RELIGION AND POWER (AN INITIAL DISCUSSION)

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Abstract.- The present work is aimed at discussing the relationship between religion and political power. Basically, social psychology like other humanistic sciences had been fully impacted by the effects of second World War. Under such a context, many scholars devoted particular attention to the study of prejudice and discrimination. In the following pages we will try to synthesize how religion contributes for the conformation of ideology and social depictions. In part, this does not suffice to affirm religion is responsible for nationalism but both share analogical element in their respective formations.

Keywords.- *nationalism, religion, prejudice, power.*

1. Introduction

The present essay connotes a brief endeavor to meditate and summarize about the relationship between power, politics and religion. In this regards, even though many scholars have been referred to religion studies as a vehicle for understanding society, little attention was given to power and politic competence in regards to the constitution of religion. To put this in brutally, religiosity is a part of all human beings and in prospective it appears to be a more complex phenomenon which merits to be reconsidered.

For that, it is necessary to consider that power is a measure or personal ability to control the uncertainness and complexity of our own environment. Sometimes, authority and power are mixed converging in similar points but the underlying problem is that they would be conceptualizing separately. Much of the recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the enabling nature of power. A comprehensive account of power can be found in Steven Lukes (2005) *Power: A Radical View* where he discusses the three dimensions of power. Basically, power would be addressed in abstraction like a

social construction. Following Lorenzini (for Lukes), power "*sketches three conceptual maps which reveal the distinguishing features of three views … the pluralist view (which he calls the one dimensional view), the view of critics of pluralism (which he calls the two dimensional view), and a third view of power*" (Lorenzini, 2006). That way, five factors determine the power's jurisdiction such as behavior, decision making, issues, observable conflicts, subjective interests. However, Lukes did not focus his important work on the influence of religion leaving a gap whereby this article like to fulfill. Following this, the theory of economic compensator adapted on religious studies by professor Frigerio is more than useful for that goal. On an introductory chapter we stress about the importance of ideology in the conformation of identity and prejudice; secondly, a revision is done over previous literature about hegemony and nationalism (even postcolonial theory). In a third section, we analyze the influence of leisure class theory on the principle divinity formation. In consequence, last two sections are intended to explain how mortality and material deprivations in the society works in the conformation of political regimes. Partially, we agreed with G. Balandier (2005) when said *political power (authority) never lies fully desacralized from archaic or modern societies.* In case of so-called traditional societies the bondage with sacrality is inarguable what ever its course of action may be. Superficially or not, the power is based on the search of transcendence and divinity.

2. Ideology, xenophobia and prejudices

In a work that has been broadly commented in the sociological literature, Norbert Elias explains initially how ideology and religion conditioned the social life in a British little town -called Winston Parva- in where territory and age issues are claimed as a criterion of superiority (Elías, 1998:83). In fact, two antagonistic groups enter in competition for local resources excluding and discrediting mutually. Following Elias's findings, the so-called "Old families" directed their apathy toward newer families which were more recent accommodated in Winston Parva by the manipulation and articulation of prejudices and discrimination; in turn, new families adopt these prejudices internalizing a supposed own inferiority in regards to old families.

Again and again throughout the book, Elias demonstrates how gossip works as a mechanism in regulating specific taboos regarding foods, hygiene and other customs oriented in remaining the established hierarchy and preventing social interaction between both involved groups. In other words, insecurity not only is one of more extended pretexts of discrimination but also the preliminary steps in founding a religious order. But the question is ¿how?. In this interesting survey, there have not been any distinctive features in distinguishing both group features at hand; then old and new families match in nationality, education, ethnic or class similarities.

The manner as to how a "dominant older families" set up the lines of membership was under the figure of stigmatization and sacrifice; whether stigmatization would be the threshold to prejudice and discrimination, also

sacrifice would be an expiatory pretext by reminding to everyone the reasons why they take part of an exclusive group. Not to belong to a privileged group would grant no potential acceptance. For that reason, members of old families valorize the observance of all rules while new families are catalogued as anomic and fragmented units. Whether newer families would be deemed as anomic and disintegrated, older exacerbate their community indoors opposing their efforts in distinguishing themselves as tidy, self-sacrificing and devoted for welfare. Under such a context, no interaction emerges between both reinforcing the social cohesion for older and fragmentation for newer.

Analogically, Riccoeur focuses his study on the action of ideology and utopia like social factors capable to shape social imaginary. He defines ideology as *"any process of distortions and pretexts with the end of hiding ourselves as society… ideology is assimilated and simplifies environment like an illusion of protection"* (Riccoeur, 2000:349). In opposition to ideology, utopia would be understood as "a mechanism of evasion from those problems originated by ideology. No need to say that these types of action are usually applied specifically in a political atmosphere.

As a result of this, French philosopher proposes a theoretical model for interpreting ideology that may be divided in three: a) ideology must be understood under a distortion / incentive dynamic whose function is to alter the world's image, b) ideology works as dominance guide (genuineness) continuing group's material concerns and finally c) ideology would be taken as an integration process wherein authority and legitimacy reproduce previous practices and customs. From Riccoeur point of view, ideology serves as connection for the collective memory, reviving and remodeling the founder act or original myth.

At the other extreme, for Eric Wolf, political power is composed for three basic elements: a) individualism and ambition for some persons over others, b) an ability for a psychological ego to impose the proper desires to "an external alter" unidirectionally, c) an outstanding capacity in centralizing specific strategies (Wolf, 2004:3). However, a fourth factor would be included in that review: communication. In fact, ideology is constructed continuously as a result of social class interaction as well as economic production order. Communication is not only a provider of linguistic codes for people but also helps coordinating potential course of actions. Linguistic codes and Power are highly interrelated since both are used ambiguously as a double edged sword where discrimination and assimilation dynamics coexist circumstantially.

3. Nationalism and Hegemony

Long time back, scholars have been concerned in studying nationalisms regardless the jurisdiction of economy and wealthy production; nevertheless, material deprivation had more to do with prejudices than have been supposed. One of more important contributions of Wolf reminds us that ethnic, religious and national conflicts appear to be associated to material privations. Besides,

this hypothesis was already suggested by other anthropologist Evans Pritchard who emphasizes the bondage between territory, economy and kinship. For this author, geographical proximity increases the likelihood of common resource conflicts. In this point, religion plays an important role played in the phenomenological world. Conflict as well as discrimination is only a little part of a broader productive system. But, ¿what is the liaison with religion?.

Nevertheless, people and community seem to take part of recursive dialectic where humanity creates stability and order. Underpinned by the proposition that religion helps humankind to remain authority and give force to social order, Peter Berger emphasizes that religion is based on the necessity of prediction and security. Religion is not only part of human life, but also is the main institution wherein all rest institutions must be subordinated. According to Berger, for M. Mcguire (1997:9) religion should be deemed as an institution with the end of controlling and limiting the negative consequences of power. For example in South African postcolonial process, Comaroff and Comaroff outline that Modern State Nations in Africa, are trying to be reconstructed under postmodern conditions with evident contradictions. For one hand, these kinds of projects find a Black underclass youths who enroot that contradiction most notably than white residents. Under these contexts, witchcraft works as a mechanism to create consciousness and expressing discontent before to certain situation. In 1995, the commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in South Africa was disposed in responding to mounting sense of emergency in this country. This inquiry was formed by Government and ethnography and had unprecedented in an effort to regain the control over cultural and runaway world. Chaired by professor Ralushai this troublesome report confirmed the presence of two streams in postmodern times: a) civic rationalism understood as a call for liberation in means with pacific method such as a rational and civilized education, b) an assertative cultural relativism related to magic and esoteric issues. No need to say that these dynamic coexist contradictorily in whole Africa like in other countries of the World (even the First World).

However, South African case was followed by circumstances in extreme violence; in fact, from 1985 to 1995 there were registered more than 300 cases of witch-related killings while in the first half of 1996 were duplicated to 676. The fact was that, rural population was convinced that their neighborhoods sheltered trenchant human evil operating with phantasmal forces of great power and destruction. To be more exact, these fears were increasing in combination to the idea that "*some people, usually old people, were turning others into zombies; into a vast virtual army of ghost workers, whose lifeblood fueled a vibrant, immoral economy pulsing beneath the sluggish rhythm of country life. The margin between the human and the inhuman had become ever more permeable, transgressed by the living dead and their depravers owners*" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 286)*.*

After a further examination, for these authors organ traffic, Satanism, zombie rituals and occult economies are part of the same problem: a tension between public and private life. In general, for colonial times divination was interpreted as

uncivilized practices and was repressed to be practiced clandestinely. On contrary, post-colonial era has ventilated these old customs but in a different way, also ritual murder, witchcraft, money magic and others are common in the public sphere like television or newspapers. That way, innovative technologies are involved in magic ritual orders and viceversa. From this point of view, the finish of apartheid was produced in the lapse of specific moments meanwhile Soviet Union broke down into pieces and black claimed for participation in political issues in South Africa. When these south Africans threw their colonial constraints the rest of continent learned about the postcolonial predication experiencing unprecedented marginalization, economic difficulties, and privation of all natures. Under this hardship circumstances and conditions, there is a human tendency to create techniques with the end to distribute public wealth among pauperized classes. Democracy in that way came across with several problems and inequalities. In these lines, magic and occult economies are replaced in part a mode of production which had been denied to whole black African population. In a combination of magic, violence and crimes, certain groups tried to dispute and recover the lost power during white dictatorship. Likewise, "*this is why violence, as an instrument of income redistribution, is such a ubiquitous feature of postcolonial economies, in Africa and beyond. The zombie is the nightmare citizen o this parallel, refracted modernity. Reduced from humanity to raw labor power, he is the creature of his maker, stored up in petrol drums or sheds, like tools. His absent presences suggests a link to otherwise inexplicable accumulation …as spectral capital, it will be evident why these forms of extraction are typically associated, as is witchcraft in general, with older people of apparent affluence –and why zombies are thought to have multiplied as wage work has become scarce among the young and unskilled. Not only does the rise of a phantom proletariat consume the life force of others, it also destroy the labor market, conventional patterns or social reproduction, and the legitimate prospects of the community at large*" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 289-290).

Undoubtedly, this text can be considered as one of most important contributions in the study of post-colonialism in Africa after democracy and action of magic belief in that process. That way, Comaroff and Comaroff achieved an original approach coordinating some isolated ideas into coherent academic corpus (theory). With basis of ethnology field work comments, they validated Max Gluckman's concerns. Furthermore, world historical forces –capitalism, colonialism, virtual society and cyberspace- take presence into cultural atmospheres in particular times and particular persons. These moments allow us realizing that the residual fragments from which anthropology of archaic capitalism and neo-liberalism may interact each other. In such a case, local is globalized whereas global is localized. Capitalism, in other words, would be very well interpreted as a colonialism method by creating different forms of identity, economic production and new social realities.

Nevertheless, Comarroff and Comaroff theory had some problems which deserve to be discussed in advance. Perhaps, the influence of Marxism not only in Gluckmann but also in Comaroffs, misjudge capitalism like a force inherited from liberal and industrialized societies omitting Soviet Union was such a

capitalist like United State. In turn, following weberian doctrine we must also admit capitalism is not determined by a massive production or consumption but a legal-rational logic (which is also present in United Sate and Russia). From this point of view, eastern communism and western capitalism worlds had more to do than they think. In contrast to Marxian standpoint, witchcraft and magic work in present times not only in tribal but also in industrialized societies; most likely camouflaged with other more complex institution like nationalisms. As a whole, nationalism as well as religion allows organizing human beliefs and experiences successfully in social life substituting some material deprivations for other divine elements such as the salvation or transcendence (Malinowski, 1993) (Evans, 2003) (Geertz, 2005).

4. Divinity and leisure class

Principles of divinity must not be reckoned but the unsuitable presence of death. Only they are capable to remind us what chaotic, awful and disordered may be turned our life sometimes. As previously mentioned, in moments of institutional turbulence men often incur to witchcraft in search of order and stability. Regarding to this point, religion not only reinforces authority and legitimacy but also reproduce the basis of economy in social imaginary. No sooner said than done in G. Balandier (2005), power shapes religion by means of the interpretation of founding myths while genealogy reproduces a division of work according to accurate territory issues wherein the tribe lies. Such a space will be defended by all members who formed the same lineage of descendants. Any external threatens or attack directed towards the groups is experienced as a form of aggression where evil forces are involved. In conflict, the other behavior most always is represented as "evil" or "sinister" while our actions are valorized positively. This is one of main dilemma that leaves the negotiation. At that instance, one of the first groups which made appropriation of best territories and cattle will claim for themselves certain privileges in relation to the rest of other groups. We are not able to determine if territory expanding comes before superiority feelings or not, but the point is that whenever this privilege may not be sustained (whatever the case may be) religion will deploy a combination of diverse methods for granting their use of power. As T. Veblen argued many years back, religion paved the pathway toward domination by emulating a downright consumption and social distinction. To be more exact, societies are divided in classes and linked inextricably to economic production. By the way, there are many types of production but very well they may be classified in two mainstream groups: technique-productive and leisure class. For Veblen, religion was an evident expression of conspicuous consumption in combination with leisure; to simply a Church was a waste of space, and clergy a group paid to do nothing fruit or useful. In consequence, clergy looks for support in high education programs where reputation and excellences are predominant. With basis on criteria like upper, low, high, evil or good, the Church as an expression of leisure class runs controls to economic performance by appliance of social work division. In recognition that syntactic and grammar rules are not only an important part of language but also a code for domination, Veblen argues that hegemony triggered around these educational centers transmit a specific chain

of codes regarding status and excellence.   An elegant diction in oral or writing language is more than important to distinguish scholars from other who is not. Once upon the times, warlocks occupied a well-ranking position in society expressing the wishes of Gods or intervening between kings and rest of community.

This power was encouraged and valorized gradually because of their knowledge about witchcraft and divination, but while societies growing these groups were professionalized in founding truthfully political circles that immediately entered in dispute with Crone. As a whole, whether warriors were characterized because their devotion to gods and honor, also priests were appraised in maintaining the bridge between profane and divine world. At time of celebrating peace or war, warrior recurred usually to consult the desires of gods; if no approval was given in case of war, Kings were restrained in going to battle.

For another hand, in a work of excellence like *The universalization of the Nation State and the historical crisis of its institutive order,* Meabe, Paredes and Saguier sustained that "*at the beginning, imperial declines and permanent distortions of the balance of power were promoted by mutual confrontations among imperial powers (Iberian, Tsarist and Austrian against Ottoman, and Austrian against Tsarist) and by their interest to compensate the costs of war by means of territorial partitions (annexations, cessions, exchanges), commercial privileges, mutual pacts of religious tolerance, and international agreements, which constituted a sort of zero-sum games, where what a world power obtained it was lost by another, for which reason was very relevant to evaluate in cases of war the seven (7) elements of each balance: territory, wealth (including balance of trade), population, army (including military technology), communications (roads and telegraphs), ethnicity, and ideology or religion*" (Meabe, Paredes and Saguier, 2008).

5. The Fear of death

Possibly, the presence of death determines the position of men in the world recalling dilemma enrooted in morality. Whether a belief a better life in heaven can compensate the human resistance to disappear, death looks to be a key element to analyze at time of religiosity inception. In these lines, Bauman supports the idea that contrary to another alive organisms (that feel fear like kind of an impulse that the help toward the escape in threatening contexts) human beings have the chance to feel doubts, fears and sentiments of other nature. Under such a context, *"the fear is more terrible when it is diffuse, dispersed, not very clear, whenever floats freely elsewhere, without bonds, without anchors, without home neither a clear cause"* (Bauman, 2007:10).

In other words, human fears drive beyond the boundaries of time and space while still remembers in our fantasy. This lies in the silt of conscience in which regulates how human beings behave even if no direct threat does indeed exist (derivative fear). That follows, dangers and "derivative fears" can be classified in

three classes: to) those which threaten a person following a physical perspective, b) those which can jeopardize the reproduction of social order and c) those which threaten people individually. Although second-range fears do not imply an imminent danger, feeling of insecurity can be centralized through other mechanisms applying the principle of subsidiary. In fact, modern State is in charge o taking care for their citizen's security, when its own possibilities are exceeded, that responsibility is assigned to other spheres such as capital market.

Following this explanation, human beings try commonly to reduce undesirable consequences of those sudden events, transforming fears in risks. To put this in brutally, risks are characterized to be calculable and foreseeable; for other hand," Bauman outlines that no catastrophe is harder than impossible. Once "civilization" falls, state of nature emerges -according to hobessian thesis- allowing mankind enters in conflicts in the fights of common resources. That organized and civilized life is presented in a form of sheet, beyond lie disorder and barbarism. In the "Titanic syndrome" Bauman explains whole of human paradox within the paradigm of modern liquid modernity. Titanic, as luxurious transatlantic, represents the social order while iceberg reminds the humanity their own vulnerability.

Albeit, in Bauman each society experiences its proper fears, thanks to selfishness and progressive social fragmentation each citizen face to these fears individually. To be exact, Bauman emphasizes that modern terror to death resulted from individualism and egoism which characterize this type of modernity. The message of these television programs demonstrates the human weakness by respecting its own "extermination"; the survival only belongs to one person while condemnation is part of majority. In accordance to Bauman mindset, Big Brother works as "moral story" in which punishment and recompense become in the present norm regardless the linkage between virtue and weakness. Most specifically, Bauman says "our moral stories try to vaccinate us against the fear of dying trivializing the vision of agony (Bauman, 2007: 45).

In other terms, death has historically been afraid in humankind because she is fully unknown. From all the things in our world which we really did not know, she was, will be and is almost the less known one. In this regard, culture works as a mechanism that helps humanity to bear daily her presence. The point is that "original sin", "spiritual redemption" and consequent salvation are essential issues in our cosmology. Beyond the recompense, each person chooses how living its proper life. For instance, salvation as well as glory of our destiny requests an appropriate sacrifice. Unlike a hero who becomes in such as a platform to access to eternity, the religious policies provide with the opportunity of transcendence whenever people do not achieve access to benefits of an individual immortality.

In the threshold of French Revolution, Bauman sustains France adopted the ancient roman formula *pro patria.* As a result of this, the modern State and its citizens created a bridge towards solidarity and reciprocity so that their own

survival was granted. This example helps understanding the reasons why citizens are devoted in the sacrifice as a vehicle of reducing the fear of death. But not only had this, following hobessian and durkheimian thesis humankind founded the society (Leviathan) as a sacral entity in opposition to frights of death. On contrary in our liquid modern society of consumers, strategies of other nature were deployed in marginalizing or disregarding all issues and things that are long-lived; from this perspective, people looks forward devaluing all own experiences shaped in the immortality.

In the *deconstructionism (of death)*, the tragedy, negative and disastrous consequences of death are left behind; as a result of this, humankind faced an increase in the grade of panic because of her possible destructive aftermaths. Of course, Bauman is convinced that human Beings are aimed at scaring the negative consequences of their motivations and thoughts when they did not find a rational response. Like in Comaroff husband and wife, meaning of evil would work as a kind of rational explanation in which people would understand and justify "the destiny". Everything that happens in this world would be (implicit or not) provoked by human's behaviors. Underpinned by the Second World War's crimes and Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem where extermination was supposedly justified by his smart lawyers arguing that it was a decision coming from the top of Nazi's hierarchal Bureaucracy, the main thesis in Bauman outlines that rational allegation reminds continuously the presence of evil in our life (not only a Tsunami but also the ethnic genocides). Nevertheless, the previous examined arguments are not able to explain how nationalism and religion work. Even if nationalism and religion would be accompanied with prejudices, exclusion, conflict, fears, status and superiority feelings, but besides (in general) religion like nationalism are manifested following dynamics of fraternity and cooperation.

6. How religion works (toward a final consideration)

Taking his cue from Stark and Bainbridge, in his research the future of religions in Latin America, Professor Alejandro Frigerio (1999) outlines the importance of compensation mechanism in understanding how religion emerge and disappear. From his point of view, religious congregations offer a battery of services to their parishioners as a compensative response to daily economic deprivations. Secondly, the encounter between what people needs and religion may offer will evolve temporarily in accordance to the players at hand (in analogy of the trademark). Like in Medicine, Diagnosis became in an important instrument to find the reasons behind illness and afflictions. That way, the theory of compensators may describe scientifically the linkage between religious community and parionisher´s concerns. Men usually move on this world with the end of finding rewards avoiding costs; but sometimes these goals cannot be reached increasing the possibilities of frustration. Unwittingly, certain beliefs are organized in form of substituted compensations in where the previous mentioned frustrations became in an act of faith. Whereas formal religion focuses in promising a new redemption in entering to a best life beyond this world (*general compensator*), popular religiosity as well as *specific compensator* emphasizes in specifics material goals that congregation pursues.

Furthermore, Frigerio points out that offers of witchcraft and religion would not be conceived separately in binomial devout / belief. Even in magic, there is a diversity of devices intended to negotiate with divinity the position of men on earth.

The upshot for Frigerio contributions is that not only religion and magic merge but also they appear to be a side of same coin. Following his own field work with umbanda practitioners, Frigerio clearly explains that a person changes of cult whenever feels its needs are not successfully satisfied by "specific compensator". This process comprised two complementary stages; at first instance, an afflicted person receives the grace and cure directly from God as a good-will gesture; but secondly, such a gift requests an inevitable reciprocity expressed in a potential reconversion. In regards to this, unsatisfied quests are channelized by new religions giving to people a reason to live; when this happens, devotion, abeyance and sacrifice surface at time of personal problems are resolved. The appliance of compensator theory in religion studies allows understanding the origin of nationalisms. Charismatic logic not only receives a diverse demands and focus in only one supreme end (the superiority of nation) but also compensates the daily deprivation with emphasis in the "golden times". For that reason, political regimes are founded pursuing the mythical glory of past or a supposed lost of cultural tradition and heritage.

For other hand, material deprivations (resulted from economic crisis or events of another nature) generating the collapse of certain regimes (which are not capable of satisfy people's necessities) while others news inevitably emerge. The devotion to specific political regimes can be put in comparison with religion issues. Both provide persons with specific compensators and a reason to living. Studies of this nature are extremely interesting since helps understanding further how religion works.

Even though some regimes justify their policy as a "fair cause", history witnessed how atrocious nationalism might be. In short, power and religion are situated in different sides of social life during stability but converge whenever people feel threatened. After further examination, the theory of social compensators explains a much more about how nationalism and religion coexist not only in politics fields but also in day-to-day social life.

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