QUIXOTISM IN CONTEMPORARY PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

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Abstract

Contemporary social movements were repeatedly criticized because of their decentralized organization and their idealist objectives. The present study argues that considering connective actions as inefficient is to confuse them for collective actions, which are based on pragmatic objectives. More than that, it will be argued that pragmatic objectives within a social movement are conducing to violence and are symptomatic for seeking fast solutions to social problems, but not for profound social transformation. In contrast, connective social movements, which are based on horizontal communication and prefigurative politics, are conducive to both individual and social change, as they enhance self-expression and personal responsibility.

Keywords: *Prefigurative politics, social change efficiency, quixotism .*

1. NOWADAYS PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Within the first age of the digital paradigm, the common man naturalized the public self-expression exercise. The non-political individual started to practice his ability to influence the political arena, regardless of his socio-political regimentation (Joyce, 2010). Since the digital infrastructure was liberalized and common people could not just use it, but also, produce it, a new conceptualization of power emerged. As people started to produce digital instruments and tools, apart from organizational monopolies that used to decide the distribution and the use of digital objects, several cultural values were weighed.

A cultural disposition towards self-transcendence and openness to change (Schwartz, 1992) got deeply embedded within contemporary shared schemes of thinking. The model of emergent democracy (Steven, 2002) and the political philosophy of extreme democracy (Lebkowsky & Ratcliffe, 2005) were absorbed within the new world-view, by their principles, if not by their denomination. This process conduced, in turn, to a new symbolic balance of power between the state and the citizen. If the old paradigm prescribed that citizens are boldly determined by the state structures of power, the new paradigm turns the relation up-side-down and states that citizens are entitled to determine the state (Meier, 2011).

Along with the spread of collaborative decentralized communities, direct action and self-organization became valuable principles. In turn, amid the normalization of direct action and self-organization, more principles developed under modern anarchism were absorbed within the social matrix. It is significant to point out, however, that these principles, even though highly displayed among collaborative digital structures, did not retain their political ideological reference. Instead, they were acknowledged by their practitioners simply as life-style principles. One of these principles regards the equivalence between means and goals, which should not be contradictory. The old political rationalism prescribed the Machiavellian point of view that noble ends could and should be pursued by any efficient means. However, the new paradigm of everyday life sanctions as unauthentic this fast road towards a desired reality (Springer, 2014).

This idealistic view gained practical efficiency as the digital anarchic landscape made it handy to create social forms to practice idealistic values, without pretending to change the word in its whole. So, it became possible to create enclaves where social norms are different from those shared within the traditional order. The individual, who becomes a member of such a community, is not asked to draw back from the traditional order. On the other hand, he is a practitioner of both social orders, at the same time. This duality was long time transparent within our vocabulary that discriminated between offline and online lives. However, the

longer an individual experienced the decentralized collaborative digital life, the more he imbued his offline life with the same principles of behavior (Tornero & Varis, 2010). Nowadays, it is considered both inefficient and erroneous to distinguish between offline and online lives within the liquid society (Bauman, 2006).

Most of nowadays the collaborative and decentralized communities allow an individual to experience a different type of social organization. However, these structures are not intended for the accumulation of revolutionary capital, but for the organic social transformation. They provide the individual with tools to find and implement solutions to various life problems. Within the post-anarchist process, the revolutionary idea to change the pre-existing social order is not prominent (Springer, 2014). The exact opposite to it, prefigurative politics rejects the radical idea that an ideal personal life can be developed only within an uniformed social arena. By embracing diversity, it allows an individual to live as he wants „here and now", with no need for a revolutionary moment intended to change the whole world. In other words, the project of changing the world is replaced by the process of transformative personal life. If being a part of a social experiment was a rare event before the paradigm shift, within the analogical society, the digitalized society normalized the social experiment as part of the daily life.

The concept of prefigurative politics was coined by Boggs (1977) to describe the shift between the old forms of socialism, as it was communism, and the new Left. However, within today social context, prefigurative politics describe peaceful post-anarchist social movements and encompass a variety of manifestations based of direct action and mutual aid, which look to communize the individual (Clarck, 2013). Still, the main part of the definition provided by Boggs (1977) is retained. The term designates the practicality of a social movement. In other words, it describes how much of the principles a social movement fights for are practiced within the daily life, by its supporters.

By practicing prefigurative politics, individuals express their political aims by their means (Yates, 2015). This, however, it is not to say that these political aims are defined by traditional explicit political language. More often than not, the private life gets political value simply because individuals' personal principles are contrasting the traditional social order. While individuals feel free to practice their personal life principles, they indirectly address and contest the principles imbued within the social order regulated by traditional politics. In the process of normalizing self-determination, individuals challenge the structure of the traditional power and by doing so, they often find themselves at odds with traditional politics.

Prefigurative politics imply five simultaneous processes: 1. the collective experience of new types of social organization; 2. the collective imagining, production and circulation of instruments that facilitate different social relations then those favored by the established social order; 3. the construction of specific lifestyles that integrate future oriented habits; 4.the continuous innovation in constructing future oriented ideologies that can be enabled in the now and here; 5. the popular dissemination of specific peaceful but non-resignedly ideologies for different types of public (Yates, 2015, p.1)

2. THE NEW-NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE FORCE OF IDEALISM

The efficiency of a social movement, in Boggs' (1977) definition, can be assessed based on the compatibility between the principles claimed within the ideological corpus of a social movement and the direct experience of those principles within the lifestyle of its supporters. The new-new social movements were more often than not associated with the danger of violence diffusion because of their decentralized nature and leaderless organization (Garfinkel, 2003). When the historical evidence presented the new-new social movements as the most peaceful collective manifestation encountered by humanity, they were still criticized because of their idealism and peaceful nature (Taylor, 2013). More consistently, they were held as inefficient compared with the new social movements and doomed to failure because of their lack of interest in accessing traditional power.

Indeed, post-anarchist movements are based on the traditional anarchist point of view. They place the root of social problems within the main structure of hierarchical power and consider inefficient to struggle to take on political power. Because every leader becomes a subject of the system he enters, post-anarchists don't place the main guild for wrong policies on individuals. The structures of power are understood in Foucauldian manner, so the efficient strategy for social betterment is not to select better candidates, but to press politicians to act accordingly with the popular will. This should not be understood as a project, but as a process that implies social betterment within which, society is co-interested and co-educated in direct democracy principles and practices.

Even though the new-new social movements can be considered inefficient when compared to the new social movements, it is significant to distinguish between the different methodologies and different objectives they are on to. To point this boldly, there should be no polemics about the efficiency of new-new social movements compared with new social movements. A fair debate would focus on the differences that distinguish collective movements from connective movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and the differences between movements with pragmatic aims and idealistic aims, respectively (Stekelenburg, Walgrave, Klandermans & Verhulst, 2012).

Most scholars agree to categorize the social movement within three categories: the old social movements, the new social movement and the new-new social movements (Feixa, Pereira & Juris, 2009). The social movements of the nineteenth century are marked by a rigid and simple social order. The protester could opt in a demonstration based on a very specific repertoire of motives and manifestations. Feixa, Pereira and Juris (2009) argue that the prototype for the protester of those times is Tarzan (p. 423). In other words, the protagonist is the young man who struggles for a better life and is willing to fight for materialistic benefits.

The second wave of social unrest unleashed in the '60s. It brought into streets a new type of protester, the so called "Peter Pan" prototype (Feixa, Pereira, & Juris, 2009, p. 423). The new

social order is more diverse now and so are the reasons for engaging in protest. The Peter-Pan type of the protester is the young man who refuses to fit in a world that does not stand for his aspirations and dreams. Accordingly, the repertoire of contesting actions becomes more diversified and the collective manifestation is, in turn, more peacefully than that of the '20s. An eclectic vision on reality makes place for dramatic manifestation of disagreement and creativity and joy get for the first time in to the street (Ayalew, 2010; Kurzman, 2008). It is the time when creativity becomes a collective good, accessible to everyone. The old social norm that makes creativity a monopoly of a professional cast is disrupted (Greene & Kuswa, 2012).

The pragmatic reasons of protest are outnumbered by idealistic reasons and the heterogeneity of manifestations increases. There is, therefore, a correlation between the idealistic nature of a movement along with its degree of decentralization and the peaceful means of collective expression.

If the second wave of contest brings creativity and social conscience into the social arena of disagreement, the third wave of social movements - the so called new-new social movements - move further on instrumenting creativity and the exercise of self-expressing within the frame of social conscience. Connective actions, by contrast with collective actions, are based on the drive to self-express life principles and values (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This change creates a shift in the dynamics of protest. Engaging in contesting action is not the result of a rational calculus, but a way to prove the authenticity of principles which were formerly displayed in public, through social networks. In other words, demonstrations are not anymore about specific benefits, but about self-expression and self-proving. Ideas, principles and values and not pragmatic claims are mainly supported by the third wave of social dissent. This is another way to say that post-anarchist principles which pin the social transformation on the matrix of individual conscience are diffused within the social contemporary practice (Springer, 2014; Clarck, 2013).

The protagonist of the third wave is the so called "Yo-Yo adultscent" (Feixa, Pereira, &

Juris, 2009, p.423). The adultscent is the adult who keeps his adolescent idealism and the child-mind that enforce imagination and optimism in the world-view. In so far, protests were coagulated around recognizable and admired individuals who created different sorts of personality cults (Ross, 2011; Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006). This happens no more once that leaderless protests are emerging around the world. The new paradigm prescribes gratitude towards great influencers and not recognition. The metaphor in use is that of an artist who feels appreciation towards nature for being inspired by it, and not obedience towards it (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006). The inspirer is not a leader in many respects. For one of them, there can be many inspirers at the same time and everyone can be one. Neutralization of an inspirer does not create the crisis, the disappearance of a leader would create.

This change is significant in many ways. One of the most important consequences is the so called naturalization of heroism. If the second wave of social unrest naturalized creativity as a common attribute anyone could enact and make use of it, the third wave of contesting could be remembered for naturalization of heroism, by politicizing the private life.

Traditionally, history keeps the name of different personalities as heroes because of their uncommon conduct. Henry Thoreau (1849) is remembered for his statement on civil disobedience and his consistent life-style with the principles he preached. More than other actions, he is remembered for his refuse to pay war taxes as a means to contest militarist policies. Although there are no official statistics, at present, tax resistance is a relatively common behavior individuals resort to in order to preserve an authentic personal life (Tokumitsu, 2014; van Gelder, 2014; Karlin, 2014; Solnit, 2013; Koehler, 2010).

Furthermore, several studies undertaken so far shew that ideological context is conducive to different patterns of dissent. When demonstrators are pursuing pragmatic interests such as obtaining power or imposing a political candidate, they often resort to violence and their actions are short and well defined on a time scale. In contrast, when demonstrators act because of idealistic reasons, such as to state publically different values and principles which were ignored by society or political power, their actions are generally peaceful. More than that, their life-span lasts longer and their tides are unpredictable (Stekelenburg, Walgrave, Klandermans, & Verhulst, 2012). These patterns appear irrespective of the subject of dissent, as it is shown in a study about two protests which sprang in response to the same stimulus, a constellation of specific policies (Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & Dijk, 2009).

Scholars who treat idealist motivation to protest as inefficient for social change claim implicitly or explicitly that pragmatic motivation to dissent is some sort of an indicator of success. This is understandable because pragmatic objectives offer a clear view on successful and failed strategies enacted to reach them. The new-new social movements hold idealistic objectives and it is erroneous to measure their accomplishment by using the same scale as the one used to measure the accomplishment of pragmatic objectives. More than that, it is transparent that aiming for idealistic objectives implies more costs, as a lot of efforts and time were invested in the movement. Demonstrators who got into protesting because of an ideological context which favored an idealistic motivation spent more time in fueling the demonstration (Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & Dijk, 2009).

It can be assumed that if a movement is limited in accepting costs, it is going to establish pragmatic objectives and is going to use violence in order to reach a rapid end point. Indeed, Salgado and Oceja (2011) pointed out that individuals who display egotist or communitarian motives for action are less inclined to spend many efforts to achieve a goal described as a better situation for someone else.

If a movement is ready to spend a higher amount of resources for social transformation, it is going to reach out for idealistic objectives. This is going to take more time, but the social change is going to be obtained by peaceful means. Many studies point to the failure of various social movements in producing real social change even though they succeeded in changing policies and political leaders (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Discriminatory mentality persisted despite the

political change and this brought about much parasite noise on the way to social transformation. Peaceful change, instead, was always corroborated with organic social change and civil empowerment (Sharp, 2010).

3. CONCLUSIONS: QUIXOTIC ADAPTATION FOR REACHING IDEALISTIC OBJECTIVES

Because the new-new social movements are mainly solidarity movements which seek to push forward a better world for a wide category of social groups, the reason for taking on activism becomes significant. Practicing prefigurative politics means to embark on social experiments that aim to communization. In other words, individuals are asked to experiment different social relations which are based on mutual aid. Their disposition towards humanitarianism is, therefore, substantially important for the success of social transformation. Salgado and Oceja (2011) argued that individuals who act on behalf of a quixotic motive for action are more equipped for long-lasting endeavors. It becomes self-evident that an idealistic objective is more efficiently reached by individuals moved by quixotic mentalities. The quixotic motive for action reflects someone's attitude who is willing to act for bettering the world as a place for living. It does not suppose grandiose actions but the conscience that every good deed is conducting to a better world (Salgado & Oceja, 2011).

All in all, the dynamics of the new-new social movements illustrate a new narrative of contesting. Connective movements are rooted in creativity and playfulness, on the one hand, and in individual existential responsibility, on the other hand. Their focus is not on fighting, but on communization. Their efficiency could be predicted by looking at how much their supporters display cultural values which enforce the quixotic motive for action. As anthropological studies suggest (Florida, 2012), the new bohemian class who engaged in this kind of social transformation is well equipped for producing social change based on idealistic objectives. The creative class that use decentralized networks and values direct action is characterized by a high level of social conscience, imagination, a strong disposition towards collaboration and continuous need for stimulation (Florida, 2012). All these features are connected with the quixotic motive of action, as Salgado and Oceja (2011) reported.

Acknowledgement

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