

# Basic cultural structure

Ideas for Discussion



# Concept History

- Before analyzing the concept of Basic Cultural Structure (BCS), it is worth asking:
- Where does it come from?
- For what purpose was it coined?

# Where does it come from?

- The concept of Basic Cultural Structure was coined by Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger in their book:
- The Dilemmas of Social Democracies. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.
- The said book analyzes the failures of movements of socialist and democratic tendency in the twentieth century
- They were not absolute failures, because something was achieved
- However, the trend towards more social democracy ended, and the era of neoliberal hegemony began.

# What is The Dilemmas of Social Democracies about?

- It consists of a series of case studies, inspired by a methodology and ontology that highlight the role of norms in human life.
- Said methodology and ontology in turn were developed in a previous book, Howard Richards, *Understanding the Global Economy*. First Edition Delhi, India 2000. Second Edition Peace Education Books, Santa Barbara CA, 2004. Third Edition available free online in PDF.

# What was the thesis of Understanding the Global Economy?

- When economists seek to analyze the causal powers that have determined the rise of the global economy, the premises of their reasoning are cultural norms, mainly those legal and ethical norms that constitute commercial exchange.
- Economic science is always a metaphysics - in the sense that it proposes readings of the facts that interpret both what is and what should be.
- “Always” in analyzed cases of liberal, Marxist, Keynesian, feminist and post-structuralist economic science

# What were the case studies of The Dilemmas of Social Democracies? one

- Spain: Origin and Outcome of the Civil War.
- Spain: The social democratic government of Felipe González, which in practice paved the way to neoliberalism.
- The Swedish model.
- Post World War II Austrian Welfare State, and Karl Popper's "Open Society" Philosophy
- South Africa - the fall of apartheid, followed by the collapse of dreams of economic justice.

# What were the case studies of The Dilemmas of Social Democracies? two

- Indonesia. A socialist revolution in a Muslim country, followed by a bloodbath and a long right-wing dictatorship.
- Venezuela (not Hugo Chavez, but pre-Chavez socialist movements, all frustrated)
- Historical evolution of the official thinking of the World Bank.

# What was the conclusion of The Dilemmas of Social Democracies?

- In the cases studied, there were any number of factors that determined the failure of the democratic and socialist tendencies.
- There were different personalities, political and religious doctrines, key incidents that seemed to determine the course of history, military and ecological factors...
- It transpired that in each case socialist-leaning democracy was not feasible because it was incompatible with the basic cultural structure.



# For what purpose was the concept of Basic Cultural Structure coined?

- 1. In order to name a causal power that, whatever the other variables that also affect the determination of the course of history may be, over and over determines the frustration of constructive and necessary social change.
- Here “constructive and necessary” names practicing care ethics to meet human needs in harmony with nature.
- 2. In order to explain why the rise of Keynes-oriented social democracy after World War II was followed by its decline and the rise of Austrian and Chicago oriented neoliberalism.

# Are we tending to attribute everything to a single cause, the BCS?

We intend to follow Pierre Bourdieu, thinking of social life as composed of a number of “fields,” of which the economic field is only one, in which numerous causes, often unknown, and including voluntary human action, and including cultural responses to environmental challenges (Arnold Toynbee’s idea), interact to produce the facts of history as they happen.

- That said, Bourdieu recognizes that “capital accumulation” as the driver of a modern economy deserves special attention as a central driver of events in our times.
- We agree with Bourdieu, while finding the idea of BCS to include, and to be on the whole more useful than “capital accumulation.”

# Relationship with historical debates within the left.

- During the first decades of the twentieth century there were debates about the possibility of a democratic transition from capitalism to socialism.
- Vladimir Lenin, among others, argued that a revolution and a dictatorship of the proletariat were necessary.
- Hjalmar Branting, the founder of the Swedish socialist party, argued that once universal suffrage was achieved, socialism would be an inevitable consequence of democracy.
- The idea of BCE (Basic Cultural Structure) is one among many approaches to defining what is the problem and what are the solutions.

# Thesis for discussion:

- More than any other factor, something that can be called the Basic Cultural Structure (BCS) determines the course of history.
- To change the course of history, you have to change the basic cultural structure (BCS)
- That is why it is not a minor thing to inquire: What is the Basic Cultural Structure? On the contrary, it is a fundamental question.

# What is the basic cultural structure? (BCS)

- An initial inkling of what Basic Cultural Structure (BCS) might mean can be gained by considering some common usages of the three words that make up the phrase.
- Although the BCS of the currently dominant global liberal hegemony is considered here...
- ... in principle every culture has a basic cultural structure.

# "Structure"

- Structure refers to organization. The same component parts often have different causal powers when they are organized differently.
- The parts of the structures at stake here are social relationships, such as the relationship between buyer and seller, between employer and worker, or between landlord and tenant.

# "Cultural"

- Cultural refers to the ecological niche of the human species. By culture we are creative and able to cooperate with each other. We transmit norms and structures from one generation to another. We are capable of creating, preserving, and eventually discarding the norms that constitute social relations. Basic culture defines how we adapt to the challenges of getting along with each other; and how we adapt to the challenges imposed by the environment.

# "Culture" and "Civilization"

- The word “culture” usually highlights the symbolic and discursive aspects “of the physical organization of the means of subsistence of human beings.
- In a similar way, Robert Cox defines a current global civilization by its “mental models” (MMs) Using MMs available today, both the elites and the subaltern masses understand and interpret the world.
- In the words of Susan Strange, today a “civilization of business” rules. A global culture/civilization defends a global common interest:
- Namely: the stability and profitability of the financial markets.



# “Basic”

- Basic refers to social relationships, v. gr. Institutions, which satisfy basic human needs. Plato made reference to basic cultural structures when he wrote in the second book of *The Republic* that the true architects of our city are our needs, and the first and most basic of our needs is food.

# Deepening what is "Structure"

- “Social structure” refers to what Max Weber called “relationships” (Verhältnisse) and treated as key concepts of the science of sociology
- We focus on:
  - production relationships and
  - circulation relationships
- Without forgetting structures of sexism, racism, militarism and other isms that are also basic

# Exchange relationships (Marcel Mauss)

- We highlight the relations of circulation
- The cell of the great body that is the global economy is the individual who needs to sell something to get money. You have to sell in order to buy.
- According to Mauss, the modern human being is *échangiste*. The BCS of modernity is the sale, and its inseparable partner, the purchase.
- In the German of Adorno and Horkheimer, the BCS is the Tauschprinzip.

# Freire's Cultural Action

- Paulo Freire was right when he called his methodology for facilitating social transformation “cultural action.”
- “Culture” and “cultural” here refer to the ecological niche of homo sapiens. Humans are the cultural animal, and therefore the ethical animals.
- “Ethics” is another way to talk about practices also called norms, morals, customs, codes, and/or the rules that govern living together in a group or community.

# Deepening again “Cultural”

- The ethical animal adapts and therefore survives both by preserving the achievements of its culture, passing them on to new generations through education, and by changing its culture, adjusting it better to its physical functions.
- “No human group can survive without moral rules to regulate their coexistence.” --Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

# “Culture” as a moral system

- "To study why some types of living beings disappear and others survive, in the case of human beings, the unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the group but the moral system." --D.S. Wilson (Biologist, specialist in evolution) (1949 - )
- In other words, more than any other cause, it is the moral system (BCS) that either adapts and survives, or does not adapt and does not survive.

# More on "Basic"

- “Basic” refers to getting the basics to live
- Today the peoples of the world are mainly physically dependent, i.e. basically dependent, on what is called "the economy" to be able to live

# The ECB according to Marx

- “The first fact of the social sciences is the existence of human beings, and the physical organization (körperliche) of the production of the means of subsistence that make their existence possible.” --Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-46)
- The culture that physically organizes the structures that produce and distribute the basic requirements of life is the ECB.



# Social Structure and Cultural Structure 1

- It is not a sharp distinction. Sometimes it is convenient to speak of "social" and sometimes of "cultural." There are numerous reasons for preferring one or the other word in one or another context.

# Social Structure and Cultural Structure 2

- It is often convenient to say that social structures are systems of material positions constituted by cultural rules.
- For example, the seller's position forms a system with the buyer's position because there is no sale without a purchase (it is the same thing seen from another point of view). There is no seller without a buyer.
- Moral norms, i.e. cultural rules, define the rights and obligations of people who at a given time occupy one or another position (e.g. seller or buyer).

# Social Structure and Cultural Structure 3

- Sales define our basic modern social structure to the extent that modern human beings have come to be, as Marcel Mauss says *échangistes*. Following André Orléan, the basic social structure of modern economic societies is *séparation marchande*.

# Social Structure and Cultural Structure 4

- The BCS (basic social structure) typically has the force of law.
- For example, the civil and commercial law of property and contract defines rights and duties in sales (at the same time purchases) made in the markets.

# Social Structure and Cultural Structure 5

- Using the word “social” is typical when talking about modern sociology and societies; “cultural” has a flavor of anthropology and non-modern societies.
- The basic cultural structures (BCS) are typically indigenous and/or ancient customs and codes of coexistence. However, it is essential to realize that modern social structures can also be studied by anthropologists and can also be *seen as* cultures.
- Modern business common sense and civil law are not universal and eternal.
- They constitute one among innumerable forms of life that human beings have built.

# The *conscientización* of Paulo Freire

- A social structure may be legally defined, but it still depends on broader and deeper norms appropriately called culture. Marriage, for example.
- “It is not the police force that creates the law. On the contrary, it is the moral force of the law that makes it possible to organize a public police force.” -J.L. Brierley, Professor of Law, Cambridge University
- Freire calls “conscientización” (awareness) educational practices that show that the sales BSC, and the modern world in general, are not eternal. They are historical constructions that can be deconstructed and rebuilt.

# "Critical" Theories

- A number of researchers have formed movements within the social sciences that are called "critical."
- There is talk, for example of critical sociology, critical political economy, critical theory of racism, critical feminisms.
- Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School, Germany, was a pioneer of "critical" studies in the 1930s. According to Horkheimer, non-critical researchers try to solve social problems without questioning the existing basic social structures.
- The "critics" postulate that the current basic institutions are temporary historical constructions, within which the most important problems have no solutions.

# We repeat to emphasize

- An BCS (Basic Cultural Structure) is typical of anthropology and traditional societies, but also a BCS (liberal culture) underlies and establishes modern institutions.



# Positions that form social structures 1

- The social positions that define the social structures are themselves defined by the *rights* and *duties* of the person who occupies the position. For example *rights* and *duties* of the tenant in the structure that relates her or him to the owner
- Thus the *ethics* built into the cultural structures, i.e. the *rights* and *duties*, constitute the social structures.
- Social structures change over time.

# Positions, and therefore social structures, change

- For example, in the positions that make up the creditor-debtor social structure, debtors have more rights today than a century ago, or two centuries ago.
- In marriage, women have more rights today than a century or two centuries ago.

# Social Structure and Capitalism 1

- Strictly speaking, "capitalism" is (according to any of the common definitions of that word) neither the basic social structure, nor the basic cultural structure that constitutes the basic social structure.
- It is more accurate to say that the basic cultural structure, a life centred around sales, is one of the main causes of capitalism and at the same time one of its results.
- It is about circular cycles of causes, more individualist culture leads to capitalism, more capitalism leads to more individualist culture, i.e. more BCS.

# Social Structure and Capitalism 2

- The BCS constitutes the BSS. Culture constitutes society. Cultural rules constitute material positions.
- There is no a priori reason to believe that formulations as simple and comprehensive as these could be true. At first glance the social world appears to be so varied and complicated that such broad generalizations must be false.

# Social Structure and Capitalism 3

- However, in fact the world has never been so uniform, due to the global economy with its liberal legal framework (the BSS legally defined by the civil codes) and its liberal ideology (the BCS of the *Tauschprinzip*).
- For good reasons Immanuel Wallerstein said that today the social sciences have only one object of study, which is the global economy.
- In fact, physically we have only one planet, and socially we have only one World Trade Organization, only one International Monetary Fund, and one hegemonic type of human being, the *échangiste* type.

# A Rereading of the Beginning of Capital 1

- In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx begins by analyzing "the simple exchange of commodities," determining how much wheat has a value equal to how much iron.
- There follow a series of "value forms" that can be read as a defense of the labor theory of value, or as a Hegelian idea manifesting itself in history.

# A Rereading of the Beginning of Capital 2

- But this story can also be read as a theoretical sketch of the consequences of a causal power. The active causal power in history already postulated at the beginning of the book is the basic social structure constituted by the basic cultural structure.
- That is to say constituted by a culture of *échangistes* making purchases and sales.

# A Rereading of the Beginning of Capital 3

- Through the centuries, with any number of intervening variables, the *échangistes*, always looking for more efficient practices to achieve their goals, inevitably arrive at capitalism.
- Later Alfred Marshall (1824 - 1924) called this same historical trend The Law of Substitution. New, more efficient practices for producing, selling, and accumulating wealth replace and destroy old practices.



# A Rereading of the Beginning of Capital 4

- Thus, through a series of stages, Marx explains the historical outcome that defines capitalism: “Accumulate! Accumulate! This is Moses and the prophets.” Sums of money are invested in order to obtain larger sums of money. (Accumulation is the same driving force of history with or without the postulate that the source of accumulated surplus value is the unpaid labor of workers.)

# We return to the Thesis for discussion:

- More than any other factor, something that can be called the Basic Cultural Structure (BCS) determines the course of history.
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# The global triumph of capitalism 1

- Adam Smith and others had already anticipated the reason why adherents of the norm of devoting one's life to accumulating would dominate the planet.
- Due to another process of circular causes (in addition to the individualism-capitalism-individualism circle; in addition to accumulation; and in addition and the law of substitution enriching the winners and excluding the losers).

# The global triumph of capitalism 2

- It was military power. With more money you buy more warships and pay more soldiers. You pay for the modernization of military technologies. With the military force you accumulate more money. It is a positive feedback loop.
- Since their objective was to dominate in order to accumulate, a decent life for all was not the objective of those who imposed the modern world-system on humanity. According to libertarian versions of the Basic Cultural Structure still, a decent life for all in harmony with nature *should not* be the objective.

# The global triumph of capitalism 2

- Question: If the decisive fact in the historical formation of the current modern world system was the domination of the rest of the world by European military forces, why do you say that culture and not military force is what most determines the course of history?
- It is because the accumulation that allowed the growth of the Armed Forces and the technification of the war by applied science in Europe, was the product of cultural logics starting from the *Tauschprinzip* inevitably leading to accumulation.

# The global triumph of capitalism 3

- Militarism itself does not define modernity. Militarism was born almost twelve thousand years earlier, along with patriarchy.
- The agricultural revolution allowed the existence of upper classes that could live off the work of others, devoting themselves to conquests.
- The superior military power of the Europeans in the 16th-19th centuries was a product of accumulation, which was in turn a product of a business culture. In short, it was a product of the BCS, today globally hegemonic.
- The imposition of European commercial culture on the world was not inevitable.
- It was *at least almost inevitable* that sooner or later a cumulative circular causality accumulating wealth would privilege one or another dominant military patriarchy on a global scale. As it turned out, it was European, especially British.

# A Consequence of Modern Western BSS World Dominance: Structural Humiliation

- The market facilitates only those sales agreed upon by both parties. Employers and consumers buy only what it is profitable for them to buy, or what they want to buy.
- Consequence: structural humiliation. Those people who are unable to sell their labor power or other merchandise at prices sufficient to fulfill their roles as heads of household, or simply to dress nicely and rent a respectable home, are the humiliated. The losers.

# Consequences of structural humiliation, 2

- When will racism or sexism end while decent employment is scarce, and therefore including some in decent employment necessarily implies excluding others? Never.
- When are all the micro-entrepreneurs going to get out of poverty by selling while there are few buyers and there are many who need to sell something to get money to live? Never.



# The homeostatic character of the system 1

- The biologist Humberto Maturana taught that any living being is homeostatic.
- When its structure is disturbed, it fights back, restoring its structure to its normal form.
- At the social level, the hegemonic structure is driven by profitability and is therefore homeostatic.

# The homeostatic character of system 2

- When social movements impede profitability...
- ..no economy is not moving.
- Thus, the system defends itself against shortages, inflation, unemployment - all this being read by the main media through the lenses of the ECB.
- Until a "normal" form of ESB is restored, that is, a regimen suitable for accumulation

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - decent employment for all 1

- Move resources from where they are not needed to where they are needed.
- Where they are not needed they can be called “surplus.” In economics they are often called “rents.”
- Surplus transfers can multiply jobs that do not depend on funds to pay wages to workers from funds earned by the sale of labor’s products.
- In Adam Smith’s terminology, a “worker” by definition is someone who makes a “vendible” product his or her employer can sell at a profit.

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - decent employment for all 2

- This proposal postulates a care ethic
- The care ethic (often called by some other name) marks fundamental departures from liberal ethics
- Namely: (1) A human being ought to be able to live a decent and dignified life *even if she or he does not succeed in selling anything*
- (2) It is a duty and a virtue to serve the common good.
- (3) Serving the common good includes creating surplus and sharing it.
- In Adam Smith's terminology, someone who does not make a "vendible" product, but is still for some good reason paid, is a "servant."

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - decent employment for all 3

- The list of useful and dignified work that servants can do is an endless list: starting with ecological services to save the biosphere, and with the biosphere save humanity.
- The sources for paying the "servants" are also an endless list: a list of everything that can be called "surpluses."
- Surplus transfers multiply jobs that do not depend on funds to pay wages to workers created by the sale of labor products.

# Evidently...

- Obviously the funds and other resources to create decent employment for servants engaged in decent but unprofitable work (for example, removing toxic plastics from the ocean) are not going to be provided by investors looking for profit.
- Neither the forest nor the ocean pays you to take care of them, but the future, or lack of future, of the biosphere depends on their good care.
- To repeat: to change the course of history, you have to change the basic cultural structure (BCS)

# More on ethics 1

- Teach and practice functional and realistic ethics, “ethics of care,” “ethics of solidarity,” “love,” “Ubuntu,” “Buen Vivir”...
- To live in such a way that, if everyone lives like me, life will be sustainable on planet earth in the long term. (rephrasing Kant)
- Living in such a way that, if everyone lives like me, the economy will be win-win and not win-lose.

## More on ethics 2

- Respect the cultural resources that are the various spiritualities, religions and lay moral codes (for example, of the Freemasons) that already exist, guiding them to function to serve the common good, "adjusting culture to its physical functions."
- "Your property does not belong only to you. It also belongs to those whom you can help with your surplus." Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)
- Create surplus. "If you are poor yourself, you cannot help the poor." -C.K. Prahalad (1941-2010)



# More on ethics 3

- A better ethics solves the problem of finding surpluses to create jobs that do not depend on sales, paying "servants."
- When a better ECB than the currently dominant one supports prosocial attitudes, people will live in a sustainable way. We will share surpluses and create surpluses to share.
- A better ethics preserves and enhances the positive elements of the liberal ethic (eg religious freedom, academic freedom, freedom of the press).

## More on ethics 4

- “The footwear that you have in your closet and never wear, belongs to the barefoot.” - Saint Ambrose (339-397)
- Saint Paul was by trade an artisan tent maker. After making enough tents to make a living, he would make even more to create a surplus to share with the weak. (Acts 20: 30-38)
- (I take the liberty of citing scripture from my own tradition. Similar teachings can be found in all the religious traditions that I am aware of. It is the wisdom of the ages.)

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - surplus 2

- Surplus sharing principles such as reciprocity and redistribution are found in all cultures. In footnotes, Marx cites Aristotle and Martin Luther in this regard.
- “A company necessarily has to make a profit. The great political question of our times is what to do with profits once they have been earned.” --Peter Drucker (1909-2005)

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - surplus 3

- Today, and for the foreseeable future, the existence of astronomical surpluses is guaranteed by the astronomical profitability of advanced technologies, such as the technologies of Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and later electric vehicles and green hydrogen, among others.
- The issue is whether the existing astronomical surpluses will end up serving humanity and mother earth, or will they end up suppressing humanity and killing mother earth.

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - education 1

- Starting from Pierre Bourdieu, Magnus Haavelsrud and Alicia Cabezudo have developed a theory of education in favor of cultures of peace and the adaptive transformation of social structures.
- Education is capable of changing culture, creating a conflict between culture and social structure.
- According to Bourdieu when cultural values collide with the social structure, the social structure tends to change.

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - education 2

- The psychology of moral development recognizes tendencies biologically hardwired in normal development. One is adults wanting to be good people. Normal adults respect and defend the morals of their milieu.

# A proposal to humanity to save itself from the current mega crisis - education 3

- On the other hand, there is also a strong hardwired tendency to be loyal to “us” and hostile to “them.” The racism that is a consequence of structural humiliation triggers a potential DNA creates.
- Therefore, human rights, cultures of peace, and the functional ethics of another possible economy have to be taught. If they are not taught, they will not be learned.

# Other readings

Further reading is available at [www.chileufu.cl](http://www.chileufu.cl) and [www.unboundedacademy.org](http://www.unboundedacademy.org). Howard Richards' new book, *Economic Theory and Community Development*, written with the help of Gavin Andersson, is for sale on the Dignity Press site , and will soon also on Amazon and other major sites at nine dollars for the electronic version.

Questions or comments are welcome at [info@chileufu.cl](mailto:info@chileufu.cl)