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THE IMPORTANCE OF MICRO-STRUCTURAL APPROACH AND PEACE FORMATIONS IN DEALING WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

Summary: Increasingly, inequality is becoming one of the most important phenomena of our time. Recent protests (Spain, the UK, the U.S.), violent confrontations (Brazil, Israel) or even armed conflicts (India, Tunisia) are a direct consequence of polarization, which has increased significantly since the 1980s when the global dominance of neoliberal model was established. So far, mainstream one-fit-all (socio)economic solutions proved ineffective in tackling not only high levels of income inequality, but, more importantly, its multidimensional character visible in the prevalence of social exclusion (access to education, health, and social services, etc.) which is seriously constraining human capital and creating conflict potential among the 'have-nots'. In this context, diversity should be considered as a strength, although this contradicts the universality principle imposed by the liberal state and the neoliberal model, often by applying pressure, isolation or violent force. This is why micro-structural approach must emphasize the importance of local peace formations which, depending on the context, could be dramatically different but still achieve similar results in reducing deep rooted inequalities which are predominantly socially conditioned. It's only by 'going local' that the roots of contemporary inequality can be fully understood and 'prevention' (Burton) achieved.

Keywords: inequality, peace formations, conflict, micro-structural approach

Introduction

In the past half-century, the policy-making discourse was dominated by 'buzz words' best depicting the political situation and economic policies dominant in different periods. Decolonization during the sixties and the seventies was the time when newly formed states tried to 'industrialize' their economies and to catch up with former colonizers whose economic progress was mainly based on material (and human) exploitation of the Third World (today Global South). The eighties were the period of 'poverty alleviation', predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa where this phenomenon is still very much present, despite all the efforts to reverse the negative prospects. The end of the Cold War brought transition in the Eastern European countries and former

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USSR and the constant struggle for 'higher economic growth' which, at that point, seemed a solution for most of the problems that command economies had faced in the previous decades. Similar occurred in South-East Asia, where countries like China, Vietnam or South Korea were fully entering market economy.

Today, the term 'inequality' is the one occupying the attention of most policymakers. This includes even Barack Obama who in 2014 State of the Union address stressed: "inequality has deepened. Upward mobility has stalled. The cold, hard fact is that even in the midst of recovery, too many Americans are working more than ever just to get by—let alone get ahead" (The Atlantic, 2014). The problem did not go unnoticed even by the international financial organisation such as the World Economic Forum which, in its yearly report, recognized the deepening of (income) inequality as number one problem in 2015, stating: "...the inherent dangers of neglecting inequality are obvious. People, especially young people, excluded from the mainstream end up feeling disenfranchised and become easy fodder of conflict. This, in turn, reduces the sustainability of economic growth, weakens social cohesion and security, encourages inequitable access to and use of global commons, undermines our democracies, and cripples our hopes for sustainable development and peaceful societies" (World Economic Forum, 2015). Similar statements were made by other key policy makers, including Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Alexis Tsipras, or governmental institutions (World Bank, OECD), all recognizing growing disparities as one of the profound problems of our time.

Furthermore, religious leaders have also emphasized this problem depicting inequality, as former Archbishop of San Salvador Oscar Romero, as "an institutionalized violence expressed in a political and economic system that believes progress is only possible through the use of the majority as a productive force conducted by a privileged minority" (Dada, 2015) or highlighting, as Pope Frances, that without "attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems" (Green, 2014). Therefore, it is no surprise that the Liberation Theology originated in Latin America where inequalities were greatest.

Recently, the trend of questioning and analysing the problem of rising inequality is present in the academia, where this phenomenon has sprung increasing interest, especially in social sciences. Initial claims were expressed by researchers such as Craig Murphy, former International Studies Association president, who stated: "Forty years ago most observers expected the world's income distribution to shift from what was considered a socially unstable bimodal form to the unimodal distribution that characterises most domestic societies... Instead... the bulk of the world's economic growth was accumulated by individuals within the wealthy OECD states, places where domestic income inequality has grown sharply as well. The bimodal distribution of world income has remained" (Murphy, 2001: 350). Other researchers and academics

followed up, opening new debates and offering the fresh perspective on inequality issues such as horizontal inequalities (Stewart 2008), true global inequality (Milanovic, 2007) or complex humanitarian emergencies (Auvinen and Nafziger, 1999, 2002). Also, the research work of authors such as Thomas Piketty is attracting very much attention (his book ‘Capital in the Twenty-First Century’ was at some point number one selling book on Amazon, reaching circulation of 200.000 copies), generating appraisals but also strong criticism regarding the findings and recommendations on the issue of reducing inequality. Nevertheless, increased academic interest is a clear sign of the importance the problem of inequality is gaining in the present moment.

Simultaneously, leading social science conferences included inequality as their general theme. The World Institute for Development Economics (WIDER) and the International Sociological Association (ISA) conference in 2014, the British International Studies Association (BISA) and International Association for Peace and Conflict Studies (IAPCS) in 2015 and International Peace Studies Association (IPSA) conference in 2016 all investigate different aspects of inequality (challenges to peace, North-South divide, impact on market-society relations, global/local implications, etc.), and their effect on society as an overarching topic.

But, the situation we are facing today is differently comparing to the inequality problems in the 1980s and the 1990s. Firstly, inequality is now present not only in poor and less developed countries but in developed countries as well, including those with most advanced (technologically and in human resources) capitalist economies such as the U.S. and the UK. This is dramatically different comparing to the time when the regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia were in the focus of inequality-reducing policies, implemented by developed countries and international financial organisations. Second, negative trend is present since the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s when economic deregulation and liberalisation started to gain momentum (Cornia, 2003, 2004), but it reached its peak only recently, with the financial crisis in the U.S. in 2008, and in the EU from 2010 onwards (Greece, Spain, and Portugal being the most drastic cases). It is only then, that the true scale of social disparities worldwide became evident. This led to intensive political mobilisation, the emergence of social movements such as the Occupy Wall Street and the Indignados, radical political change (Greece) or outburst of violence (Tunisia, Bulgaria, and Brazil). Finally, inequality today is much more a social than the economic issue, as Piketty (2014) shows in the case of the U.S., since it is to a large extent result of proprietorship, and not of person’s abilities, as often highlighted by liberal thinkers. Because of this, Dzuverovic concludes that “this systemic injustice is especially visible in crisis periods; affecting the ‘have-nots,’ such as those from the lower part of the income scale, exclusively. Being this, the inequality is increasingly becoming a social rather than an economic feature” (2014: 553). As a result, the issue of inequality is attracting attention

not only of actors who are visible in the political process, but of those could be decisive in maintaining/overturning present political and economic institutions, but are often less or not visible at all. This applies for the local level where activities and agenda of indigenous movements are purposely neglected, but also for the global level where actors with decisive influence on policymaking are trying to be less noticeable.

Bearing in mind what has been stated above, it is becoming obvious that, unlike other ‘buzz words’, this one (inequality) will have a very long life expectancy. If this is true, then it has to be taken into account that broad implications we are experiencing at the moment cannot be overcome by policies and instruments, depicted mostly in neoliberal political/economic orthodoxy, which initially led to the problem.

The Universality Principle

First of all, it should be noted that the idea concerning the negative influence of inequality on personal/intergroup relation is still not commonly shared. According to the neoliberal discourse, globally dominant since the 1980s, inequality does not negatively influence social cohesion or induce mobilization of underprivileged. Instead, it leads to increased competition among the ‘have-nots’ for improving their unfavourable position. Due to this reasoning, economic policies in the last thirty years have not stressed strongly enough the importance of inequality reduction or social redistribution. On the contrary, measures that have been introduced as part of wider economic reforms had an even greater negative effect. A few examples are given below.

During the 1980s, the ill economic situation in many countries of Latin America and Africa led to the implementation of ‘structural adjustment programmes’, which strongly emphasized the deregulation of a labour market and liberalisation of the financial sector, enhancing downturn mobility in much greater extent, instead of achieving inclusive development. Similarly, Eastern European and Eastern Asian countries during the 1990s, and most of Southern Europe in last couple of years (since 2010) have been subjected to strict austerity measures insisting predominantly on state cuts (for safety nets, education opportunities and health services) and further marketization of state-led services, which had, almost exclusively, (negative) effect on those from the lower levels of the income scale (have-nots). This is also supported by Stewart and Brown (2007) findings on the orientation of major economic institutions (including IMF and WB) who are pursuing macro and market-oriented policies aimed at fostering competition while neglecting problems of horizontal and vertical inequality.

In these instances (as in many others), the ‘universality principle’ has been enforced, while the local context and conditionality of circumstances that led to initial negative prospects were mostly ignored. According to Rostow’s (1960) understanding of modernization as westernization, contemporary policymakers tend to presume Centre’s (Northern) superiority in thinking (and practicing) development. Therefore, it

is no wonder the imposition of the universal objective even included the use of violence, as in the case of Chile during Pinochet or Argentina under the military junta. Even today, actors who promote neoliberal state-building still very often resort to the use of violence as it was the case in Yugoslavia in 1999 and Iraq in 2003; isolation (Venezuela since 2002) or conditionality as it the case with the Western Balkans countries seeking economic assistance and the EU membership.

Also, in the neoliberal political/economic discourse inequality has always been seen as an economic, not social category. Because of this, the economy (i.e. market) was considered an appropriate corrector of any anomalies that might abrupt, while increased social disparities were not seen as a threat to peace (understood not only as presence/absence of violence - negative peace but also as structural violence incorporated in institutions legitimizing disenfranchised position of the majority). This position has somewhat changed recently with mass mobilization in the countries such as the United States, Spain, Greece and Israel, where underprivileged groups have clearly demonstrated that profound polarization cannot be tolerated anymore. From these protests, it also became evident that income inequality cannot be separated anymore from unequal education opportunities (especially in the case of higher education), limited access to health services and poorly funded and ill-equipped social nets and services, since the two are correlated and mutually connected. Moreover, the constraint of human capital proved to be especially threatening in developing and less developed countries where progress on the income scale is based on privileges minority groups have for being part of the establishment. Hence, the impediment of state in providing comprehensive social services proved to be a major reason for defeat in fighting inequality by using a top-down approach.

The problem we are still facing at the moment concerns the persistence in “one-size-fits-all progressive framework of mainly elite governance with little recognition of difference” (Richmond, 2008: 3), although it is exactly because of this universality we are faced with high levels of mobilization and inter-group cleavages. An alternative approach is, therefore, becoming the prerequisite for sustaining change grounded from bellow (vs. top-down), offering context-specific (vs. universal) solutions and insisting on multi-causality (vs. economic reasoning).

Micro-Structural Approach and Peace Formations

As Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013: 772) argue “localism is hardwired into conflict transformation as it emphasises the need to address relationships between antagonists and the need to address conflict at the individual and community levels.” Hence, localism can transcend personal (vertical) and intergroup (horizontal), which are often seen as an or/or choice, both in conflict theory and policy levels. Also, localism does not exclude regional, national or global, but intertwines from bellow, a

characteristic often neglected in many orthodox prescriptions implemented top-down, without taking into account the notion of multiple localities (specificities). Therefore, the bottom-up approach does not reject the possibility of a common approach but incorporates an adjustment to differences that may occur depending on the case in question.

Contextual specificity relates to localism since the two are mutually dependent. This means that resulting historical (and contemporary) circumstances and peculiarities must be taken into consideration before measures are adopted and introduced. On practical level it can be assumed that policies which advocate state withdrawal from the welfare sector cannot be implemented in countries where poverty, inequality and disenfranchisement are initially very high (as in Latin American countries in the '1980s); or that comprehensive deregulation of labour market is not appropriate for countries where trade union rights are pivotal for market-society relation (as in East European countries before the '1990s); or favouring (Western) legal institutions instead of customary practices (as in Rwanda or South Africa in prosecuting violence against marginalized groups); or insisting on individualization in highly collective societies (as in South East Asia). This aspect proves to be highly important in a case of aid/development programs in less developed states, often created and implemented by developed countries which are (seen as) responsible for the problems former are facing. It is clear that yet another modernization effort, while ignoring previous negative and often very violent experiences (Lindqvist, 1997), cannot be wholeheartedly accepted.

Micro-structural approach is therefore inspired by constructions (and experiences) such as infrastructures for peace (I4P), everyday peace, small and hybrid peace or similar concepts insisting on conflict multi-causality, but also offering 'multi-solutions'; recognizing the importance of different actors in constructively transcending problems/conflicts; understanding local differences and the (in)possibility of universality; accepting social justice not only as a political platform, but also as a necessity in societies where disparities are destroying social fabric; implying solidarity and empathy as a strength, not a weakness and understanding that change is not always (and only) dependent on political opportunities and economic efficiency. Accordingly, it could be argued that micro-structural approach aim is adding pluralism to Galtung's understanding of positive peace (see Galtung, 1996) or supporting Smoker's conclusion that "peace on may be imaginable but it is not likely to be a single peace, rather it is likely to be a collection or network or system of harmony societies" (1981: 152).

Finally, peace formations are defined by Richmond as "relationships and networked processes where indigenous or local agents of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, development, or in customary, religious, cultural, social, or local political or local government settings find ways of establishing peace processes and sustainable dynamics of peace" (Richmond, 2013: 276, cited by Mac Ginty, 2014: 14). In the case of micro-structural

approach, peace formations should not be seen (and used) only as conflict prevention instrument, but also as socio-economic empowerment mechanism since peacebuilding is understood as physical and social reconstruction based on the principles of social justice and equality (economic, political, social and cultural), as vital preconditions of self-sustaining peace.

It includes various structures created in local environments as a direct answer to political and economic challenges faced by these communities. Formations of this kind can be recognized in conditional cash transfer in countries of Latin America (most notably Brazil and Mexico) where inequality and poverty are fought not by social welfare but by improving human capital; community councils in Venezuela and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre where participation in decision making is essential for social inclusion and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) proposal for wages that go beyond the established ratio not to be deductible for income tax purposes. Other examples may include the system of micro-crediting the impoverished communities in Bangladesh; indigenous judicial system in Bolivia; public employment programmes in South Africa; local peace councils in Ghana as part of the national strategy to identify and prevent root causes of violent conflicts; community development councils in the Afghan solidarity programme aimed at developing rural country areas but also many others still invisible for decision makers implying universality principles and policies. It is essential to note that these formations are all trying to achieve a high level of cohesion, essential for coexistence and mutual acceptance, leading to the equality that is not necessarily normative, but commonly perceived as just and sustainable.

Therefore, by insisting on peace formations which are locally grounded and context oriented, the micro-structural approach is able to provide a comprehensive answer to the inequality problem, which is long lasting, sensible to different environments, and most importantly accepted by the 'have-nots' who are the beneficiaries of services provided in this way. It seems that the acceptance proves to be the key element in most of the abovementioned examples since it leads to the recognition of the system fairness (to a certain extent) and decreases mobilization and the possibility of violent outbreaks as its consequences. If similar efforts were applied elsewhere, it could increase the prospects for limiting structural violence, deeply rooted in the current political and socio-economic system.

Conclusion

Is it realistic to expect a worldwide appearance of peace formations tailored in the way described above? It should not be mistaken this endeavour will escape great challenges, since the present political-economic order is extremely military, applying limiting impositions and violent co-optations. Zapatistas in Mexico, the landless

movement in Brazil, the workers unions in Greece and other examples with similar experience clearly demonstrate the challenges faced by the actors confronting the order that is imposing the universality principle.

Still, the opportunity exists since localism, often “rebuffed as romantic, relativist or particularist, anti-democratic, anti-developmental, contravening youth and women’s rights, as well as human rights more generally” (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013: 764), is seen by the neoliberal political order as unimportant and inefficient, leaving this ‘space’ for other actors to fulfil. This is the case in the world periphery where transnational agenda is fully incorporated on the national level, but also in countries of the Centre where transnationalization originated from, but where ‘transnational elites’ (Robinson, 2004) did not pierce the ‘local bubble’. In that context, there is a chance to occupy, alter and adapt locality, providing the have-nots with much-needed security and adaptability. At the same time, the ‘invisibility’ of the change would not provoke a violent top-down response, and could sustain long-term changes.

By introducing the micro-structural approach, existing, negative prospects could be limited and structural violence transcended. More importantly, as Stewart and Brown (2007) note, it would lead not only to “equality in opportunity” and “equality in access to resources” as mainstream academia often emphasize but also to “equality of outcomes”, far more significant for achieving small or everyday peace(s). This task will depend on political/economic elites and policy makers, but far more of ordinary people whose compassion and innovative way of thinking will determine the nature of any future (un)fair structure(s).

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ЗНАЧАЈ МИКРО-СТРУКТУРНОГ ПРИСТУПА И МИРОВНИХ ФОРМАЦИЈА У ПРЕВАЗИЛАЖЕЊУ СОЦИО-ЕКОНОМСКИХ НЕЈЕДНАКОСТИ

Сажетак: Неједнакост убрзано постаје један од најзначајнијих феномена данашњице. Протести (Шпанија, Уједињено Краљевство, Сједињене Америчке Државе), насиље (Бразил, Израел), као и оружани сукоби (Индија, Тунис) директна су последица поларизације која је значајно увећања са глобалним преовладавањем неолибералног модела која је започет 80-их година. Досадашње политике су се показале неефикасним у савладавању не само високе доходне неједнакости, већ и њених других димензија попут социјалне искључености (једнак приступ образовању, и здравственим/социјалним услугама и сл.) што значајно ограничава људски капитал и ствара конфликтни потенцијал код оних који су маргинализовани. У наведеном контексту, разноврсност би требало посматрати као предност иако се тиме противуречи принципу универзалности који се снажно намеће неолибералним моделом, неретко употребом притисака, изолације или насиља. Управо због тога микро-структурни приступ нагласак ставља на важност мировних формација које, зависно од локалног контекста, могу бити драматично другачије, а истовремено довести до сличних учинака када су у питању дубоко укорене неједнакости које су најчешће друштвено условљене. Једино инсистирајући на локалном приступу се савремена неједнакост може у потпуности препознати, а самим тим и "провенција" (Burton) остварити.

Кључне речи: *неједнакост, мировне формације, сукоб, микро-структурни приступ*