17). His intellectual enterprise, then, was a continuation of the search for explanations and answers to European historical developments that has preoccupied the minds of Western thinkers for centuries; however, his contribution represented a departure from the prevailing philosophical tradition. His was a "positive" philosophy that differed from the "metaphysical" enterprise of conventional political thinkers of his time (Giddens, 1978, p. 246). Regardless of these differences, Western philosophy and Comte's sociology should be regarded as part of a continuous intellectual effort to make explicit the institutions and practices of Western societies, in particular the phenomenon of the sovereign State and the political practices and institutions engendered by it.

Western social sciences have recently been challenged to re-conceptualize the time-space relations that inform modern social analysis (Wallerstein, 1984 and 1991; Adam, 1990, p. 13). Most notably, Anthony Giddens has argued that these interpretations do not take into consideration the changes in the relationship between time and space that have been brought about by the globalization of modernity. This process is defined by Giddens as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaded by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Globalization destroyed the correspondence between time and space that modern social sciences have taken for granted, and invalidated the notion of sovereignty as the enclosing of political phenomena

within geographical boundaries that contain a national history. According to Giddens, globalization brought about the "disembedding of the social system". By this he refers to "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time space" (Giddens, 1990, p. 21). Globalization, in other words, penetrated the walls of the sovereign States, linking domestic political processes with international forces. The result of this penetration is the end of politics as a domestic activity and the restructuring of national and political processes at a supranational level (Luard, 1990).

Gidden's criticism of social sciences is relevant to the re-conceptualization of the State, not only in the West but also in developing countries. However, it is important to keep in mind that globalization is a force that runs counter to the resilience and variety of the human condition. The capitalist mode of production, as Eric R. Wolf points out, "may be dominant within the system of capitalist market relations, but it does not transform all the people of the world into industrial producers of surplus value" (Wolf, 1982, p. 297). Therefore, the adoption by social scientists of a "global level of analysis" could be damaging if it ignores the internal specifics of peripheral societies (Slater, 1989, p. 20). Moreover, globalization has a differential political effect on developed and developing countries. Western developed countries carry with them a "reservoir" of political sovereignty that they began to accumulate in the seventeenth century. This created the conditions for the patterns of political conflicts and institutions which resulted in the liberal democratic tradition that we know today. The radicalization of modernity may have reduced this reservoir, but has not exhausted it. Furthermore, these countries located at the centre of the world economy have found ways of protecting their political autonomy by exerting their influences in the international forums constituting the organizational infrastructure of the world system (Faletto, 1989).

III

Social sciences and social reality in Central America

The Central American social sciences have perpetuated and legitimized the use of European history as the proper foundation for the analysis of Central American social reality. Concepts, models and theories that evolved out of the European historical experience have become the lenses through which Central Americans try to understand their social existence (Stone, 1990, pp. 145-146). It is not surprising, then, that the academic fashions that have swept Oxford and Princeton are the same as those that have captured the minds of scholars in the universities of the region. As in Europe and North America, the central point of contention in the academic circles of Central America has been that which emerged out of the confrontation between Marxist and "bourgeois" social theories.

The social sciences proper emerged in Central America in the 1970s (Camacho, 1985, p. 1; Lungo Ucles, 1985, p. 4; Torres-Rivas, 1989, p. 5). Prior to that decade, social analysis was carried out by "amateur essayists or *pensadores* who were trained and supported as lawyers and bureaucrats" (Kahl, 1976, p. 1; Torres-Rivas, 1990, pp. 18-19).[4] Three main intellectual approaches can be identified in the historical evolution of Central American social sciences.

The first one is functionalism. Social scientists operating from this perspective do not question the foundations of the social systems within which they operate. Their main objective is the promotion of greater technical capacity in areas such as economics, education and public administration, for the attainment of development objectives.[5]

The second one is an orthodox Marxist approach that is based on a "vulgar" interpretation of Marxism. Vulgar Marxists, according to C. Wright Mills, "seize upon some ideological characteristics of Marx's political philosophy and identify these parts as the whole" (Mills, 1968, p. 96). Nevertheless, orthodox Marxism had a considerable influence on Central American students and intellectuals who opposed the status quo and the notion of development advocated by functionalism throughout the 1970s.[6]

The third approach is Marxist structuralism. Like orthodox Marxists, proponents of this approach are critical of the premises, the methods, and the objectives of "developmentalism" (Arredondo et al., 1984, pp. 20-21). However, they are far more critical in their use and interpretation of Marxist theory than orthodox Marxists, as they are influenced by the work of Gramsci, Althusser and even Weber.[7]

The year 1979 constituted a critical point in the development of Central American social sciences. With the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, proponents of both the orthodox and the structuralist approaches began to concentrate on analyzing the causes and consequences of the revolution (Aguilera, 1989, p. 22). Orthodox Marxists interpreted this historic event as the inevitable outcome of the "decline of capitalist imperialism", while Marxist structuralists adopted a position of largely unquestioning support for the Nicaraguan revolutionary government. For obvious reasons, this was more evident in Nicaragua, where most social scientists assumed a position of unconditional commitment to the principles of the State.[8]

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[4] Kahl's reference is to social analysts in Latin America before World War II. His description does not apply to Central America, however, where social sciences emerged only in the 1970s.

[5] The Central American Institute of Public Administration (ICAP), in the 1970s, and the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE) are examples of institutions that have supported functionalist social science research in the region.

[6] For examples of this type of social science research see Villagra, 1981, and De Castilla, 1985.

[7] Some of the most important exponents of this current of opinion are Edelberto Torres-Rivas, Daniel Camacho, Guillermo Molina Chocano and Gabriel Aguilera.

[8] See, for example, Lanuza et al., 1983.

It is interesting to note that proponents of the functionalist approach in Nicaragua quickly adapted to the changing political climate of the country. Their traditional attitude of supporting the prevailing political system, whatever its ideological orientation, logically resulted in their collaboration with the new Sandinista government.[9]

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in the elections of 1990, and the stalemate of the revolutionary process in El Salvador have left the Central American social sciences in a state of intellectual crisis (Torres-Rivas, 1990). Marxist intellectuals have been unable to adapt their theoretical schemes to make sense of the profound political and economic transformation of the world today. On the other hand, functionalist social sciences have become receptive to the notion that history has ended, and that all that is left for Third World social scientists is to contribute to the perfectibility of a new world order.

The crisis of the Central American social sciences, however, is not simply the result of changing international circumstances. Rather, it is the long-term consequence of their imitative character. The end of the Cold War merely exposed the unauthentic nature of many of the concepts, theories and assumptions that have influenced the production of knowledge in the region. It simply showed that the emperor had no clothes.

From their inception, the social sciences perpetuated the notion of Central America as a geographical extrapolation of Europe.[10] This notion was, to a large extent, the result of Central American social scientists' reliance on a textual understanding of European

interpretations of social reality. Textual interpretations of ideas are based on the assumption that "the text provides the 'sole' and 'self-sufficient' object of enquiry. Reading the texts carefully over and over again will prove sufficient for revealing their meaning" (Boucher, 1985, pp. 216-217). From this perspective, the context within which ideas emerged is either bluntly ignored or treated as a matter of historical curiosity. The result of this approach to the study of ideas is a mystification of books and authors, which are perceived as possessing transcendental and suprahistorical qualities.

Social theories, however, are shaped by the spatial and temporal contexts within which the social scientist operates (Gouldner, 1970, pp. 25-60). A knowledge of these contexts adds meaning to the texts produced by scholars, and facilitates an understanding of the limitations of their concepts, theories and ideas.

Transcending "textualism" in the Central American social sciences requires a critical examination of the conceptualization of the time and space relations that have informed the production of local social theory. This examination is essential for the articulation of concepts, theoretical approaches and methodologies that can bring the Central American social sciences closer to the reality they are trying to comprehend and explain.

The political societies studied by the Central American social sciences are the product of a correlation between time and space that is qualitatively different from the time-space relation which affected the formation of political societies in Europe. The legal principle of sovereignty that was formally attached to Central American States by international law lacks the historical, social and political significance that it has for European societies. The Central American States were never capable of containing or expressing their own histories: instead, they have been open receptacles of the history of the West from their inception. Therefore, Central American states have never been spatial expressions of historical time. Rather, they constitute formal and legal arrangements designed on the basis of European interpretations of politics and society. They are the product of the imposition of Europe's political values and traditions on the Indian reality of the region. As a result of this imposition, Europe's past became the historical framework against which the political processes of Central America would be evaluated for the next five hundred years. Self-definitions of European

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[9] After the Sandinista victory in 1979, the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE) became an active participant in the training of public employees and in the organization of the Nicaraguan public sector. Jaime Wheelock, one of the most important leaders of the Sandinista movement, referred to INCAE in 1975 as "an institution designed according to the educational model of the United States...its objective is to train the medium-level technicians needed for the administration of the American companies massively established in Central America during the 1960s... In INCAE, a group of American professors are in charge of disseminating the capitalist techniques of exploitation that they have developed, taking as models the exploitative practices of multinational corporations" (Wheelock, 1975).

[10] Ironically enough, the European experience which has influenced the Central American social sciences excludes the Ibero-Latin tradition (For an understanding of this phenomenon at the Latin American level see Wiarda, 1973, 1974 and 1990, and Veliz, 1980).

political actors and explanations of European political practices were transplanted into the region and used, after Independence, to justify the political, economic, and social institutions of the emerging states (see Bradford Burns, 1989). These institutions neither represented nor recognized aboriginal people as a political reality. The Conquest erased the political identities of the continent's first nations by categorizing them as "Indians". This name itself was a negation, for being an Indian simply meant not being European (Ortega Hegg, 1982, pp. 232-233).

The negation of the Indian by the political discourse that explained and justified Central American States and the political institutions engendered by it differs significantly from the exclusion of the working class in Europe in the first part of the nineteenth century. At that time, European liberal-democratic discourse and institutions were designed to sustain a class-divided society. That is, they recognized the political existence of both the rulers and the ruled. Liberal theorists such as Bentham and Mill "accepted and acknowledged... the class-divided society, and set out to fit a democratic structure onto it" (Macpherson, 1977, p. 10). Liberal-democratic institutions and theories, then, excluded but recognized the political force of the workers. As such they promoted the development of political values designed to legitimize their exclusion. In so doing, however, they acknowledged the workers' presence and their potential political role. Thus, the act of exclusion was a purposeful one that acknowledged the political presence and the potential political role of the excluded. Liberal-democratic institutions and practices changed when the political role of the working class began to materialize in the second half of the nineteenth century. Once again, social theory made explicit those changes in order to account for the new political reality of Europe (Macpherson, 1977, pp. 44-76).

Thus, the history of liberal democracy, and of the theory and institutions that sustained it, was also the history of the excluded classes. By recognizing the excluded, liberal-democratic institutions and discourse were able to formulate self-definitions of the excluder, creating a political history that was "national" in scope.

The case of the Central American Indians, in contrast, is one of political exclusion without recognition. The view of the Indian as a barbarian, advocated by people like Gines de Sepúlveda and based

on the Aristotelian notion of natural differences, attempted to justify the Indians' subjugation as a precondition for their christianization and civilization (Zavala, 1971, pp. 64-75). On the other hand, the view of the Indian as "a creature of God, endowed with reason and the capacity for virtue, religion and freedom", defended by Bartolomé de las Casas, argued that religious conversion should be considered as the proper avenue to the political recognition of the Indian as a subject of the Spanish Crown (Zavala, 1971, pp. 53-75). Both views, however, negated the Indian as a political reality and agreed on the necessity of his political transformation and Europeanization, ignoring his history and perceptions of politics and society. Thus:

"the historical being exhibited by America was rejected as lacking in spiritual meaning, according to Christian standards of the time. America was no more than a potentiality, which could be realized only by receiving and fulfilling the values and ideals of European culture. America, in fact, could acquire historical significance only by becoming another Europe" (O'Gorman, 1961, p. 139).

The formation of the political societies of Central America after independence did not change the view of the Indians as non-political entities (Dussell, 1973, pp. 29-32). As Richard N. Adams explains, the regimes that have governed the political societies of Central America since 1821 have been divided "between those who, on the one hand, favour a rigorous liberal policy to achieve labour control through forced, but always strategic, deculturation and social control based directly on threat of force...and those who, on the other hand, favour an *indigenista* policy, also liberal-inspired, but designed to obtain the conformance of Indians to labour controls through 'civilizing' and 'educating' them" (Adams, 1991, p. 181). Therefore, as was also the case during colonial times, the Indian in post-colonial Central America had to "disappear in order to ensure his inclusion in time" (Rodríguez, 1991, p. 56; see also Lovell, 1988).

In addition, the *Criollos* denied their own Spanish past. In its place, the ruling elites of the independent political societies of Central America, like those of the rest of Latin America, "set the shining examples of Britain, France and the United States" (Fuentes, 1985, p. 39). Zea explains:

"At a certain historical juncture the Hispanic American rebelled against his past, and hence against the responsibilities that it implied. He attempted to

make an immediate break with that past. He denied it, by attempting to begin a new history, as if nothing had been accomplished previously. He also created his utopia. He found the ideal to which he aspired in the great Anglo-Saxon countries, England and the United States, or in France, in what it contributed to the advancement of civilization. Their political constitutions, philosophy, literature, and culture in general were models by which the Hispanic Americans sought to mould a new history" (Zea, 1963, p. 12).

The exclusion of the Indians, then, was not based on a political discourse that acknowledged their potential political role. Rather, the discourse of Central American political actors was European and so were the institutions justified by it.[11] The formal political history of Central America was in no way the history of the Indians, who remained outside politics both discursively and institutionally. Like European women prior to the nineteenth century, "they were in, but not of civil society" (Macpherson, 1977, p. 19). They remain, even today, victims and spectators of the formal political evolution of the region.

The non-recognition of the Indian reality and the adoption of a European political discourse by the elites who inherited the colonial structure of Central America also resulted in the falsification of the Criollos' political values and institutions (Villegas, 1963, pp. 107-111; Salazar Bondy, 1968, pp. 112-113). Thus, the political discourse of the Criollos created a formal political reality –explained and justified by European notions of Liberalism, Conservatism, and later Socialism– that ignored not only the Indian but also the unique and unprecedented role that the Criollos played as carriers of a European political history in a non-European political reality. The result of all this has been a "gigantic cover-up of identity" (Zea, 1988-89, p. 35): the formalization of a "legal" country that is European and a "real" country that still remains to be discovered.[12]

As Edelberto Torres-Rivas has pointed out, social scientists in Central America study the "official country" rather than the essence of the "real country" (Torres-Rivas, 1989, p. 2). They have made explicit the European "self-descriptions" of political life in Central America articulated by the Criollos and their

inheritors. The result is the legitimization both of Central America's political history as an imperfect version of European history, and of a Eurocentric tradition of social sciences in which explanations make sense only because we assume that the Europeanized version of the evolution of Central America is the true history of the region. In this context, the social sciences have become part of the problem rather than part of the solution of the entanglement of Central America's history.

By concentrating on the formal political discourse and on the evolution and functioning of the Criollos' political institutions and practices, Central American social scientists implicitly assume that the European and Central American realities can be studied with the same metatheory –that the nature of the social reality of Central America is similar to that of Europe. The consequences of this assumption have been tragic. The uncritical use of European social theory for the study of Central American societies has produced an illusory knowledge of the region's social, economic and political evolution and problems. This result is to be expected, since social theory is shaped by the very social reality that it tries to make explicit. From this perspective, social theory's capacity to grasp social reality is conditioned by the pre-theoretical conceptions of social life held by the scientist before he or she tries to explain the nature of social phenomena. The tensions derived from the intimate relationship between social reality and the aims of social theory are explained by Alvin Gouldner:

"... while aiming to account for a set of events that extend beyond the sociologist's facts or personal realities, social theories are at the same time influenced by his prior imputations about what is real in the world, whether these are his facts or personal realities" (Gouldner, 1970, p. 44).

The European social sciences, then, have been shaped by Europe's history. As such, their theoretical tools have been designed to give priority to those features of the European historical evolution that are regarded as essential by social scientists. In this sense, they have a built-in predisposition to recognize specific social actors, processes and institutions.

The uncritical application of European social sciences to a non-European reality could produce three different effects. First, it might recognize those aspects of social reality that are identical in both the European and the non-European political experience; second, it might entirely miss segments of the non-European reality; and finally, it might mistakenly

[11] By "European" we refer to the countries of Central and North-west Europe (Wiarda, 1990, p. 396).

[12] The distinction between the "real" and the "legal" country is taken from Fuentes, 1985, p. 11).

impose a European identity on segments of non-European reality that appear European.[13] Since we have argued that the relation between time and space which conditioned the emergence of the State in Europe is different from the time-space relations which conditioned the formation of the Central American State, the first possibility can logically be eliminated. The different time-space relations in Europe and Central America produced different types of State and different types of political actors and institutions. Thus we are left with the two latter possibilities regarding the application of European social sciences in Central America.

The incapacity of European social sciences to capture salient features of Central American reality is evident in the research agenda of the region. In countries like Guatemala (where they form more than half of the population), Indians have been practically ignored by social sciences because their situation is not regarded as a typical sociological or political issue. Consequently, the study of the Indian issue has been left to anthropology, which implicitly reduces its importance (Torres-Rivas, 1989, pp. 2-4; Smith, 1990, p. vii).[14]

The uncritical application of European social sciences to Central America can also result in the misrepresentation as European of segments of the local social reality that have a formal European appearance, as occurs in the case of the State, the formal patterns of political conflict, and the political actors in the region.

Central American social sciences mistakenly assume that the principle of national sovereignty is the natural point of departure for the study of Central American political societies, and that the patterns of political conflict in the region are determined by social actors and forces predominantly operating within the State in a manner that only marginally

differs from the European experience.[15] Liberal and Conservative scholars based their analysis of the political history of these countries on voluntaristic interpretations of history in which the personal qualities of leaders are regarded as the forces that have determined the evolution of the region.[16] This evolution is usually depicted as an historically predetermined and progressive evolution from the condition of underdevelopment to the condition of development. Marxist scholars, on the other hand, look at the evolution and transformation of the economic structure of individual societies and analyze the class tensions that result from that process.[17] Thus, the study of the State in Central America implicitly assumes that Central American history is a re-run of European history and that the region replicates the social laboratory and the historical mix of circumstances and values that produced Conservative, Liberal and Socialist institutions and ideas in Europe. These studies identify political periods, historical patterns and actors that are surprisingly similar to those studied by social scientists in Europe. Thus, Central American social scientists have come across the existence of national bourgeoisies, proletariats, and even "peasant bourgeoisies" in the countries of the region, while ignoring the "Indian issue".[18] In European history and in Western social sciences, the concepts of the "proletariat" and the "bourgeoisie" contain the accumulation of a long historical experience. In the absence of this experience, these concepts have little or no theoretical value. Ownership of the means of production as a criterion to differentiate social classes is only the legal expression of a complex historical phenomenon that is "not merely economic in the strict sense but also ecological, social, political, and socio-psychological" (Wolfe, 1982, p. 21). In Central America, on the other hand, the concept of class is a name rather than a container of historical experience.[19] In consequence, the image of a European re-

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[13] Marx was a victim of his Eurocentrism when he interpreted the emergence of Simón Bolívar as the Latin American version of French Bonapartism (Sánchez Vásquez, 1988-89, p. 115).

[14] It is important to remember that anthropology emerged in nineteenth-century Europe as a discipline dedicated to studying marginal people in marginal areas of the world; as such, it differs from sociology, which concentrates on the study of European societies (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 312; Ehlers, 1990, pp. 141-142).

[15] See, for example, Vega, 1981; Torres-Rivas and Pinto, 1983; Lanuza, Barahona and Chamorro, 1983; Posas and Del Cid, 1981; Torres-Rivas, 1980; Asociación Centroamericana de Sociología (ACAS), 1989; Molina Chocano, 1982.

[16] See, for example, Reina Valenzuela and Argueta, 1978.

[17] See, for example, Wheelock, 1975.

[18] The concept of "peasant bourgeoisie" is used by Arias, 1985.

[19] For an analysis of concept misinformation, see Sartori, 1977.

ality has been transformed into the Central
American reality, and the production of knowl-
edge in social sciences has been transformed into
the formulation of intellectual images of an imagin-
ary reality (Salazar Bondy, 1968, p. 114). Needless to
say, the consequences of these misinterpretations are
both theoretical and political. For example, the post-
1979 mistreatment of the Miskitos on the Atlantic
coast of Nicaragua by the Sandinistas was rooted
in an imitative and Eurocentric Marxist theoretical
tradition that did not recognize the Miskitos' histori-
cal reality and was incapable of comprehending their
unique social and political views. In their attempt to
institutionalize a Socialist revolution, the Sandinistas
treated ethnic minorities on the Atlantic coast of
Nicaragua as marginal variations of an imaginary
national proletariat. This view, as Carlos Vilas has
pointed out, was:

"reductionist and incomplete. The different so-
cial organizations of the Costeño groups, the articula-
tion of production relations to the kinship system, the
different modalities of legitimation and exercise of
authority, ideological and linguistic differentiation,
and different historical processes were reduced to a
geographically distinct manifestation of the problem
of economic backwardness. The revolutionaries' lack
of knowledge about the ethnic question led them to

privilege the Costeños' most obvious material traits:
they were poor farmers and mine and lumber com-
pany workers, exploited by foreign capital and mer-
chants. At the same time, certain cooperative
productive practices based on reciprocity (such as
panapana) and certain characteristics of village life
were interpreted as survivals of primitive commun-
ism" (Vilas, 1987, p. 96).

In general, the strategy of class struggle fol-
lowed by the radical Left during the revolutionary
1960s and 1970s was based on Eurocentric interpre-
tations of the concept of social classes. The theoreti-
cal lenses used to produce these interpretations could
not recognize the Indian reality of the region unless
Indians were dressed in European clothes –that is,
unless they had been "depeasantized" or "prole-
tarized" (Allahar, 1989, p. 119).

Thus, Central American social sciences have le-
gitimized the use of Europe's history as the proper
foundation for the analysis and evaluation of Central
America's reality. They have perpetuated in the re-
gion a state of mind that Antonio Gómez Robledo
characterizes as "philosophical submission". This
state of mind is, according to Gómez Robledo and
Augusto Salazar Bondy, "the correlative, at the spiri-
tual level, of political submission" (Gómez Robledo,
1946, p. 189; Salazar Bondy, 1968, p. 40).

IV

Social theory and social practice: closing the gap

With the end of the Cold War and the decline of
revolutionary movements and ideologies in Latin
America, Central American social scientists have
begun to explore the possibilities and limitations with
regard to national consensus on the organization of
political life, particularly in Guatemala, El Salvador
and Nicaragua (Solórzano, 1986; Torres-Rivas, 1987;
Pérez, 1991). Most observers agree that, at the very
least, this consensus "must include agreements re-
garding the permanent rules governing competition
for public office; the resolution of conflicts; the re-
production of capital; and the appropriate role of the
State, with particular reference to the military and the
bureaucracy" (Karl, 1986, p. 10). The possibilities
for Central American social sciences to make a

positive and effective contribution to the articulation
of national political consensuses will depend to a
large extent on their capacity to transcend Eurocen-
trism and close the gap between social theory and
social practice (see Dahrendorf, 1983, p. 36).

Social theory provides "the constitutive under-
standing necessary for continuing, reformed, or puri-
fied practice" (Taylor, 1983a, p. 16). Therefore,
mental experience is not independent from social re-
ality. Different perceptions of life, different defini-
tions of what is right or wrong, legitimate or
illegitimate, can create different understandings of
the nature of social institutions. In turn, these under-
standings shape social practice and, through it, the
very institutions that they try to elucidate (Taylor,

1983a, p. 12). Thus, the role of social theory is not only to explain social life but also to "define the understandings that underpin different forms of social practice..." (Taylor, 1983a, p. 20). By making explicit the meaning of social action, social theory becomes an active participant in the making of the very history it tries to explain. Social scientists, from this perspective, "are in the business of proposing and fashioning ways of looking at, thinking, and talking about –and hence contributing to the construction and deconstruction of social objects" (Gouldner, 1973, p. 105). Therefore, the goal of achieving in social sciences the type of objectivity achieved by the natural sciences is misleading and inappropriate. The test of good social sciences is not objectivity but authenticity. The concept of authenticity has been used by Leopoldo Zea and Augusto Salazar Bondy to criticize Latin American philosophers' tendency "to borrow indiscriminately from the West and to manufacture faulty copies of European doctrine..." (Lipp, 1980, pp. 115-116). This tendency "has been conducive to producing an unauthentic philosophy based on an unauthentic existence" (Lipp, 1980, p. 116). Authenticity, then, "refers to a characteristic that flows naturally out of a given set of circumstances, or a product which is inherently part of an organic whole and not derived from an alien body of thought" (Lipp 1980, p. 116). From this perspective, the compromise of social sciences is not with an ideal view of the world but with ideas that are rooted in, and shaped by, the historical conditions within which social scientists operate. Penetrating and explicating social practice is thus the first and foremost function of social sciences. Charles Taylor explains:

"If theory is about practice here, then what makes a theory right is that it brings the practice out in the clear. And what this leads to is that the practice can be more effective in a certain way. Not just in any way, but in the way practices can be when we overcome to some degree the muddle, confusion, cross-purposes which affect them as long as they are ill-understood. To have a good theory in this domain is to understand better what we are doing; and this means that our action can be somewhat freer of the stumbling, self-defeating character which previously afflicted it; our action becomes less haphazard and contradictory, less prone to produce what we did not want at all" (Taylor, 1983b, p. 78).

Fostering the capacity of Central American social sciences to elucidate social practice involves developing their ability to elucidate the "real country" of meanings and perceptions underlying social action

in the region. Only an understanding of the interpretations of social reality guiding the practice of social agents in Central America can create conditions appropriate for the articulation of national consensuses that can bring peace and prosperity to the people of the subregion. Making sense of agents, as Charles Taylor points out:

"does require that we understand their self-descriptions. We may –indeed, often must– take account of their confusion, misinformation, illusions, but we make sense of them if we grasp both how they see things and what is wrong, lacunary, contradictory in this" (Taylor, 1983a, p. 30).

Understanding agents' self-descriptions and interpretations of social reality in Central America requires identification and explanation of the network of intersubjective and common meanings that constitute the foundations of social practice in the region. Charles Taylor defines the concept of "intersubjective meanings" as "ways of experiencing action in society which are expressed in the language and descriptions constitutive of institutions and practices" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 38). They represent society's common comprehension of social experiences as it is expressed in language and social practice.

The existence of a network of intersubjective meanings should not be confused with the existence of political consensus (Taylor, 1985a, pp. 36-37). Intersubjective meanings can be the foundation of both consensus and disagreement. They simply provide a common language through which members of society can agree or disagree on the nature and organization of social and political life. Through their agreements and disagreements, members of society participate in the constitution of social and political reality.

Intersubjective meanings are essential for the emergence and development of "common meanings". These are "notions of what is significant, which are not just shared in the sense that everyone has them, but are also common in the sense of being in the common reference world" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 38) In other words, common meanings represent points of convergence concerning the identification of relevant aspects of social and political reality. Taylor explains:

"Common meanings are the basis of community. Intersubjective meanings give a people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings. These are objects in the world that

everybody shares. This is what makes community" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 38).

The existence of common meanings still does not guarantee political consensus. They represent areas of social and political concern that are considered important by members of society. They might even represent common goals and aspirations. However, political conflict can emerge as a result of different understandings of the proper ways to achieve them. Political consensus is rooted in both intersubjective and common meanings. The existence of both of these –a common language that members of society can use to express their agreements and disagreements, and some points of convergence regarding social and political issues and priorities– is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the articulation of political consensus.

The most important contribution that social sciences can make to the search for peace and stability in Central America is to explicate the intersubjective and common meanings that guide social action in the region. This task calls for the elucidation of both the Indian and the *Criollo* self-definitions and explanations of social reality.[20] The *Criollos'* self-definitions and explanations of their social condition, inherited and reproduced by the ruling elite of the region, have to be approached as mirror images of a European reality (Stone, 1990). Like the images in a mirror, they are both real and unsubstantial; they hide as much as they reveal. If they fail to transcend these images, the Central American social sciences are condemned to remain ignorant of the fact that it is the combination of visible images and hidden realities that give content and meaning to Central America's formal political processes and institutions (Salazar Bondy, 1968, pp. 112-133).

The Central American social sciences also have to penetrate the Indian reality of the region to uncover the intersubjective and common meanings that constitute the existential foundation of Indian communities. Knowledge of the Indians' interpretation of social, political and economic reality is essential to identify mental bridges that can link the Indian and the *Criollo* worlds of Central America (Matul Morales, 1989).

It is important to note that the Indian and *Criollo* dimensions of Central American reality are not necessarily located within easily recognizable population groups. With the exception of Guatemala, the population of the Central American countries is predominantly mestizo. The mestizo is the embodiment of both Spain and Indian America, and incarnates both the "real" and the "legal" country. His duality is the duality of our political existence: the past that we have rejected and the future that we cannot achieve.

V

Conclusions

The recommendation to revise the time-space relations that created the conditions for the emergence and development of Central American States means implicitly that the region's social sciences must articulate their own metatheory. This requires an explanation of the intersubjective and common meanings that underline our social practice. In studying the hidden dimension of Central American politics, the social sciences should pay special attention to the cultural foundations of Central American political life. Fiction, folklore, narrative and religion contain important clues to the political identity of the region and its actors. They offer the possibility of articulating a metatheoretical foundation that can sustain the theoretical work of authentic social sciences.

The preceding argument should not be interpreted as a call to ignore the intellectual contributions of European social sciences or the real influence of Europe on Central America's historical evolution: this would be juvenile, counterproductive and irresponsible. European social sciences must be used to articulate "a language of perspicuous contrast" (Taylor, 1985b, p. 125). This is a language that can

[20] In this article we have made reference to the *Criollo* and the Indian dimensions of Central American reality. However, the development of authentic social sciences also requires the identification and explanation of the network of intersubjective and common meanings underlying the social practice of the region's black population and other minorities (Rout Jr., 1976, pp. 261-279).

be used to elucidate both the European and the Central American realities "as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both" (Taylor, 1985b, p. 125).

Furthermore, Central America, like the rest of Latin America, "is a vast, original, modulation and modification of Western culture" (Merquior, 1991, p. 158). Therefore, the imitative nature of Central America's political development is part of the region's reality. This imitation never has been and never will be fully successful, for Central America already had a history before Europe imposed its values and institutions on the New World. This forgotten history continues to leave its mark, upsetting the implementation of European utopias, distorting political ideas and

practices. In short, it creates and maintains a gap between the "real" and the "legal" country. The most important task of the Central American social sciences is to close this gap in order to light the way towards more effective social practice. The fulfilment of this task involves neither the nostalgic reconstruction of a forgotten past nor the visionary articulation of a utopian future, but the construction of a new language, a new culture, and a new community that is rooted in the multidimensional makeup of our historical existence (Gouldner, 1973, pp. 104-106). Only then will the Central American social sciences be able to contribute to the articulation of durable national political consensus and stability.

(Original: English)

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