

Interview

Self-Evidentialization of Oppression: An Interview with Jessé Souza*

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This interview was recorded in İstanbul on December 26, 2013, directly following a presentation by Jessé Souza that took place at Arel University in İstanbul, where Professor Souza was invited to deliver a speech. Jessé Souza involved in discussions with academics and students on the theme of global protests that left their mark in 2013. Discussions revolved around the question of how much importance should be given to the role of middle classes for a proper analysis of the social protests.¹

Q: Professor Souza, thank you very much for accepting this call for an interview. Please allow me first making a brief introduction that could guide the interview.

For the last three years, contemporary struggles, comprising the Arab upheaval, protests in Brazil and Turkey and Occupy movements in the USA and elsewhere have shaken the world. Resistance has globally become a popular phenomenon. With the popularity came trivialization. We have now become even more aware of the dangers of falling into the trap of superficial interpretations. There is no limit to what forms superficial interpretations can take. Yet two particular types of interpretations have proved to be significant and persistent. They are marked by a tendency to exaggerate either universalities or singularities.

An example for the former would be making a liberal use of an unconvincing conceptualization—middle class. Intellectuals and opinion leaders in the media and academia have developed a habit of utilizing middle class conceptualization as a magical formula—everything including acts of resistance is understood as a middle class phenomenon. An example for the latter would be arguing that local cases are too specific—they are exclusively singular. Turkey is no exception to this rule. You have witnessed yourself during your meetings here that both lines of thought exist here.

As a sociologist you are of the opinion that one can never fully grasp singularities or universalities. To paraphrase Boike Rehbein, there is no other way but to work on the level of particularities.² May this be a rather basic principle and without committing to this principle one cannot practice social science, there seems to be good enough reasons for academics to persist on emphasizing the peculiarities of specific cases. The strong suspicion and sometimes paranoia especially in the global South is related to a conviction: Epistemic hegemony will be self-inflicted if meta-level frameworks are willingly adapted for making sense of local realities.

In countries with a colonial past, one can only have empathy for this intellectual self-defense. The notion of a singular outlook, occasionally compromised on behalf of pressing demands from family resemblances, is perceived to be more appropriate than a selective cluster of particularities. These concerns are somewhat legitimate. There is indeed a certain risk that singularities might be absorbed and manipulated. Nevertheless, one can easily doubt the legitimacy of singularity-criticisms as they can be used against absolutely any argument for taking a self-righteous position. I think we should not give up hope of constructing a phenomenologically-sensitive analytical framework. What do you think?

A: Yes, you are absolutely right. It is possible to construct a phenomenologically-sensitive analytical framework. Call me a naïve, but I do believe that this is the path to emancipatory thinking. Since I share

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¹The interviewer would like to thank to Dr. Efe Arık for organizing the event and making this interview possible.

²Rehbein, B. (2010). Critical Theory after the Rise of the Global South. *Transcience Journal*, Vol. 1 No.2, 1-17.

the sensitivities or concerns of post-colonial thinking, I am always in favor of starting a discussion with first setting the historical background. This is also what I am going to do today. We must remember that singularities do not exist in a vacuum. They are situated in the history of the respective case. When we understand the historical setting, we do have a firm grasp of how singularities are informed. Since universality is a goal that we might never reach, we should settle with the level of particularities. Before doing so, let me say a few words about what you coined as phenomenological-exclusivity and sensitivity. It is, for example, nothing but stating the obvious if one argues that the cases of Turkey and Brazil are different from each other. Sure, they are different. The point is that although they differ, they do share family resemblances. Therefore, they are not really fundamentally different from each other. A comparative perspective is extremely important. One could apply a comparative logic to other countries as well: Turkey and India, Brazil and India, Turkey and South Africa and so on. A comparative framework will be guided by a fore-structure. My guiding fore-structure by no surprise is the capitalist society. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. A lot of intelligent people spent quite a large amount of time for understanding and explaining capitalism. We must continue to raise awareness and brand consciousness.

Capitalism is not just an economic system; it is also a cultural system. In that sense, I think you can say that I am closer to a Weberian analysis. I just said that singularities do not exist in a vacuum. Neither does capitalism. It is not a free-standing system independent of the contributions of the social agents to that system. I value objective abstract analytical analyses of capitalism as they contribute to our understanding but these mechanical models draw on a certain sense of naiveté and they do render us less intelligent in the sense that we cannot think otherwise.

Let me put it plainly: A capitalist society also generates similar forms of cultural capital. So one's being in the world is shaped by this all-encompassing framework. When one registers the existential character of capitalism, one will no more fail to see the family resemblances with other societies.

You do not need to be a sociologist or even smart for that matter for recognizing obvious similarities between capitalist societies. Laypeople may not always be able to exemplify the similarities in detail but they would surely grasp them intuitively. This is the whole point. If capitalism does not reproduce and homogenize not only economically but also socially and politically, how could we all have an intuition about it? Being aware of Orientalism is indeed important but it should not translate into provincialist perspectives. One should learn how to differentiate between the two.

Q: You talked about setting the historical background. Can you please elaborate?

A: I think the discussion so far has already made it obvious as to why one needs to set the historical background before delving into more specific discussions such as the 2013 Brazilian protests. I can move on directly to the historical outlook.

Let us start with a cliché: Brazil has always been understood as a continuation of Portugal. I can even say that I like clichés and stereotypes. Because when you put aside the embedded caricaturization, most of the times they point at undeniable facts. Unfortunately this is not the case here. And the rupture between Brazil and Iberia is little known to Brazilian and non-Brazilians alike notwithstanding they have been studying Brazil all their lives. What we keep on failing to grasp is that Brazil had always been a slave-society. It may depend on how you define a slave-society, but I guess it goes without saying that Portugal had never been a slave-society such as Brazil. There is a socio-cultural rupture between Portugal and Brazil.

Slavery in Brazil was widespread all over the country. It is a peculiarity of Brazilian society that there was sexual slavery alongside industrial slavery. This is the level where singularities matter. Take the example of US American slavery which had substantial differences in the type of slavery that was practiced there. Although one cannot omit the possibility of sexual abuse in the case of US American slavery, this was not the essential feature of the type of the prevailing slavery in this part of the Americas.

If we need to talk about Portugal's expansion to Brazil, this is where it could really be historically relevant: Sexual slavery came to Brazil from Portugal. And this was a result of the Islamic conquest of Spain and Portugal. It was usual in colonial Brazil for the master to have a group of wives. Even though the law did not allow the practice, regulations did not stop rich men to do whatever they liked and this was somewhat culturally accepted.

Against this historical background, we can now think how class and gender relations have been formed up until now.

Q: Are you saying that the heritage of sexual-slavery is the key aspect for understanding the social structure of contemporary Brazil?

A: Yes, this is what I am arguing. I think in couple of minutes I will be able to explain how sexual-slavery is related to contemporary social-structure of Brazil.

Since its founding Brazil has had a strong immigrant presence. The composition of the contemporary Brazilian population has been greatly shaped by past waves of migration in different periods of Brazilian history. Brazil has a vast territory and for long the economy was dependent on agricultural production (e.g. sugar cane production and coffee plantations). The first wave of migration which was coordinated by the Portuguese colonizers had brought migrants from Portugal and slaves from Africa. When slave trade ended in the year 1888, floods of people from different parts of the world (e.g. North America, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, Armenia, China, Korea and so on) started to arrive to Brazil for compensating for the slave-labor. After the World War I, whitenization of Brazil continued with more migrants coming (e.g. Poland, Romania, Japan) followed by more migrants after World War II (e.g. Spain, Syria, Lebanon). If you add the migration flows in recent history, you will realize how multicultural the country is.

In this sense, I think Turkey is very similar to Brazil. I have seen that Turkey is also very multicultural. This obviously does not mean that heterogeneous populations of Turkey and Brazil were not targeted with top to bottom homogenization processes. Nationalism has a universal logic. Although they were different historical figures, Atatürk and Getúlio Vargas share certain resemblances. You have informed me about the processes of Turkification and I can tell you about Brazilianification.

Q: Did the processes of whitenization result in the marginalization of people with different colors?

A: Exactly. When millions of white people arrived especially from Europe, they were quickly marginalized and pushed to the outskirts of the society. Soon enough the absurdity of having millions of people marginalized around the cities has become a natural Brazilian phenomenon. Brazil has had a rapid transformation through modernization and industrialization. Today's dynamic economy which Brazilians are proud of was made possible by creating one of the most unequal societies on the planet. I now would like to spend some time on the class composition of this inequality.

To explain in extreme simplicity, in the modern Brazilian society we can make issue of four main types of social classes: Upper class, middle class, working class and underclass. And these classes could be classified under two categories: Upper and lower classes. On the top of the social hierarchy we have a class which amounts to less than 1 percent of the whole Brazilian population. This privileged group possesses more than 50 percent of the wealth of the nation. They hardly work as their wealth is mostly (close to 70 percent) generated by the profits they make from high interest rates. Almost all economic capital is controlled by this class.

Below the elite lies a second class which could be defined as a *real middle class*. When I use the term middle class, I am adding an adjective, real, for emphasizing that the category should be understood in European and US American terms. They constitute the 30 percent of the population. The elite do not have to work in the regular sense of the word. They manage to live off of the profits they make from high interest rates. Unlike the elite, the members of the middle class have to work. But they monopolize almost all of the good jobs. Their monopoly guarantees them good salaries and their privileges extend far across many areas comprising public and private sectors. While for the elite their richness is mainly inherited from early generations, for the middle class the prestige is earned through their appropriation of respective forms of cultural capital that is knowledge that is important for the reproduction of the market and state.

According to the social hierarchy in modern capitalist order in Brazil, the two classes that I just mentioned are considered as the superior classes. Below them we have an army of people, the pressing majority of the Brazilian population which amounts to 70 percent of the general population. One can say that 40 percent of the lower strata belong to the precarious working class.

Q: It is interesting that you are using the concept precarious working class. It seems like you utilize this concept for problematizing superficial yet popular middle class analysis. So, rather than rejecting the conceptualization of middle class at its entirety, you prefer to divide it into two parts—one belonging to

the upper class and one to the lower class—and cluster respective social groups accordingly: Middle class in the US American sense of the word and precarious working class. So, on the one hand you are using a concept which is adopted by the people who are very much distanced to class analysis. And on the other hand, since middle class conceptualization is an ambiguous concept, you use it as a provisional category only for substantiating it by introducing the logic of productive relations. Correct me if I am wrong, but in the end what we have in our hands is nothing but a social-structural analysis which works with two classes: Capitalist class and working class.

A: You are perfectly right. This is why I often start with posing fundamental questions: What are we dealing with here? Is this a new middle class or a new working class? If we do not position the upper and lower strata against each other, the antagonism between the two would be rendered invisible.

Talking about invisibility, we must notice that the precarious working class is kind of a new type of working class which tends to clothe itself as a middle class. This issue is of prime importance and I suspect this is mainly why you are interviewing me today. I must say you are right. You are sensing where at the heart and soul of the matter lies. Precarious working class is coming into being in all around the world but especially in the countries of the global-South.

We should call it the new working class because it differs qualitatively from the traditional working class: They work too much and gain relatively too little; they are not excluded from the mainstream society; they are included in the competitive markets. In the Brazilian case we can see an ascending movement of this class especially because of the real increase of the minimum wage (roughly 70 percent in the last ten years). This class is responsible for the dynamism of the Brazilian economy for the last 14 years. And this could be why they consider themselves as part of the middle class in the US American sense of the word.

Q: What about the people at the bottom of their society?

A: Yes. At the bottom of the society lies the fourth class, the so-called inferior class, which we could call the socially excluded.

Q: Brazilian Plebs?

A: Yes. *Ralé Brasileira*. They constitute 30 percent of the Brazilians. This is a social class of the marginalized. These people lack any kind of predispositions for acquiring cultural capital. They are obliged to make dirty, heavy and dangerous work for the real middle class. Let me emphasize again: It is something entirely natural in the case of Brazil that people at the bottom work for the middle classes. They would cook for you, take care of your car, deliver food to your home and so on.

Q: Do you think the Brazilian case is similar to the Indian case?

A: Yes, or elsewhere for that matter. The peculiar ways the the class composition is playing out in a respective country depends on the historical background. This is where singularities might matter. Since you mentioned the case of India, what you have there is a rigid caste system. Caste system of course has a strong impact on how inequalities are being structured. Nevertheless, if you ask my opinion, I am not sure whether or not the situation of *Dalits* is essentially different from that of *Ralé Brasileira*. This is an empirical question. But, if I was allowed to have an intuitive guess, I would confidently claim that the social situatedness of *Dalits* and *Ralé Brasileira* in principle cannot be substantially different from each other.

Q: Is it because they are both at the bottom of the respective social hierarchy?

A: Yes. I do not understand the point of emphasizing how special one's particular type of oppression is. If in India there are *untouchables* what we have in Brazil are the *invisibles*. They are invisible because the situation of *Ralé Brasileira*, an army of people as the metaphor goes, who earn so little that they cannot really afford a decent life, goes unnoticed in Brazil. Political parties do not talk about them. This is a social struggle that the political debate is not aware of. In the case of India, *Dalits* are politically very active. What happened in the last 14 years in Brazil is that some of the people from the marginalized

segments of the society were able to ascend to the status of precarious working class. And this makes the class scene very interesting.

Q: What were the factors behind upward social mobility?

A: Well, there are many. But if I should choose one, I must mention the positive impact of the Evangelical churches in Brazil. Their expansion has occurred in great numbers in the last decade. You can understand how these churches appeal to the very poor. When you are at the bottom of the society, you are symbolically dominated. You find it natural to be humiliated on an everyday basis.

Q: The underclass thinks—or to put it with better words—they are forced to think: It is what it is! They never imagine that life could have taken different forms. The underclass is forced to self-evidentialize their ways of being in the world and the related oppression. As they say in India: Born a Dalit, live a Dalit and die a Dalit! Is this what you mean?

A: Yes. It may sound as if we are claiming that the whole world—therefore oppression—is a construction and we may be accordingly misunderstood. But we are not denying the reality of oppression. We are rather explaining how it is substantiated. I do think that *self-evidentialization* is a great expression. There is no doubt that there is substantial oppression and underclass positions exist. Nevertheless, besides the material, real oppression, there is also another type of oppression, and that is perhaps more important, symbolic oppression. It feels so real that one starts to take it as self-evident. This is perhaps what you mean by *self-evidentialization*.

Q: And the Evangelical churches, the Pentecostals, do they tackle the symbolic aspects of domination?

A: I must admit they do. Consider the social situatedness of a citizen from the Brazilian underclasses. There is a certain kind of consciousness that is embedded in that particular kind of situatedness. Not only they feel worthless but also they find it quite normal to have self-deprecative behavior. It is painful to hear when Indian underclasses talk about their worthlessness. For the Brazilian upper classes, self-deprecation may point at some good sense of humor; but in the case of underclasses, it only highlights how they realize and substantiate their worthlessness. So, think about it: As a member of the Brazilian underclasses, while you find it quite normal to feel worthless, the church at your neighborhood welcomes you, takes care of you and keeps on whispering to your ear that you are worthy, that you are a human being, not garbage to be wasted, that you have dignity. You told me that you interviewed Pentecostals in different local contexts—South Africa, India and Brazil—you must have realized the positive impact of the church. There is no exaggeration if we claim here that the mushrooming of new churches is transforming the social configuration in respective countries. The people at the bottom of the society are adopting a new consciousness.

Q: Can we talk about a phenomenon of Protestantization of Catholic Brazil?

A: It is true that Brazil is—well at least formally—a Catholic country. I am hesitant because I would not consider Brazil as a religious country in the strict sense of the word. You told me that according to the surveys in Turkey—and one can really observe what surveys are telling in everyday life as well—Turkey is a rather religious country. I would say Brazil is more like a conservative country. But it is not necessarily religious. The religiosity in Brazil has a distinct character: It could be considered a magical form of religiosity rather than an ethical one.

Q: Talking about surveys and numbers, I think that would be a fair estimation if one claimed that over 60 percent of Brazilians are Catholic and over 20 percent of them are Protestant. These numbers hardly tell anything as Brazilian religions are quite diversified. For example, Catholicism and Protestantism do not exclude magical practices. Brazilian religions are inclined to syncretism: Afro-American and Afro-Brazilian versions are prominent.

A: Yes, that is true. You see, Protestantism - or Islam for that matter - is ethical. You told me yesterday that your conservative politicians keep on claiming that Turkey has a natural social welfare system because of people's religious beliefs: In Islam, the rich are obliged for alms-giving (zakat). You

may agree with him or not, but the point is that Islam does give Muslims a personal responsibility for practicing charity. And that makes it an ethical religion. While in other settings there are traditional ethical codes for taking care of the very poor, in Brazil we do not have this principle. There is no ethical obligation whatsoever for taking care of those who are in need.

So, the Protestantization of Brazil, as you called it, does have a new influence on the economy and political life. And, yes, it is indeed very important. Would I make a normative statement about it and argue that the expansion of Evangelical churches in Brazil is essentially a good thing? I do not think so. But this should not stop me from admitting the positive impacts of these churches. There is no doubt that the influence of the Evangelical churches in Brazil is quite ambivalent. It is true that they are providing self-respect to the members of the underclass who used to feel completely worthless. Excuse the comparison, but if a car hits a homeless person on the highway that would be roughly equal to running over a street dog.

So, anything that helps these people to free themselves from the harsh reality of humiliation, from a pragmatic point of view, can be considered a positive thing. But we do not need to celebrate the growth of Evangelical churches. There is no reason to be naïve. It is obvious how conservative and regressive the doctrines of the Evangelical churches are. You name it: They are against abortion, they promote homophobia, they favor patriarchal principles and so on. This is hardly an emancipatory movement.

Q: I think we have now set the historical background. Can we now highlight how all of these issues that we have discussed so far relate to the Brazilian protests that had taken place in June this year?

A: Sure. This introduction was very important for grasping the June protests. Let us start with a statement: The upheaval in Brazil began as a joined action of the children of the precarious working class. In other words, the new generation of the socially excluded started a social protest against the impact of the market forces. The first wave of the protestors belonged to the first generation of the underclass that could pursue a university education. They were marching on the streets and protesting on matters that were important for them: Public transportation for fair prices, better health care system, more investments on education and so on.

Before the 19th of June, it was a movement led by students who were situated in urban areas and appeared as middle class members. In reality, as I explained, they were members of the precarious working class. For the first time in Brazil, these people could pursue a university education in large numbers. This was made possible by the government. Lula government provided scholarships and funding for students.

One of the most important industries in Brazil is automotive industry. The number of cars has doubled in Brazil for the last 10 years. Public transportation system is awful. If you are a student living in the outskirts of the big cities, you have to use the public transportation. You travelled in Brazil and used mainly public transportation. So you have acquired a first-hand experience. Up until the 19th of June, students' anger about the inefficiency of the public transportation system and high fares constituted the core of the protests. After the 19th June the movement changed dramatically.

Q: Let me restate what you have just said to make sure that I am following your argument: Students from the precarious middle class constituted the core group of protestors—the first wave. Is this correct?

A: Yes, you can say that. The first wave of protestors was going after a political agenda. They would have perhaps followed the same line of protest but soon after the members of the real middle class had joined the protests.

Q: And then with the second wave was the nature of the protests dramatically altered?

A: I am not sure if the discourse was *dramatically* altered but it was surely transformed. All of a sudden corrupted politicians were under the spotlight.

Q: And what you are arguing is that the shift of discourse towards corruption trivialized the main aspects of the protests—an essentially leftist reaction against neo-liberal political rationality; do I get it right?

A: Yes.

Q: Then, you are actually arguing that the protest was hijacked. And a leftist class-based movement turned conservative. Is this what you are saying?

A: Well, it did not turn into a conservative movement on its own terms but on the discourse level it was trivialized. Criticizing the government officials as being corrupted in a personalized manner may have a rehabilitative effect. But that is all it can do. Caricaturization of politicians as blood sucking monsters—something you also like to do here in Turkey—can only have a psychological effect. You may discharge your emotions. But what you really need is launching a substantial interpretation.

Q: Since one has to see the banality of the evil, that interpretation has to be systemic. Is this what you are saying?

A: Yes, if there is corruption, it is from bottom to top. One can always choose a corrupted person, and then examine how bad this person is. You showed me clippings from daily newspapers here: Police finds shoeboxes stuffed with millions of cash. I must admit this is good material for caricaturists and I suspect this is why you have top quality humor magazines here. I think it is totally fine and important to make fun of politicians, marching on the streets against corruption and so on. But it is important to remember that none of these politicians exist in a vacuum. They are part of a bigger system.

So, in the case of Brazilian protests, instead of having a serious debate about the relation of political system with economy - which is of course a systemic critique - media preferred to manipulate the public opinion for focusing on personalized corruptions: There were good and bad people with or without ethical codes and this is what really mattered in the end.

Q: Recently in Turkey there have been all kinds of discussions on this matter. During one discussion on TV, for example, discussants came very close to having a philosophical discussion on human nature. Just when you think it cannot get stranger than this, another discussant would be very eager to show off with his political thinking: If there were corrupted ministers in the government, the Prime Minister should simply ask for their resignation and purify the government. You know, once it is purified, it becomes a legitimate government again. Are Brazilian opinion leaders as creative as the ones in Turkey?

A: In Brazil there is no shortage of discussions of this sort. None of this is useful, of course. We need a critical analysis about the relational network between economy and politics. If not, we deem ourselves suitable of stupidification. I have realized that people of Turkey are very passionate, just like Brazilians, when they talk about politics. Do not get me wrong, rage is relevant and important. Nevertheless, there is no end to highlighting the affective aspects of events. Without realizing one might end up stripping events of their rational objective aspects. One must remember that this is how the mental capacities of the social agents are crippled.

Q: Talking about stupidification, the protestors in Turkey were extremely angry at the media. Can you briefly comment on the role of the media during the protests in Brazil?

A: The media in the case of Brazilian protests did not really miss the opportunity which was provided by the contribution of the middle class: They started portraying the protests as a rebellion against the leftist government which has been in power in Brazil. I say left but you know what I mean—moderately left. But let us not get into that. This was, of course, not unexpected. The media after all belongs to the very rich. In order to distort the core message of the protests, the media started to draw on the political discourse of the middle class: All of the problems of Brazil were a result of the corruption on state-level. According to the mainstream political discourse, corrupted state was the generic answer to any question. Media was quickly joined by the academia and intellectual milieus and the circle of conservative consensus was complete: Corruption comes only from the state and the market is a paradise that is free from all kinds of corruption.

Q: What you coined as the conservative consensus is part of what one might call as the capitalist utopia: We are living at the end of the times. The end of history has come. We have witnessed the final

victory of liberal democratic regimes. The middle class conceptualization is part of this discourse. The larger the middle class is, the more reasonable distribution of resources and less inequalities and social conflict there will be. So, just like the Evangelical churches spread all over the Global South, democratic liberal economies will be in power in these parts of the world. If one pushes the idea into a conclusion — and one hardly needs an extra effort to do so — any desire for change in the political system will have to take the form of a democratic reform. Do you agree with this analysis?

A: You do not seem to be convinced—and for rightly so. This is a big lie. It is simple logic really: If the state is corrupted, this would only indicate that the market is corrupted. They are part of the same system. There is an obvious tautology: The parts are corrupted but the whole supposedly is not. It is impossible not to see the contradictions. Simple logic would suffice really.

To go back to my earlier point: When the new wave of protestors joined the masses, a genuinely democratic upheaval—or let us not glorify democracy, we could call it an *emancipatory attempt* instead - was transformed into a rather superficial form. We must understand that the main reason for this decadence: The middle class is prone to be manipulated in moralistic terms. They are really taken by a manipulative discourse. This is obviously not a simple communicative mistake. It may comfort us if we argued that the middle class was dumb. But we would then have to explain from where the dumbness takes its source. Middle class fails to see that they are exploited by the very rich. Brazil has the interest rates that are one of the highest of the world. As a result, the profit rate is quite large. Very rich are bluntly exploiting the middle classes.

You can now see the irony: The real middle class was on the street for a variety of things on the surface. But underneath all, they were doing nothing but supporting their exploiters. When you argue that the state is inefficient and corrupted, who do you think gains from this argument? Those who own the market will be on the winning side. May this be the case the real middle class is in love with the rhetoric of the conservative consensus. There is a reason for this mindless affection. Middle class is made the champion of morality. They are not aware that the resources, including their time, are stolen from them. This is the only way the upper class can continue to exploit and reproduce their privileges.

Q: One of the most pressing topics of debate in the Global South is endemic corruption. Brazil, Turkey, India, South Africa, you name it. The dominant rhetoric against corruption is as simple as this: Corruption is bad! In order to deconstruct the phenomenon of corruption one needs to shake up the popular perception of corruption. Let me please take a minute and refer to an Indian scholar Ashish Nandy who has recently initiated a discussion in India in a provocative fashion. It can contribute to our discussion.

Ashish Nandy said during a presentation in the famous Jaipur book fair: It will be a very undignified and - how should I put it - almost vulgar statement on my part. It is a fact that most of the corrupt come from the O.B.C.s and the scheduled caste and now increasingly the scheduled tribes. And as long as this is the case, the Indian republic will survive. Ashish Nandy is of the opinion that if there remains some degree of corruption in India, it will humanize Indian society. What he wants to say is that while the corruption of the upper classes does not really look corrupt, lower classes are not as skilled as the upper classes. Corruption of the upper classes takes sophisticated forms. But lower classes lack the social capital for that sophistication.

So, what you call the conservative consensus, liberal utopia if you like has a rich toolbox full of rhetoric that is based on moral values. The rhetoric gets even more dangerous when it takes an institutionalized form. For example, in India, reservations—affirmative action in the US American context—is promoted as a magical intervention from the state to tackle all kinds of inequalities. I think, all of this is a good example for symbolic violence. We must highlight the irony of inequality: Where the discourse of equality is the strongest, there one will find the most unequal society. Is there any way out of hegemony?

A: That is indeed a very difficult question. There are reasons to be pessimistic and optimistic. I guess we can try to balance our ideals with the reality of the world. As we have seen in the case of Brazil—and you told me that it was no different in Turkey—the media belongs to the upper classes and used in order to manipulate masses. Upper classes are controlling the economy, the politics, the media and the symbolic realm. That is why when there is resistance, it is quickly hijacked and trivialized. I think, all of this thinking explains why we must keep our eyes on the life course of the precarious working class.

Precarious working class is a pseudo middle class. Their consciousness is closer to the proletariat.

While the real middle class benefits from playing the dumb—they are shamelessly exploited by the upper class by means of over taxation and high interest rates, expensive services and products—precarious working class is still in proximity with the underclass. The specificities of their situatedness make them sharp and aware.

We must understand that in the case of Brazil and I understand from what you have told me this was no different in the case of Turkey - the resistance started and led by the members of the precarious middle class. Perhaps for the first time in history of modern Brazil, a large number of people from the lower classes have acquired social capital which enables them understanding the consequences of an oppressive regime. Therefore, they revolted against their oppressors. Excluded are no more out of the political game. We can confidently say this. I realized that you were very impressed with the Brazilian case as the left under the leadership of Lula was able to uproot the popular base of the right-wing governments. Lula convinced the very poor to vote for the Workers' Party. Even though left in Brazil is not really left, I do agree that this is a step for the betterment of the social system in Brazil.

Let me tell you this. When the poor are provided with the resources, they will certainly question their commitment to the popular right wing parties. And they will resist against oppression. This could be the way for emancipation. And there are good enough reasons to be optimistic. Real change can occur. It somewhat happened in Brazil. It may happen in Turkey too. Why not?

Q: Professor Souza, before we complete this interview, let me pose a final question: There are an increasing number of academics in Turkey and elsewhere who are interested in working on Brazil. What would you like to recommend to them?

A: Let me first say how great this development is. I am seeing more and more cultural and academic exchange programs between countries—South and South such as Turkey and Brazil; and North and South such as Germany and Brazil—and this could only contribute to knowledge. Secondly, all of this proves one fundamental point: It does not make sense anymore to go after research frameworks that are essentially limited to the contexts of nation-states.

Let me give you as an example. As students of Global Studies you and your fellow students set as perfect examples. You are intellectuals from different parts of the world pursuing graduate studies in Germany and in some other countries of your choice. As a result you had developed a strong reflex for comparative thinking. When you study local phenomena you can relate local phenomena to a global context with ease. You are all situated in your national contexts but you never suffer from estrangement - you are not completely a stranger to your local context - or assimilation—you hold more than your citizenship. You have a safe distance with your own way of being. One cannot possibly overemphasize the importance of this distance. It is what allows one to think in global terms.

To go back to your question, I can recommend young researchers who are interested in working on Brazil - or somewhere else for that matter - to do their best for building self-reflective skills. Some people are self-reflective due to their situatedness. This is ingrained in their personalities and this type of self-reflectivity cannot be taught. Nevertheless, through cultural and academic exchange programs one can provide possibilities for those who are willing to build an intellectual form of self-reflectivity. In addition to this, they should adopt sound research frameworks and stay away from different forms of post-modern hysteria. Only this way they can take the advantage of opportunities that are provided by comparative case studies.

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