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Panel: Rethinking Power Shifts: Plutocracy as the Paradigm for the 21st Century?

Considering the Preexisting Values on the Ruling about Plutocracy

[draft paper; not for quotation]

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Abstract

The ancient Greeks are said to have invented political theorizing, but it appears that politics were not the first that they reflected systematically about. Speculation about gods, about what moral instructions the Homeric poems contained, about the duties of hospitality, was already far advanced before anything like political theorizing began. Plutocracy was recognized and classified by ancient Greeks as the degeneracy of the Oligarchy, where Virtue is replaced by Profit, not because the political regime was condemned by itself but by the systematic thinking about the pre-existing values, which proposed them to judge it as degeneration. In this paper we intend to understand which current values allow the actual state of the world that is currently contested by movements all around the world, which call themselves fuming, namely “movement 15” in Europe, inspired on Spain’s M12 (Real Democracy Now) and Portugal’s Generation in Trouble. Over these past weeks, there have been repercussions in other countries, like the accession of the city of New York (Occupy Wall Street) the origin of the first global movement of social contestation created by virtual means against a model of Plutocracy.

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Outdoor Signs from North Africa

Warning!!! All this information is gathered from the Web... Just follow with us what the world can easily read, without political information, without knowing who wrote it and without political formation. But it seems that the world is waking up. All websites agreed that..... It is difficult to assess the extent to which the virtual media, in particular the use of the Internet, social networks and mobile phones, contributed to the downfall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. However, the mobilization from social networks (Dagnaud, 2011) and its role in social movements that have been challenging and agitating the Arab world is inevitable, whether in such cases or other places where there have been protests, such as Algeria, Libya, Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen.

After Tunisia and Egypt, Libya and Morocco have also used these “online stages” for the mobilization of their “masses”, and in both cases the Facebook served as a “meeting point”. The upheaval of *February 17, 2011 – to make it a day of anger in Libya*, was the name of the group that called for an uprising against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, and that brought together, at the time, more than 4400 members. Another group, with more than 2600 elements, called the Libyan people out into the streets for a day against corruption and nepotism. Few days after on the early movement of contestation, Libya was in a climate of strong political and social tension, demonstrating that the internet and mobile phones had become an increasingly powerful weapon for civilians. With messages via Twitter, videos recorded with smartphones and published on Facebook, through illegal channels and using YouTube, these platforms served as a vehicle for the protesters to express the revolt against their political leaders and, in some cases, to show suffered reprisals.

Moreover, the social network Facebook (created by Mark Zuckerberg) was the starting point for the concentration of thousands of people in Rabat, Morocco. The page of the group that organized the protest against the Moroccan Government and its King – *Movement for Changes February 20* – gathered the support of more than 22 thousand people.

Far from the North Africa dimension, these scenarios are noted as precursors of the movements of dispute that has been affecting the European and North American

democracies. In another political scenario, the means used are the same and we are far from considering all the political consequences that therefrom arise.

Indoors Signs from South Europe

In Spain, May 2011, thousands of protesters in Madrid came together to demonstrate for change in the political and economic and social system of Spain. The protests rapidly spread across the country and even crossed the borders to various European cities. Organized through social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, the demonstrations were compared to the unrest in North Africa and ironically received the name: *Spanish revolution*⁴.

The *Movement 15-M*, referring to the start date of May 15, took shape through the civil digital platform *Real Democracy Now*⁵! The platform voices its concern with high unemployment⁶, welfare cuts, and a cartelized and oligarchic political party system in Spain. Political corruption is also a major issue. While the protests do not have a clear-cut agenda, several demands reoccurred during the course of the protests: electoral reforms, better political representation and fair measures to combat the economic crisis. A slogan of the movement states: “Europe for the citizens and not the markets, we are not commodities in the hands of politicians and banks”⁷.

The protesters have been resourceful in keeping the rallies peaceful; however, some violent outbursts have threatened to undermine their cause. Nevertheless, the movement, characterized by young participants, can be considered politically and socially engaged and dedicated to transform the country. Some institutions are now closely monitoring the developments surrounding the *Movement 15-M* and especially their view on political corruption. The protesters seem to have a holistic as opposed to a legalistic view on what constitutes corruption. Unethical behavior within legal boundaries is still considered corrupt. The *Movement 15-M* has created an opportunity to advocate anti-corruption measures on the political agenda⁸.

⁴ See on Twitter <http://twitter.com/#%21/search/%23spanishrevolution>

⁵ See more on <http://www.democraciarealya.es/>

⁶ The rate of unemployment affects around 20% of the working population; in the case of young people to unemployment rate is around 40%.

⁷ See more on: <http://blog.transparency.org/2011/09/20/the-spanishrevolution-of-the-movement-15-m/>

⁸ In the running-up to the national elections in November 2011, the pressure of the movement had already contributed to reform proposals of one of the candidates running for office, Alfredo Pérez (PSOE). The

In Spain there is little official information and academic research on practices that could be viewed as corrupt and the statistics on convicted cases do not necessarily reflect the reality of corruption. Terms like ‘undue influence’ and ‘legal corruption’ do not contribute to build up popular trust in governmental institutions. Therefore, research institutes measure perceptions of corruption in order to provide a solid overview⁹.

In Portugal, Facebook was also used as a starting point to create protesting movements. The network welcomed more than an initiative, as was the case of the *Protest from Generation in Trouble*, a demonstration scheduled to take place on March 12, 2012 in Lisbon and Porto, and attended by more than 20 thousand participants.

The protest wanted to give voice to unemployed, *quinhentoseuristas*, and other low-paid citizens, self-entitled “slaves in disguise”. The movement ensures that is non-“partisan, secular, peaceful” and simply wants to demonstrate the dissatisfaction of those who want to have the right to employment, education and better working conditions. According to the organizers, this was a “spontaneous and civic movement” in order to create a “discussion group” involving “politicians, employers, young people, older persons, who at the moment are in a precarious situation”¹⁰.

Another even more ambitious protest, scheduled also on Facebook, by a group called *One Million in Avenida da Liberdade on March 19* wanted to join one million Portuguese citizens in the Avenida da Liberdade, seven days after the protest of the *Generation in Trouble*, aiming to show indignation because of the lack of employment, “the injustices and inequalities”, and defending “policy changes”.

The Apple in the Eye of the Storm

But it was in New York City, the world financial center, in the USA, that the movement has reached broad proportions with far-reaching consequences worldwide. *Occupy Wall Street* (OWS) is a protest that began on September 17, 2011 in Zuccotti

PSOE’s campaign program had included electoral reforms in order to increase accountability of deputies and improve the proportionality of the parliament. Besides, Pérez also insisted on the prevention of corruption in urban-planning by shifting the municipal responsibilities to the national level and strengthening scrutiny mechanisms.

⁹ This can be based on quite simple and straightforward country comparisons of citizens’ opinions of the frequency of corrupt behavior. In Spain research has shown that 46.8% perceives that corruption among politicians is very extensive, 39.8% quite extensive and 0.4% that there is no corruption (*Spanish Centre of Sociological Research*, 2011).

¹⁰ Even though they predicted some public ownership due to the number of people who were in this situation, they did not expect for the movement to grow as fast as it did.

Park, located in New York City's Wall Street financial district. The Canadian activist group *Adbusters* initiated the protest, which has led to occupy protests and movements around the world¹¹.

The main issues are social and economic inequality, greed, corruption and the undue influence of corporations on government—particularly from the financial services sector. The OWS slogan, *We are the 99%*, addresses the growing income inequality and wealth distribution in the U.S. between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population.

OWS was initiated by Kalle Lasn and Micah White of *Adbusters*, a Canadian anti-consumerist publication, who conceived of June 2011 occupation in lower Manhattan. Lasn registered the *OccupyWallStreet.org* web address on June 9th and emailed its subscribers writing “America needs its own Tahrir”. In a blog post on July 13th of 2011, *Adbusters* proposed a peaceful occupation of Wall Street to protest corporate influence on democracy, the lack of legal consequences for those who brought about the global crisis of monetary insolvency, and an increasing disparity in wealth.

So, the protest began in June and July when a group called *New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts* (NYAB), began promoting a “People’s General Assembly” to “Oppose Cutbacks And Austerity Of Any Kind”. On August 2nd the *New Yorkers Against Budget* met in Bowling Green Park. The event was intended to be a precursor to marching on Wall Street.

The internet group *Anonymous* created a video encouraging its supporters to take part in the protests. The *U.S. Day of Rage*, a group that organized to protest against “corporate influence [that] corrupts our political parties, our elections, and the institutions of government”, also joined the movement. The protest itself began on September 17th; a Facebook page for the demonstrations began two days later on September 19th featuring a YouTube video of earlier events. By mid-October, Facebook listed 125 Occupy-related pages.

The original location of choice by the protesters was 1 Chase Plaza, the site of the “Charging Bull” sculpture. Police discovered this before the protest began and fenced off the location. Nearby Zuccotti Park was then chosen. Since the park was

¹¹ See more on <http://directory.occupy.net/>

private property¹² police could not legally force protesters to leave without being requested to do so by the property owner.

Because of its connection to the financial system, lower Manhattan has seen many riots and protests since the 1800s, and OWS has been compared to other historical protests in the United States¹³. There is a consensus that, antecedents for Occupy Wall Street (OWS) include the British student protests of 2010, as well as Greek and Spanish anti-austerity protests of the “indignados” – starting 15 May 2011 in Spain, and the Portuguese one’s above referred – along with the Arab Spring protests.

These antecedents have in common with OWS a reliance on social media and electronic messaging to circumvent the authorities, as well as the feeling that financial institutions, corporations, and the political elite have been malfeasant in their behavior toward youth and the middle class. Occupy Wall Street, in turn, gave rise to the Occupy movement in the United States and around the world.

“Occupy” protesters' slogan *We are the 99%* refers to income disparity in the USA, a main issue for OWS. In fact, income inequality¹⁴ has increased over the last three decades with economic stagnation and unequal distribution of the wealth undermining the goals of working people. It is a focal point of the Occupy Wall Street protests.

OWS's goals include a more balanced distribution of income, more and better jobs, bank reform (including reduction or elimination of profits earned by banks), a reduction in the influence of corporations on politics, forgiveness of student loan debt or other relief for indebted students, and alleviation of the foreclosure situation. Some

¹² At a press conference held the same day the protests began, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg explained, *"People have a right to protest, and if they want to protest, we'll be happy to make sure they have locations to do it."*

¹³ Sit-down strikes (Michigan, 1930s); lunch-counter sit-ins (1960); occupation of Alcatraz by Native American activists (1969); Bonus Marchers (1932); May Day protesters (1971).

¹⁴ Simon Rogers and the Guardian UK, in their piece "Occupy protestors say it is 99% v 1%. Are they right?" state: *Now, one in every seven Americans lives below the poverty line - that's a record 46.2 million people (although it might actually be higher). One in six Americans have no health insurance - 50 million people, a population twice the size of Texas (27m people). Of every 17 Americans, at least one will be earning below the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. 14.5% of Americans households are defined as "food insecure". That means for every seven households, one will have trouble putting enough food on the table.*

media label the protests "anti-capitalist," while some dispute the relevance of this label¹⁵.

Early on the protesters were mostly young, partly because young people, primarily use social networks through which they promoted the protests. The average age of the protesters was 33, with people in their 20s balanced by people in their 40s. Various religious faiths have been represented at the protest including Muslims, Jews, and Christians. According to a survey of *occupywallst.org* website visitors by the *Baruch College School of Public Affairs* published on October 19, of 1,619 web respondents, one-third were older than 35, half were employed full-time, 13% were unemployed and 13% earned over \$75,000. When given the option of identifying themselves as Democrat, Republican or Independent/Other 27.3% of the respondents called themselves Democrats, 2.4% called themselves Republicans, while the rest, 70%, called themselves independents. A survey by *Fordham University Department of Political Science* confirmed the Baruch College findings and gave further details: the protester's political affiliations were 25% Democrat, 2% Republican, 11% Socialist, 11% Green Party, 12% Other, and 39% independent. Ideologically the Fordham survey found 80% self-identifying as slightly to extremely liberal, 15% as moderate, and 6% as slightly to extremely conservative.

Since the closure of the Park encampment, the movement has turned its focus on occupying banks, corporate headquarters, board meetings, college and university campuses, and Wall Street itself. On March 17th, 2012, Occupy Wall Street demonstrators attempted to mark the movement's six months anniversary by reoccupying Zuccotti Park. The police, who made over 70 arrests, soon cleared protestors away. During an October 6 news conference, President Barack Obama said, *"I think it expresses the frustrations the American people feel, that we had the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, huge collateral damage all throughout the country, and yet you're still seeing some of the same folks who acted irresponsibly trying to fight efforts to crack down on the abusive practices that got us into this in the first place."*

¹⁵ For example, in an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, pollster Douglas Schoen wrote that polling of the protesters revealed *a deep commitment to left-wing policies: opposition to free-market capitalism and support for radical redistribution of wealth, intense regulation of the private sector, and protectionist policies to keep American jobs from going overseas.*

In September, various labor unions, including the Transport Workers Union of America Local 100 and the New York Metro 32BJ Service Employees International Union, pledged their support for demonstrators. The Internet Archive and the Occupy Archive, a project at the *Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media* at George Mason University, has been collecting material from Occupy sites beyond New York.

Occupy Wall Street and similar movements symbolize another rise of direct democracy that has not actually been seen since ancient times. Let us now see the global proportions:

The Occupy Movement Around the World (2011-2012)



Source: <http://directory.occupy.net/>

	Libya	Egypt	Morocco	Spain	Portugal	USA
Goals						
<i>Against</i>						
Corruption	×	×	×	×	×	×
Nepotism	×	×	×	×		×
Oligarchic political parties				×	×	
Increasing disparity in wealth				×	×	×
Unemployment				×	×	×
Welfare Cuts				×	×	
<i>In favor</i>						
Bank reform				×	×	×
Better working conditions				×	×	×
Change in political and economic system	×	×	×	×	×	×
Direct Democracy				×	×	×
Increase political accountability				×	×	×
New Public Policies				×	×	×
Parliamentary reforms				×		

Source: Mendonça, Oliveira, Sarmento, 2012 [Table under construction]

Old Procedures, New Goals?

But in reality all that internet information doesn't mean more participation. In fact the promotion of contestation political facts of our societies has been accompanied by a general devaluation of politics, characteristically of the exercise of power in democracies in the context of mass society (Shils, 1992). The intellectual background of the massified society is the development of technology communications, facilitating the merger of intellectual and cultural criticism of the content of the press, radio and television, with fears about the unpatterned masses within territorially extensive society with a growing urban and industrialized population.

The negative aspects that follow from the definition of mass society have characterized its analysis: alienation, disbelief, atomization, the homogeneity without roots, moral vacuum, lack of firmness, the egotism, and the evaporation of loyalties.

However, the originality of the society of the masses lies in the relationship between the mass of the population and the society center (Shils, 1992). The awareness

that societies have centers that impose themselves in ways other than by coercion and manipulation, functioning as a general system of values, in which one of the main elements is the positive attitude regarding the legitimization of the established authority that allows you to understand that the authority is the representative of the public order.

This order (Voeglin, *Order and History*, 1956-1957), implied in the general system of values, and in the light of which the value system is self-legitimated, is endowed with dynamic capabilities. Namely, contains the capability of critical judgment about your own value system and its institutional system.

When, as in current societies, a unified economic system – political democracy – forces through education and urbanization a frequent contact between the many sectors of the population, a mutual consciousness is created (perhaps even greater than at any other time) that nonetheless bears and even increases the range and possibility of concerted rejection of the central system of values.

Those participating in the central system of values also feel their outer position – the distance from the centre – with greater intensity than their predecessors would probably not feel. Thus, though the mass society may become more prone to consensus there may similarly be a strongly negative link with the symbols of the central system of values, the very same around which people organize an opposition to the institutional system and central values.

As Shils demonstrated, it can be said that the sources of disorder are imperfect connections on the central system of values. The integration through authority does not exhaust all possibilities, for successes and failures are linked to the cultural sphere, which is the realm of belief, and the cognitive image of society. According to Eisestadt the possibility of the emergence of new movements and orientations of protest in new societies, has a potential that unraveled through generational conflict, of intellectual contradiction and demystifying the world (Eisenstadt, 1991).

Thus, on the one hand, much broader participation in the central system of values through the educational and institutional apparatuses and through political and communicative rights, allows the mass of the population the dominant system of values as their own, thus becoming a part of civil society, with a sense of moral responsibility on the compliance of rules and the sharing of authority. Political apathy, frivolity,

vulgarity, irrationality and sensitivity to demagogy accompany this phenomenon. So is the re-emergence of nationalism an important aspect of this incorporation process of the population mass in central systems and institutional values (Di Palma, 1970).

In this sense, it is especially around the middle classes that the direction of our society's evolution is established but it is a mystification that tends to make them wrongly believe in their own power. Insofar as, on the other hand, the dissent towards the centre relates to a number of particular issues, the consensual statement of the core loses its ability to control dissent.

It is in the exchange between elites that the structures of inter-group beliefs become particularly important to the order and disorder of a society. In the vast majority of groups, beliefs are less salient in the lower ranks that are from the perspective of the elites. When dissenting beliefs manifest themselves in relation to components of culture they provide a focus and a model for those who suffer from the distributions of income, status and power.

An extensive and integrated society will tend to have individuals and groups who reject the beliefs that animate the dominant consensus and these beliefs tend to be more systematic and coherent insofar as general beliefs that go into any consensus are vague and diffuse.

The emergence of the modern neo-liberal state with its plurality of religious bodies, with various political parties, with separation of powers and institutions of guidance and control of class conflicts or other partial conflicts, reduced the number of requirements for *peace in polity*. However, the technical progress has not put an end to the struggle for the fair distribution of revenue as Aron already underlined; the essence of democracy, combined with the industrialized civilization develops a state of agitation.

An enlargement and expansion of the society and of its core values to the masses differentiates the forms of conflict that tend to be confined to the borders of partial dissent within a framework of limited consensus. Alongside these deliberate efforts to change the structure of consensus, there is a continuous process of border redefinition. These changes have in turn resulted from the efforts of the advocates of dissenting beliefs, in part on demographic and technological change, and in the development of dynamic potential of various patterns of beliefs.

The analysis of a situation of dissent in a society presupposes that societies are much too large and diverse in order for the center to master a thorough knowledge of what lies outside of it. There are many obstacles to such cognitive saturation. There is also a tension between the center's search for knowledge, from which the periphery needs to protect itself from, and the desire from opposing factions to penetrate the very arcane *imperium* of the center.

For our case, we need to consider that the most important turns and changes of the structural and symbolic premises of the Western tradition (European and American) that have crystallized initially under the controversial impact of the Protestant ethic, the Counter-Reformation, Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, have created new forms of protest and heterodoxy in general, whose characteristics were particularly evident in the student protests of the sixties.

The facts of today's disputes allow explanatory and systematically comparisons' with the abundant produced literature by political scientists as a result of the effort for understanding the student revolts of the 1960s (Sarmiento, 2008). The political connection between the young age and the ability to claim was extensively studied and allows the swift and unoriginal typological identification of the protesting group.

Also the fact that disputes occur simultaneously in democratic and non-democratic regimes, has already begun to draw new classifications such as the *Democracy Protestataire* (Mathieu, 2011).

What is new, on the one hand, are the virtual culture aggregating means and, on the other hand, the goal of a struggle against a regime that, even though being democratic, seems to have degenerated into much like what the ancient Greeks knew as plutocracy.

Admittedly there are several ways of understanding the bundle of popular upsurges presented above. At the first sight the tendency is to take them as bounded to the same *nisus* or idea but how can it be that people from quite disparate regimes and social systems share the same desire for change when the places of departure of such aching for change seem to be so incommensurable with one another. Theoretically it could be argued that there is a level of abstraction that actually enables us to take these different sites of revolt as comparable and even similar, and empirically it could also be

argued that the place of departure is not only comparable but in fact the same, in the sense that it is an embedded system that generates similar discrete phenomena (i.e. across nation states) throughout the system.

Should the latter be the case we might certainly find evidence of it through purely macro-economic data related to the interdependence of all these different places where the differential impact of the macro-regime of accumulation and macro-mode of regulation (see Jessop and Sum, 2006: 41-2; Boyer and Saillard, 2002) is felt both between territories and within territories; and should the former be the case we would find ourselves in the need of a concept that could simultaneously describe a phenomena that pervades these places with manifold shapes. Naturally both efforts of theoretical and empirical development must be interconnected.

Hints towards a Research Agenda: Plutocracy and Political Behavior

We pursue explanatory leverage of these popular revolts through the excavation of the concept of plutocracy because what seems to be at stake in each of the cases of protest is a matter of a collective craving for better access to goods that are seized by limited sectors of society. The quality of these goods is varied, in Tahrir, for instance, they are more clearly political goods namely in the form of rights to instances of decision making and personal security, but Spain's M12, Portugal's "Generation in Trouble", and the seemingly international OWS, though presented mainly as demands on the regime of redistribution, could just as well be declared as claims upon these same rights. The differences though stark — where in Egypt what was at stake is the legitimacy of a political regime and in the Western cases it is the legitimacy of social results of a mode of production — begin to be more clearly grounded on appearance rather than substance if we are to understand that what actually differs is the mediated access to goods.

This is why the concept of plutocracy seems worthwhile to explore in the effort to unveil the common thread linking these popular demands: it attempts to describe some kind of undesired political regime, which is strongly based in the way goods are distributed, without stating the actual means through which power is exerted and maintained. The concept also fortuitously diverts us from the issue of social inequality. Ironically enough if the OWS slogan "We are 99%" was to be true there could hardly be

a more socially equal society. The concept of plutocracy binds the discussion of citizenship to the materiality of power as opposed to merely its formal and procedural dimensions. However as any with other meaningful concept in the social sciences it is not without several thorny problems that we here attempt to resolve.

We will thus now expound on the varied shapes that the concept may take, propose an alternative definition by mobilizing and contrasting nearby concepts, and discuss its overall utility for analyzing the social world. The first job at hand is to understand to what kind of conceptual traveling and conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970) plutocracy may lend itself to. Quentin Skinner's (2002) proposition for analysis of the relationship between the social lexicon and the social world is rather appropriate to address how theoretical efforts may cope with terminology that is ascribed to shifting material realities conveying ambiguous and evolving social meaning. Skinner devises three focal points at which discussion of the correct application of a term with social meaning occurs: the meaning, the referent, and the attitude expressed in the discursive act.

Conceptual traveling would hence occur every time the referent of the term is extended, i.e. every time the conditions for its application meet new *loci*. Conceptual stretching on the other hand would take place when these new things to which the term is applied force an alteration of its meaning. Presumably, in scientific discourse the attitudinal aspect carried within the term would be exterior to any controversy located in the first two focal points. However, overseeing this would equate to loose sight of the reasons that lead to discussions around the meaning and the referent in the first place.

Whereas all three points of discussion are dialectically related the mere analytical distinction among them concedes the task of giving a stylized account of plutocracy without ruling the attitudinal dimension (Skinner's third point) out of the definition and even integrating it. This initial linguistic palaver may be forgiven if we are to agree that plutocracy is a special case of conceptual stretching, not only because the conditions that gave birth to the term are somewhat unrepeatable but also because the actual meaning of the term is filled with potential redundancies and paradoxes.

Going far back to Aristotle's typology of political constitutions what we find are terms that specifically denote some kind of agency. Now plutocracy would denote the

ruling by the wealthy, but historically this seems redundant and scientifically it comes as underspecified. If plutocracy was a political system characterized by the ruling of the wealthiest, the burden of proof for the necessity of the term in political science would be evidence from a system where the rulers are deprived from a privileged disposition of material resources or the rich find no way to exert power over other individuals via government through their wealth.

Consequently, what would we call a regime where wealth exercises power without the need to rely on government? We would say it does not exist, because the exercise of power requires a systematized use of violence and though it may be conveyed through all sorts of *media*, money included, they cannot be seen as sources of power but mere bearers. As for wealth is itself meaningless in a situation of non-existence of power.

This is to say that wealth is a result of a bundle of social practices and its definition is differential (it implies inequality), and while it is reproducible the conditions for such reproduction lie outside the nexus of production and exchange that generated it in the first place. For this nexus to be holistic and wholesome — to rely on nothing outside of it for its permanence — something of an extreme relationship among individuals and between them and things would need to be put to work: either total commodification or total decommodification. Both these scenarios would constitute a starting point for the conceptual discussion of the referent.

This bifid exaggeration is also intended as first step towards a stylized account of plutocracy as political regime. Though, we may still regard it adjectivally, as a possible feature of other types of regime (eg. plutocratic democracy). Acknowledging the imperatives of state action in a capitalist economy might force us to consider plutocratic features as constitutive of regimes where capitalism is the dominant mode of production and intrinsic to any capitalist state, and not as a clear-shaped and finished perversion of some pristine form of government. The possibility of being co-constitutive makes expressions like “plutocratic capitalist democracy” run both the risks of redundancy and contradiction depending on the choice of available strategies for definition. Either it is redundant because of the indivisible overlapping character of public and private realms in capitalism, or contradictory because whereas this indivisibility is typical of capitalism, plutocracy might just mean its elision.

The Weberian drill of devising the ideal-typical form of plutocracy seems quite appropriate to mitigate the risks of redundancy and, *en route* to a more complete construction of the concept, render the desired compatibility with scientific cogency. The ideal-type of plutocracy is found in the detailed specification of the referent, so some empirical considerations are in need instead of a sheer analysis of the logic of capitalism. But let us elaborate on the adjectival use of the term before we abandon it, for it may still have some purchase on the discussion around both the referent and what will ultimately constitute a definition, i.e. the meaning.

Returning to the attitudinal dimension of terms, we may note that *plutocracy* is used in modern democracies to impeach political practices that entail undesirable rationales for the distribution and exercise of power or unwarranted results of resource allocation. Dependent on the historical contingencies, it may assume various forms but its existence appears to rest on the distinction between public and private realms, or to put it simply in the institution of private property, and therefore restricted to certain types of society. The interactions between public and the private are, once this institution arises, necessarily the object of regulation and themselves constitutive of the arenas for political action. The threshold of plutocracy depends on the extent to which this relationship is perceived to benefit certain sectors *vis-à-vis* the public and is of course historically contingent and socially constructed.

What is of central importance in this institutionalized distinction between the private and the public is that it is deemed as corruptible: when the private invades the public — economic agents taking over the state apparatus — and vice-versa — state agents taking over the access to material resources. The paradoxical conclusion is that this corruption means that an approximation to either total commodification or total decommodification are in action, both of which in any case express the absence of a distinction from public and private; both of which would be perfect plutocracies. Without the distinction between private and public it is hard to know what would be of government and, hence, to plutocracy maintain meaning a slight but significant adaptation is necessary: to consider wealth not as a means of government but as the predominant means of command.

As it seems the central phenomena ascribed to the term — material inequality sustained by social inequality and the other way around — is historically transversal to

most political regimes, none of which would readily and without controversy be designated as a full-blown plutocracy. If plutocracy were to be considered as a certain degree in social inequality and so an aspect of all regimes the term would lose much leverage for scientific inquiry. It would be rendered both superfluous and inadequate for any typology of governments. Because plutocracy tends to be everywhere — too much conceptual traveling — it can either mean nothing — too much conceptual stretching — or need to be considered as a continuum. However if it were to be a matter of degree in the distinction between public and private it would make its entrance back into political science's toolbox. To actually understand how this degree could be grasped a more in depth inquiry of both possible ideal-types would be rather valuable. Here they will only be sketched out.

In a state of total decommodification all goods are public and as such its usufruct is a collective matter hence subject to the mode of political representation and intervention (Jessop, 1990). Wealth — the comparatively superior assemblage of goods — would follow the will of political representatives, and political power would mean disposition of wealth. The complete implications cannot be entirely discernible because there remain many untold possibilities as to what the general mode of production could be in such a system. The notion of private property for instance would not be absolutely incompatible as long as it is derived from public endowment and is not later exchanged.

In a state of total commodification every social relation is subject to the rules of exchange, including traditional state functions. The well being of the members of such community is the direct result of their ability to cope with, and profit from, the informal rules of collective survival. Corruption, a concept which we will not try unravel here, is pretty much about creating these systems of informal rules where power establishes the rules for exchange but with one significant difference: corruption actively feeds on public laws and public power.

Both ends of the plutocratic continuum have a myriad of implications. They defy existing frameworks of state theory because they hurdle some kingpins upon which we are accustomed to organize our knowledge — social class, ruling class, state apparatus, all need reconstruction under these ideal-types. We have been moving back and forth from the concept's meaning and referent much in line with any general theoretical effort.

The problem with plutocracy is that if the meaning is to be complementary (and not redundant) to nearby concepts like corruption, social inequality, crony capitalism, capitalist democracy, and so forth, the necessary specification makes its referent hardly meet any empirical counterpart. Though this might be an interesting challenge for theoretical efforts the absence of empirical counterparts advises prudence. Our proposed solution is to understand plutocracy as the state of affairs preceding the rupture of the state system into sudden moves towards either commodification or decommodification. This is but a research approach; it allows the framing of both historical and theoretical inquiry in less descriptive terms and situates it right at the intersection of state theory and political economy.

The Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) (Jessop, 2002: 31-5) to the state draws from the Gramscian inclusive sense of the state (political society + civil society) and the Poulantzian understanding of it as a complex social relation as opposed to a neutral object or an agent. Accordingly, the SRA establishes six analytical dimensions of the state where strategic selectivity occurs (Offe). Three of these dimensions concern the institutional aspects of the state as social relation, namely the form of political representation, state intervention, and the internal articulation of state apparatus. The remaining three dimensions constitute the state *qua* social relation: the articulation of political projects by different social forces; the prevailing state project; and hegemonic projects seeking to harmonize particular practices and injunctions with universal tenets.

This brief exposition of the SRA offers the minimal and essential conditions to inquire, in a thought-experiment fashion, what could plutocracy mean now and what could it mean regardless of the historical period. This would lead us to enquire what social bases could enable modes of representation where the specificity of particular interests is close to rupture the distinction of public and private. Could it be a distinct mode of representation and intervention? How long and in what circumstances could the pre-rupture state of affairs persist? What discursive strategy led and sustained such status? What type of political membership does it generate?

All these questions entail the rejection of the notional plutocracy (i.e. the regime or perversion of regime) and establishing it as a *moment* that can only be factually detected *a posteriori*, when reversing movements in the commodification *continuum* occur. A cautionary note is however needed, for commodification occurs in numerous

arenas sometimes in opposing directions. We believe that Brenner et al. (2010) framework of six sites of regulation — 1) wage relation; 2) form of capitalist competition; 3) form of financial monetary regulation; 4) the state and other forms of governance; 5) the international configuration; and 6) spatial development — originally devised to analyze neoliberalization supplies the necessary complement for the SRA to cope with the question of assessing the direction and degree of commodification.

The protest movements that we have described above cannot be traced back to a single event in either of these sites of regulation. In broad strokes the regulation school account of a transition from Fordist mode of production to Post-Fordism (Boyer, 2002) and Jessop (1993) own depiction of a movement towards a Shumpeterian warfare post-national regime (see Jessop, 2004: 67-8) (SWPR) signals quite unequivocally a governance shift towards greater commodification.

But we may also witness how little predictive power the degree of commodification seems to have on whether there occur large or significant protest movements. This happens too because if we were to construct an explanatory model of protest movements mainly based on indices of commodification (for a seminal use of these types of indices as empirical variables see Esping-Andersen, 1990) it would still be very hard to gauge the extremely eclectic phenomena we wish to explain. A more promising entrance point to actually try to relate the two variables is to focus on patterns of political participation.

Among the major discussions on democratic outcomes and citizenship we find the Tocquevillian inspired literature on the conceptual triad of civic participation, social trust, and democracy. Putnam's (2001) model of an effect of civic participation on social (generalized) trust which in turn facilitates collective action and the well functioning of democratic institutions was challenged by others advancing alternative determinants of social trust like welfare selectivity (Larsen, 2007) albeit leaving the essential link between social trust and democracy untouched and somewhat unexamined (for a review: Paraskevopoulos, 2010). One of the contending claims states that the neo-Tocquevillian "town meeting model" of civic participation has been superseded by new political repertoires of action generated by a New Political Culture (NPC) (Clark & da Silva, 2009).

This NPC has been simultaneously portrayed as a phenomena occurring in places “with more highly educated citizens, higher incomes, and high tech services” (Clark, 1998) and as a phenomenon generating “critical, engaged citizen[s]” with “a significant impact as public good” (Clark & da Silva, 2009: 263). Such an optimistic account of NPC, suggesting it capable of occupying the place left empty by the decreasing traditional citizenship as a promoter of democracy, seems paradoxical and somewhat under-theorized. How can a phenomenon that is apparently based on social polarization (see Hamnett, 1996) be an agent of democracy?

The critique of modernity has developed itself around a kind of ideological consensus about the organization of the market economy and its relations with the culture (Wolin, 1997). In it, there are present some of the terms used frequently to describe also the postmodernism, post-structuralism political thought –, post-marxism, neoliberalism, post-materialism. It is therefore debatable, *which are the implications of culture in the context of politics?*

Discussions on civic culture patterns (Almond and Verba, 1989), mass society and advanced industrial societies (Aron, Shils, Inglehart, 1990; 2007) thus constitute a varied spectrum and are relevant for the analysis of processes and mechanisms of political transformation (Tilly, 2001: 24; Pierson, 2004). However, *to which extent are we witnessing a convergence of contemporary societies to the post-materialism or to other patterns of political culture?*

The analysis of available literature ¹⁶ confirms that the policy has a new cultural dimension complex, becoming the challenge of seeking the logical elements in order to set valid interpretations (cf. Davis, Dowley and Silver, 1999) about the emergence of a new standard political culture (Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998; Clark and Inglehart, 1998).

Thus, changes in the political system and in contemporary democracies have been explained from the changes in attitudes and behaviors of individuals in relation to party systems, to innovative forms of mobilization and political participation, to a new

¹⁶ Given the existence of a large number of publications on the topic of political culture, the dichotomy materialism vs. post-materialism and diversity of empirical and quantitative information available, we have opted for an approach that exploits the emergence of cultural paradigm regarding the rational choice paradigm, and in view of the emergence of new political culture.

set of attitudes toward work, family and environment. The emergence of a new political culture is thus the result, on one side of the refinement of the concept of political culture and, on the other side of the spread of post-materialist paradigm on a global scale.

Cultural Power Shifts?

The argumentation and demonstration carried out in this text enables us to say that the idea of a new political culture corresponds to the introduction of a new political style (Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998).

What you could call from the outset of an unconventional study of politics, is currently the theoretical threshold available that allows us to discuss, under a political point of view, the changes made within the contemporary politics. And which place it is at the center of the discussions about the new configurations of power.

The growing interest in the debate on cultural paradigm and a new political culture, resulted in the development of analytical, sophisticated and conceptual instruments, seeking to study the interaction between concepts and empirical reality, notoriously engaged in explaining the variation of accommodation and adaptation strategies of behaviors.

The social context most closely resembles the black box (Easton, 1965), in which the individual is taken in the diversity of its political and social relations, settling, thenceforth, the priorities of the public debate on governance, economic, social and cultural. What is released outside the black box (*outputs*) highlights the different assumptions tested collectively and participated on issues, trends and common challenges of contemporary? But that's what is going on inside the box is what arouses more curiosity and in respect of which little is known – what is in there contains a set of interactions mainly involves cultural and political.

We finalize with the assumption that this world of globalisation accentuates the nature of politics as a function of the economy and therefore reverses the classical concepts. Let's say that in this new scale all are competitors – *enemies* to Schmitt – from an economic point of view, but to overcompensate everyone has to be a *friend* in a political point of view. In this passage is lost simultaneously, both the catalytic and separating forces of politics.

The cultural root of this transformation lies in the assertion of an area of individual freedom that is greatly influenced by the movement for individualized and decentralized use of technology. The cultural openness to technological experimentation and symbolic manipulation constitutes a whole new world of imaginary representations that evolve into the virtual culture.

This libertarian paradigm, this promise of a new social space, global and anti-sovereign, in which anyone, anywhere, can express to the rest of humanity their beliefs without any fear, this harbinger of intellectual freedom and economic, that can undo all authoritarian powers on Earth (Barlow, 1996a) would assume the transformers thesis that the society of information would be such as to create the conditions that were missing for the full exercise of rights and freedoms and ultimately, the realization of the principles of equality and democratic participation. As others have stressed, however the risks of greater control and police surveillance of the “end of privacy”. This new social organization has been named “society of individual mass”, as a political characteristic of a policy of globalisation (Hague Loader, 1999).

This is the cultural antinomy that merited our reflection. It is not possible neither prudent, to seize the inquiry that led to it immediately. However, the complexity, seen as a challenge to the analysis stimulates “cross-border land tours”. It matters to investigate how a deliberately anti-organizational policy is the source to the emergence of a new political structure that undermines the legitimizing force of political activity, changing the status of power and counter forces that pressure it.

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