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Chapter Three

THE GLOBAL PROBLEMATIC: VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

Introduction

The ideas on globalisation expressed in Chapter Two seem to have two common, fundamental aspects. First, they study the particular social, political, and economic *organisation* of society and the effects it produces upon itself (e.g. Harvey: 1990). Secondly, most of the theories of globalisation deal with the problem of *distribution*, of either objects or materials of a different nature. From ideas, medicines, education, security, risk, disasters, goods, wealth, natural resources, and all sorts of things, the main concerns in global analysis are the asymmetries in distribution outcomes. The search for balance and sustainable ways of achieving symmetrical distribution, ideally without homogenising societies, is at the core of the sociological debate, and is encroaching other realms and fields (academic circles, environmentalism, etc.).

Following this line of thought, I propose that globalisation can be understood as a *process that organises and distributes change upon society*. And further, that the study of contemporary globalisation and its effects – *what it does* – could also refer to the analysis of the main *assemblages* and power *diagrams* – the actual *forces* – that organise societies and distribute objects, things, and change in the world. Therefore, this study analyses contemporary globalisation, its *social assemblages*, and its *forces*.

What is the Global Problematic?

The global problematic is defined as a *social assemblage* subject to processes of *actualisation* – the actualisation of poverty and violence in society. The global problematic and its intensification are supported by particular technolinguistic social assemblages which promote power diagrams, three of which deserve special attention: 1) economic and political instability; 2) socio-economic polarisation; and 3) the shift in relations between the state and civil society that leads to violence (e.g. civil wars, dictatorships). It can be assumed that the global problematic assemblage is knowledge that is actualised and perpetuated in human experience by subjects, statements, and forces that attach this problematic assemblage to virtual diagrams, guaranteeing its permanency in the actual plane. By setting particular relations between linguistic and technological means, persons and groups keep the global problematic *visible* and apparent within the *actual* social realm.

What Does the Global Problematic Do?

The aim here is to build a unit of analysis suitable for a globalisation research agenda that goes beyond its economic nature. In this regard, and considering that globalisation is quite an ambiguous concept, we may think of a unit of analysis that is flexible, variable, and dynamic, and which may approach the complexities of globalisation processes, in particular those which are related to the experience of poverty, violence, or uneven distribution at the human scale. The reconceptualisation of the *social problem* into the *global problematic* can be briefly summarised by the idea that the mission of the global problematic is to collapse all social problems into one single problematic or set of interrelated problems – a whole. The global problematic, as part of its reconceptualisation, is also considered a *stable structure* within processes of destratification-becoming and deterritorialisation-change; as Latour's famous statement goes, a 'matter of fact' and not only a 'matter of concern' in society (Latour: 2007).

In short, the reconceptualisation of the social problem understands the global problematic as a *stable structure* or social assemblage subject to processes of *actualisation-reproduction*. This reconceptualisation unifies the undesired social outcomes into one unit of analysis instead of being a dispersed field of sociological inquiry where poverty, violence, and other social problems are approached independently and not as a human condition regardless of historical and cultural specificities.

The Global Problematic Explained

The main question here is how does the global problematic *actualise* and *intensify* in contemporary societies? What are the technolinguistic social assemblages that promote the stabilisation of the social assemblage and diagrams of the global problematic? To elaborate on this idea, it can be said that the *exterior* – and appearance – of the global problematic is both poverty, seen as lack of dignity for human existence, and the *physical experience* of material constraint or humiliation. If poverty and violence constitute part of the appearance of the global problematic, the *interiority* quality of the global problematic is constituted mainly by two components that form this social assemblage. First, there are the victims who experience violence, humiliation, poverty, despair, and lack of dignity in everyday life conditions (e.g. Palestinians). Secondly, there are the groups controlling significant power diagrams (e.g. weapons, police), such as interest groups, leaders, and sections of society, all of whom are working as *wholes*, and which at certain times generate processes or diagrams of instability, polarisation, and shifts in relations that lead to violent events, thus reproducing and actualising the global problematic social assemblage in determinate places. The victims and those responsible for the actualisation of the global problematic are two sides of

the same coin.

In this regard, the first and most important clarification that needs to be made in relation to the social assemblage of the global problematic is to stress that it is not constituted only by those social groups or interpersonal networks experiencing material deprivation and lack of dignity, or those persons suffering from cultural oppression and violence (Marcuse: 2009). In fact, the social assemblage of the global problematic *includes* the social components that reproduce poverty and violence, even if they have no direct experience of it themselves.

The intensification of the global problematic can have internal causes (e.g. suicide as violence), but it is primarily stimulated by exterior causes (e.g. scarcity). Social assemblages other than those that directly experience the effects of the global problematic can participate in the intensification of poverty and violence by stimulating instability and polarisation processes throughout particular technolinguistic differentiations and relations. Therefore, the global problematic is not constituted exclusively by the poor or the victims of violence but also by the interpersonal networks and organisations that aid certain conditions that perpetuate violence and poverty in determined territories.

Ethics and Desire

Even if it is the poor or the vulnerable who experience the undignified conditions imposed by material constraint and humiliation, this does not determine that the poor are the source or exclusive agent when thinking of the *actualisation* of the global problematic. Poverty and violence are not (necessarily) self-inflicted. Quite on the contrary: while it is possible that the causes of poverty are to be found inside specific assemblages, the conditions and causes of the global problematic might very well come from the *outside*. This is, perhaps, one of the most important hypotheses of this dissertation.

I argue, therefore, that it is crucial to develop and analyse the role of *ethics* in relation to the intensification of the global problematic, and not to follow exclusively scientific technical data about subjects suffering material deprivation in different countries or regions. In order to clarify this point, the Deleuzian notion of *desire* needs to be introduced into the discussion. The way in which poverty and violence may be defined or expressed is by means of the *desire* experienced by those involved in these processes. Deleuze explains that,

... desire is the real agent, merging each time with the variables of an assemblage. It is not lack or privation which leads to desire: one only feels lack in relation to an assemblage from which one is excluded, but one only desires as a result of an

assemblage from which one is included. (Deleuze: 2006: 77)

The notion of *desire* and the *ethical* dimension are important, because desire is the *force* that evokes the relation between constituted assemblages and power diagrams in the form of our *thinking process* and *actions*. The machine of desires represented by subjects and social assemblages can institutionalise certain diagrams of power and forms of knowledge (visibilities and statements) that perpetually resolve the entelechy of the world, sometimes with contradictory consequences. In this respect, we might ask: what form of *desire* is behind the production and reproduction of the social assemblage of the global problematic? Which individual and collective desires (immanent thought and action) stimulate diagrams of instability, polarisation, and violence in contemporary global society?

Poverty and violence are not the result, nor are they the side effects, of social development and progress. Rather than being the result of Darwinist notions of natural superiority of one group over another, they are conditions subject to change or avoidance, the product of certain purposes and interests. The manifestations of the global problematic are the result of established power relations. The global problematic attached to certain power diagrams of instability, polarisation, and violence is an *ethical* matter. It is related to *purpose* and *desire* that individuals and interpersonal networks, as well as collectives, use to frame their actions and desires over and against other actions.

It is not exclusively social assemblages suffering from the *lack* associated with the effects of the global problematic – poverty (dignity) and violence (security) – that we should be focusing on, but also the social assemblages that promote and perpetuate certain technolinguistic social assemblages that enable the intensification of the global problematic in a determined territory. This means that with violence and poverty, those who suffer from and cause them are inseparable, and to separate them would be more of a theoretical manoeuvre than the elaboration of two entirely differentiated notions. Poverty, it may be said, is a social practice, which is the product of certain interactions between differentiated social assemblages that hold violence as one of its diagrams. In this, instability and polarisation are two categories or diagrams that bear quite clear manifestations. Violence, however, requires further explanation.

Violence

In regard to the existence of violence, Deleuze (2000) explains that violence *can* constitute a part of a power relation. However, it is also evident that violence is not constitutive of *all* power relations. Life without extreme inter-human violence is also possible and natural. This last scenario, however,

is often substituted by the idea of permanent global and uncertain states of war and violence as something inevitable, natural, and necessary. In this dissertation I challenge and dispute this notion of violence, furthering the idea that violence is not a necessary state.

Violence may be defined in three different ways: as forces that destroy other assemblages; as forces that radically deterritorialise other assemblages; and as forces that ‘chaoticise’ other assemblages. More particularly, the process of chaoticisation is understood as the ‘ingestion’ (‘engulfing’) of one assemblage by another; as a radical form of an action upon an action, if we think in power relations as posed by Foucault in *The Subject and Power*. This chaoticisation is comparable to processes of transformation of one assemblage into an unrecognised different assemblage or *thing*. The transformation of an assemblage on such a degree where it is impossible to reconstruct the original nature of the chaoticised assemblage is visible, for example, in the act of eating. The work of synthesised components of the interior of an animal assemblage can chaoticise other assemblages. Food (e.g. plants and vegetables) inside the body loses its last faculty in terms of exteriority (e.g. photosynthesis in the case of plants), therefore becoming a non-assemblage, a *thing*. In a strict sense, processes of chaoticisation are considered violent acts in terms of the disruption of nature they entail. Violence is literally the disruption of nature of the chaoticised object.

The discussion about the necessary status of violence in society reappears here. It is not the argument in the present work to call for the inexistence or disappearance of violence, but to identify it as a disruption of nature in terms of its power to radically deterritorialise, destroy, and chaoticise social or organic assemblages, so questioning the teleology and desires behind the enactment of violence in society and upon nature. From this perspective, and to understand the causes and nature of poverty and violence, we have to approach these problems simultaneously (assemblages-knowledge and diagrams-power). Trying to abate poverty without addressing violence, instability, and polarisation all together would be pointless, since the intensification of all those problems is in fact one single problem: poverty *is* a form of violence.

To recapitulate, in order to address and approach the social problem as a *whole*, a new viewpoint or subject position is required, one that aids learning processes instead of subjective understandings. The positioning of such a subject capable of seeing the intensification and variation of the global problematic, from the angle of ethics as the product of human desire and action, and not only as a technical affair randomly spread over a territory, is essential to this work. However, more than being a viewpoint matter or the elaboration of a new type of subjectivity, it is a question of building or devising instruments for social research that respond to the demands posed by contemporary globalisation and the urgent ethical debates that need to spring from it in order to generate a more balanced, less unjust human realm. From this proposed viewpoint and ontology

(exterior instead of interior relations), this heuristic device approaches in this study the social problem in general (the global problematic) and the relations it keeps with the technolinguistic social assemblage in contemporary Mexico.