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Desigualdades Sociais, Redes de Sociabilidade e Participação Política (Social Inequalities, Sociability Networks, and Political Participation)

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Introduction

In Brazil, the most recommended readings in graduate sociology courses are dominated by Europeans. Few Brazilians are among the most read. Also, conspicuously under-represented are North Americans. Of the seven top Europeans, five (Weber, Bourdieu, Marx, Foucault and Durkheim) are dead.

A pernicious effect of the conceptual and theoretical alienation is that the Social Sciences do not provide answers to the major problems affecting Brazil—nor try to. The subjects taught are not related to those that the population expressed concerns. They are not grounded in time and space.

Research methods, in general, and Statistics, in particular, are painfully absent from course syllabi, congresses, articles, books, theses and dissertations. Nelson do Valle Silva is one of the few who researched and criticized these serious lacunae. He analyzed 308 articles published in the Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais (RBCS): 85% had no quantification whatsoever; 13% had univariate frequency distributions and only 8 (eight) articles, less than 3%, had any kind of statistical analysis. Of the eight authors, only one was fully trained in Brazil.

It is against this background of indifference, if not hostility, to quantitative sociology that *Desigualdades Sociais, Redes de Sociabilidade e Participação Política* should be read. It has an Introduction, eleven chapters and two appendixes. The contents are spread over different aspects of life in the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Area. The book uses data from a survey. Sampling was multi-staging. The questionnaire has a considerable conceptual and theoretical spread. The Editor's focus was on inequality, stratification and mobility, with an eye on social capital, social networks and related concepts.

It discusses the usefulness of keeping human, cultural and social capital separate, and underlines the consequences of these concepts for more classic concerns such as occupation and income. Race, gender, violence, crime and fears, as well as political participation, apathy and trust—central issues in Brazil today that are dealt with in some detail.

A cursory inspection of the bibliography used in the various chapters reveals a far more balanced use of sources than the syllabi. The work of Brazilian and North-American social and political scientists is recognized, as is that of European researchers and thinkers, contemporary and “classic”. However, references to researchers outside North America and Western Europe are scarce. Africa, Asia and other Latin American countries are absent.

Chapter One

The first chapter, by Antônio Augusto Pereira Prates, Flávio Alex de Oliveira Carvalhaes and Bráulio Figueiredo Alves Silva, deals with social capital and social networks. Joining Coleman, Granovetter and Burt, it makes a point of linking both and presents a balanced discussion. It cross-tabulates weak ties and social capital, expecting to find efficacy differentials among the resulting cells. They analyze an index of social capital. Age, in years, having 11 or more years of formal education and having lived for seven or more years in the neighborhood are the three surviving independent variables. Later they introduce “weak ties”, measured by the presence in neighborhood meetings and in informal meetings with city officials, as an intervening variable. Access to ties enhances collective efficacy. Actually, only when weak ties are present does social capital influence efficacy.

Chapter Two

Jorge Alexandre Neves and Diogo Henrique Helal wrote the second chapter, retaining social capital and “*associativismo*” in their analysis of the labor market. They discuss two definitions of social capital, one that is an attribute of collectivities and another that may become an attribute of individuals and/or be used by them. They use Granovetter, Bourdieu and Portes to back the latter. They hypothesize that the greater the individual’s social capital, the higher the likelihood that he/she will be employed even after controlling for SES (socioeconomic status) at birth and human capital. They use a multinomial logistic regression, based on the number of years of formal education, age, age squared, gender, father’s SES and social participation as an indicator of social capital. In the formal market, father’s SES is not significant when the respondent’s schooling is controlled for.

In Brazil workers can be hired without their employers signing the *carteira de trabalho*, which assures workers of some benefits and employers of some additional costs to the employers. Every year of formal education reduces the risk of this kind of employment by 8% in relation to regular employment. Public employment is generally considered desirable in Brazil, and each year of formal education increases the chance of being hired in this subsector by 22%—taking as reference workers in the formal market.

Interestingly, social capital does not increase the likelihood of employment in the informal market; father’s SES continues to be statistically non-significant and respondent’s education does not reach statistical significance—in consonance with previous research.

Chapter Three

The third chapter, written by Maria Carolina Tomás, Flavia Pereira Xavier and Otavio Soares Dulci, also focuses on human, social and cultural capital in the analysis of individual income and occupation. The authors use similar references to social and cultural capital as in other chapters and add a human capital bibliography. Social capital is measured through participation, cultural capital as a factor analysis of only two variables, the education of each parent, and

human capital as number of years of formal education and age. I wonder about the wisdom of using parental education as indicators of the respondents' cultural capital as these have a long tradition as indicators of status of origin. In a linear regression analysis, all ten predictors turn out to be statistically significant. They control for sex and use a multinomial logit analysis.

In their conclusions, the authors pinpoint that the three forms of capital that they used—social, cultural and economic—are inter-related and that the effect of cultural capital increases with the income groups.

Chapter Four

In the fourth chapter, Daniela Assunção Campos do Amaral, Leonardo Hipólito Genaro Fígoli and Ronaldo de Noronha write on social inequality and cultural capital. Interestingly, they include eight references, seven by Bourdieu and one on Bourdieu. This kind of devotion is in dissonance with the diversity of the references of the other chapters. It is costly because there is readily available an ample bibliography dealing with cultural capital, a concept that is not restricted to Bourdieu's writings. Some criticized Bourdieu for not taking into consideration working classes' cultural expressions nor rural ones. Although true, this is an unfair criticism, as Bourdieu is not classifying cultural behaviors but asserting that the possession of these items and skills is demanded from those aspiring to be admitted to higher educational levels. A fairer criticism is that Bourdieu and followers see these requirements as static and independent from the entrance of people who also have other values and cultural expressions. Cultural capital is seen as impervious to their entrance, even in great numbers. The impact of public policies, such as fellowship programs, is not considered.

Newcomers from “down below” must change their cultural values but may also contribute to change the cultural standards of the receiving institution. I believe this to be a more creative hypothesis than to start the reasoning with the current requirements and cementing them across time and space.

They create an additive Index of Cultural Capital with 14 items. The items are grounded on middle and upper class consumption and intentionally exclude items that are more common in the working classes and those that cut across class lines. However, as it stands, the operational definition is an example of selection bias. As the items that were included are typical of middle and upper class cultural consumption, it is not surprising that they correlate with socio-economic indicators such as income, education (both the respondents' and their parents) and place of birth. As used, its operational definition is Eurocentric. Brazilian culture and society do not play a significant role. By eliminating Brazilian cultural items the authors fall in the trap of assuming, without saying, that in Brazil the class and educational systems are grounded on Western European values. In the Social Sciences this seems true, but in the Exact Sciences this does not hold.

Chapter Five

The fifth chapter, written by Solange Simões and Mauro Jeronymo, is a methodological paper on racial classification and racial identity. They authors show no less than 45 different labels used for self-classification. The IBGE (Bureau of the Census) classification accounts for only one third of them. *Negra* (black, no negative connotation) and *Moreno*, account for another third, but are not census categories. Asked which factors were relevant for their racial classification, color was mentioned by 54%, followed by family (22%). The researchers allowed

respondents to classify the defining factors as the most, the second most and the third most important. Phenotypical factors are more relevant, but over half mentioned genotypic ones (family) and one fourth considered a social response, how others saw the respondent. Thus, descent is not as unimportant as part of the literature claims. It is just below skin color as a criterion. Respondents largely believe that others classify them as they classify themselves (95% of whites; 84% of *pretos* and 80% of *pardos*).

Chapter Six

In the sixth chapter, Leticia Junqueira Marteleto, Ana Paula de Andrade Verona and Cristina Guimarães Rodrigues analyze the intricate role of father and mother racial characteristics and schooling, respondents' racial self-identification and interviewer' identification on educational achievement. Cohort analyses show that women have less formal education than men in older cohorts and that this disadvantage is overcome in later cohorts.

The statistical instrument used in most multivariate analyses is an OLS regression. Respondents' education is associated with racial identification, both by the interviewer and by the respondent. However, when the parents' racial characteristics are taken into consideration, this association does not survive. Education of both parents counts, but the authors consider that the influence of the maternal education had been under-estimated. This analysis shows that mother's education is a major determinant, largely due to those mothers with complete secondary education and those who finished college.

Chapter Seven

In chapter seven, Neuma Aguiar, Danielle Fernandes and Jorge Alexandre Neves deal with the social mobility of women. They measure SES by a weighed index which includes labor force participation and years of education. Some 48% of the women interviewed are in the labor force. Analyzing the SES of those who are part of the labor force, they use an OLS regression which shows that the highest standardized beta was years of schooling, followed by fathers' occupation, gender, and if the mother was a housewife. They further search for the determinants separately by gender. The only significant relation for women is the number of years in school, whereas for the men the father's SES and if the mother was a housewife are significant predictors.

Considering that educational achievement is of relevance, what explains its variance? For both women and men, educational achievement is a function of parental SES. Education is shown to be part of status inheritance.

Chapter Eight

Maria de Lourdes Dolabela Pereira, João Gabriel Teixeira and Fernanda Pereira Mendes Motta write on mobility and quality of life in the eighth chapter. A minor shortcoming is that the bibliography that they use is all in Portuguese, thus missing the benefits of a substantial research experience on QoL carried in various countries. Insufficient satisfaction with the residential area is apparent: only slightly over half of the respondents feel "at home" in Belo Horizonte and in the metropolitan area as well. The vast majority of residents were in the area for more than ten years. The bulk of residents feel that their QoL is good or regular ('average, so-so'); "very good", "bad" and "very bad" attracted fewer evaluations. Police, hospitals, public transportation and entertainment are evaluated worse than school vacancies, business facilities, garbage

collection and basic public sanitation. Interestingly, the differences between residents of Belo Horizonte and those of the metropolitan area are modest. Family income also is modestly higher in Belo Horizonte. The students used Pearson correlation coefficients to look for the determinants of the wish to move elsewhere (“would move if I could”). The overall evaluation of QoL has a higher correlation with the wish to move than the evaluation of specific services and income in both spatial areas. Actually, family income only correlates significantly with the wish to move in the metropolitan area.

Chapter Nine

Corinne Davis Rodrigues, Betânia Totino Peixoto and Claudio Chaves Beato Filho analyze fear of crime and victimization risk in a paper similar in structure, theory and method to articles published in a first-rate American criminology journal. They analyze the fear of local victimization and of distant victimization, as a function of standard socio-demographic variables, indicators of risky routine activities and the perception of external variables. Social networks and interpersonal trust are also present. The analytical tools are based on Logit models. The analysis shows that risk perception varies by crime and locality.

My only addition to the model would be to move from a single safety center, based on residence, to a multi-centered concept, including other familiar environments, such as work, school and other neighborhoods.

Chapter Ten

In chapter ten, political participation and its opposite, apathy, is the dependent variable studied by Fátima Anastasia, Carlos Ranulfo Melo and Felipe Nunes. They note that active participation is the exception, not the rule, and establish a significant set of relations with family income, schooling and information level. The usual relation between apathy and lack of information is present and the authors do not presume that the direction of causality is known. Their favored statistical instruments are binary logistic regressions.

Chapter Eleven

In the final chapter, Magna Inácio and Paulo Magalhães Araújo tackle support for democracy. They use regression and path analyses. Their surviving predictors are age, years of formal education, income and civic engagement (*engajamento cívico*). Gender and interpersonal trust do not survive the regression.

Concluding Remarks

This book adds to the knowledge of Brazil, in general, and Belo Horizonte, in particular, in a variety of areas. It is good to have it close by.