VIEWING SOCIETY FROM THE PERIPHERY[*]

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Introduction

Though fragmented and heterogeneous, very valuable information has been gathered in Brazil during the past decade concerning the way of life of the working classes and urban poor living in large cities.[1] This information is the result of a great number of research studies, many of which were carried out by anthropologists. They deal with very diverse themes: migration, family life, gender, women's perspectives, food, working conditions, social movements, and survival strategies.

Not only does one encounter a heterogeneity of themes and problems, but also one must take into consideration the diversity of the population studied. Almost all of the studies, particularly anthropological ones which tend to isolate specific groups, locales or institutions as objects of research, deal with a very heterogeneous population with respect to the labor market: factory workers, self-employed workers, street vendors, house-maids, lower level public employees, service providers of various kinds, piecework homeworkers, and the entire range of less prestigious and underpaid jobs.

However, notwithstanding this diversity, as one becomes familiar with these studies, even the most unsuspecting researcher will not fail to be impressed by a remarkable uniformity with respect to fundamental values, habits, social tastes and aspirations which apparently characterize this population as a whole. This is not surprising. It is reasonable to suppose that the social forces that direct the transformation of Brazilian society tend to produce very similar living conditions among the urban poor. Uniformity of consumer standards generated by wage levels, and the occurrence of common problems in matters of housing, health, schooling and access to the labor market are bound to promote, in this population, the development of similar patterns of sociability, leisure and consumption, labor market evaluation and particular forms of perceiving society. In other words, we can assume that similar living conditions produce similar cultural characteristics.

The analysis of what is similar leads to inquiry of the cultural universe. It is this perspective which

dissolves the initial heterogeneity. A diversity regarding ways in which people are inserted in the productive structure, which is certainly fundamental when analyzing processes of transformation of capitalist society, acquires a different meaning when seen from the perspective of the subjects who live through this process. From the perspective of an unschooled and unskilled population, the wide gamut of low paying jobs with little prestige to offer constitute a single set of work options and possible employment. The life history of each individual, and, even more so, of each family member, is constructed from the diversified work experiences which occur in this same universe of occupational opportunities.

For this reason, analysis of uniformities and similarities which are constructed at the cultural level can not be carried out on the basis of concepts associated with the Marxist theory of social classes. The notion of *classes populares* ("popular" or "people's" classes), which is used for descriptive purposes, may be more appropriate for dealing with this universe in terms of its characteristic diversity and uniformity; this notion also indicates that analysis is being carried out on a different level from that which is found in theories of social classes.

Assuming the cultural perspective, this study has a double objective: on the one hand, it presents the results of a specific research study, carried out in 1982 by a team of anthropologists associated with CEBRAP;[2] on the other, it seeks to use as a general frame of reference all of the ethnographies, which have not yet been systematized, concerning the city of São Paulo. With these two objectives in mind, this article seeks to present a preliminary synthesis so as to better organize the results, both partial and partially overlapping, which have accumulated in recent studies.

Since the final objective is, in fact, to analyze the *classes populares* in terms of their cultural context, the theme and object of research here presented have strategic value. The research project proposes an exploratory study of three medium size cities in the State of São Paulo (Rio Claro, Marília and São José dos Campos).[3] The fact that the field research was done outside the metropolis permitted comparison with an abundant existing material concerning the city of São Paulo, and offered confirmation of widespread cultural orientations.

The choice of the "the urban periphery" as the location and theme of investigation deserves special attention.

The "periphery", or outskirts

The poor can be found in every part of the big cities: in rooming houses and tenement areas, rundown neighborhoods and small enclaves in the fissures of wealthier neighborhoods. There is, however, a place where the poor concentrate in large numbers, a space of their own and which allows most clearly for the expression of their way of life. It is called the *periferia* in Portuguese, which is a reference to the "periphery" or "outskirts" of urban areas. The *periferia* consists of the poorest neighborhoods, those most distant from centers of urban life and least well served by public transportation and urban amenities.

Obviously, the phenomenon of the formation of urban peripheries is neither new nor particularly Brazilian. In São Paulo, where vigorous urban expansion dates from the end of the nineteenth century, when many European immigrants came to Brazil, the city had already been growing haphazardly a hundred years before. However, since the 50s, urban growth has not only increased its tempo, but has also acquired specific characteristics that distinguish the new outskirts from the old city fringes.

In first place, regarding this most recent period, one notes the effects of massive substitution of national migrants for foreign workers. In second place, a radical change occurs in regard to housing provisions for workers. In the past, the problem tended to be solved by private initiative, involving construction of workers' villages, and rental of rooms and houses. Since World War II, however, when rental rates were frozen and legislation was enacted for tenant protection, this type of investment has become unlucrative. A new business began, involving the sale in installments of cheap lots for housing in peripheral areas. These

lots tended to present similar characteristics: location in distant and unhealthy areas, unsuitable topography, low access to public services and absence of legal documentation.

The dream of owning a house was sold along with the lots, and became part of the general aspirations of the popular classes. Results are clearly visible in the layout of the neighborhoods: no sidewalks, no lighting, no sewage, no schools or public health clinics, irregular streets, poor water supplies, and low access to public transportation. The houses, which are built little by little by the owners themselves, always appear to be unfinished. This entire process has already been amply studied in São Paulo.

The creation of this system of popular housing had consequences which were neither entirely predictable nor functional from the standpoint of capitalist reproduction of the labor force. Most of these consequences are linked to two interrelated phenomena: the segregation and relative immobilization of the population. Ownership of land, even when illusive, and the immense effort required to build a house constitute an arduous long-term investment that ends up confining the population more or less permanently to a certain area, tying it to an interminable project. On the other hand, as the income levels of those who buy the lots tend to be similar, a relative uniformity characterizes this population which is segregated by the distance and difficulty of access to the rest of the city. Children and women who do not have jobs tend to stay in the neighborhood, because transportation is costly and time consuming.

The relative uniformity and segregation appear to favor the development of a local sociability that distinguishes this population from more privileged layers of the population. For the privileged, distance is eliminated by automobile and phone. Sociability is exercised between relatives and friends dispersed throughout the city. Self-sufficient houses or apartments are isolated from surrounding neighborhoods. In contrast, on the outskirts of the city, neighborhoods and social surroundings are essential for the formation of networks of sociability, which depend on physical proximity.

There are still other implications of a more political nature regarding patterns of segregation and location of the low-income population. Research among diverse segments indicates clearly that spatial and occupational mobility is oriented in function of a family project of improvement of living conditions. Although this process is always thought of in terms of the individual, within the dimensions of private families, there is a social counterpart. The improvement of living conditions also depends on urbanization of the periphery and access of this population to urban public services: pavement and street lighting, running water and sewage systems, health centers and schools, more frequent and accessible transportation. These improvements depend on governmental action. In this specific sphere of living, as a response to neighborhood confinement and investment in house ownership, the family project of social mobility acquires, necessarily, a collective and political dimension. Not only do urban improvements of the neighborhood produce collective benefits; they cannot be obtained through individual effort. It is in this context and moment in the social process that the population becomes receptive to forms of organization that permit joint action directed towards local government.

This dynamic has already been amply studied in the city of São Paulo. The proliferation of neighborhood associations, which shows the specific ways in which the popular classes constitute themselves as political actors, has been highlighted by a great number of researchers. However, the cultural processes underlying political behaviors have not been sufficiently analyzed. On the other hand, the diffusion of this new style of urbanization and political action in cities of the interior requires an analysis relevant not only to metropolitan areas and the city of São Paulo, but to smaller urban centers as well. Only in this way can we evaluate the dimensions, common characteristics and variations of this process.

The vision of the city

In the medium sized cities where research was carried out, the vision that the urban poor have

of the city is, on the whole, positive. When the question is formulated in a very general manner, as in the case of "What do you think of this city?", or "Do you like living here?", responses are very similar and include a limited number of standards of reference.

The medium size cities are considered good to live in because they are both *clean* and *calm*. The absence of violence is also pointed out as one of the advantages, as is the absence of speeding cars and car accidents. In this context, an explicit or implicit comparison to life in larger cities is always made, the foremost example being the city of São Paulo, which is characterized negatively for its pollution, overcrowding, car accidents, violence and transportation problems.

As the responses are very similar, a single example is sufficient to illustrate the type of response which is most frequent. A resident of Rio Claro said: "I like it here. If I go to a city like Campinas, for example, which is very crowded and busy, I don't like it. The big cities like São Paulo, Campinas, are too agitated, crowded and polluted. Here everything is calm and clean."

The set of attributes which are used as terms of comparison defines the value given to a certain type of social order which is constituted in so far as three planes — spatial, social, and moral — are superimposed.

Medium Size City	Large City
clean — good climate	pollution — bad climate
easygoing calm	agitated — crowded
absence of violence and criminality	violence and criminality

Alongside these attributes, which refer to social-spatial order, we find others which have to do with "resources". The word "resources" has a broad meaning and basically refers to the availability of certain public services. First of all, medical services, but also schools and transportation. Secondly, it refers to the presence of urban equipment such as water, electricity, sewage, and pavement. Lastly, it can allude to the existence of a rich and diversified shopping area. When reference is made to "resources", the comparison

tends to favor the large cities as against small cities or countryside. Two examples illustrate this context:

> We lived for 16 years in a place in Paraná, a coffee farm. Then we moved to Marília, which is better. The farm didn't have resources, you couldn't get free medicine, that's something that poor people need. Here in Rio Claro you also get milk and medicine at the health clinic.
> It is a city with many resources; when the children get sick, it's easy. I go to the Santa Casa [the public hospital] or the public health clinic. There's a lot of public transportation to get to the center of the city.

New terms of opposition emerge:

Small City or Rural Area	Medium Size City
absence of "resources"	presence of "resources"

A third set of references which is present in these responses has to do with economic considerations, as expressed by evaluations of the ease or difficulty in obtaining good jobs. In this context, the comparison is again made with larger cities, and desirable conditions regarding abundance of good jobs are always associated with large industries. Therefore, although medium sized cities like Rio Claro and Marília are considered very good cities, they have the disadvantage of offering less employment. In São José, on the other hand, the large number of jobs available always emerges as the most positive characteristic of the town. Industrial cities like São Paulo and Campinas, despite being agitated, crowded, violent and polluted, are also valued in terms of job availability. Accordingly, small cities and rural areas are at an even greater disadvantage than medium size cities, because they offer fewer opportunities for employment.

On the whole, this view, which emerges in both questions and answers in very broad terms, tends to articulate perceptions of an urban-rural continuum. The axis which may be said to run along this continuum, whose range includes the countryside, small cities, medium size cities and

the large metropolis, is precisely defined; in general, the population has a very recent and personal experience of migrations traversing this continuum. Through family histories, the parameters of urban geography are established.

Along the continuum, cities are evaluated in regard to two dimensions or orders of attributes. Both dimensions are clearly acknowledged by all of the population interviewed. The first refers to the quality of urban space which, ideally, should combine order and tranquility with availability of "resources" such as medical services, schools, transportation, etc. The second refers to the economic order which is seen in terms of the abundance or scarcity of well-paid jobs, and associated with the presence or absence of large industry.

As regards the first dimension, the medium size city, which is seen to offer a satisfactory combination of resources and tranquility, is valued positively in relation to both poles of the continuum. The countryside and the small city are more tranquil, but do not offer resources. The large city offers resources but not tranquility.

In respect to the second dimension, the availability of jobs, larger cities are always favored. São José dos Campos appears to present the ideal combination, because it offers many jobs without having destroyed the tranquility of a medium size city.

It is necessary to emphasize somewhat the extent of this kind evaluation. The interviews are extraordinarily consistent regarding the criteria used to evaluate the different urban centers, although variation may be found as to the weight attributed to one or another factor in the choice of city for residence. Thus, Rio Claro, for example, may be indicated preferentially, in spite of employment difficulties, due to perceived advantages related to tranquility and availability of resources. In contrast, one might prefer to live in a larger city (like Campinas or São Paulo), where there are greater job opportunities, despite the absence of peace and order.

When, on the other hand, we analyze the data pertaining to São Paulo, we find the same types of reference (Caldeira, 1984). In the evaluation of this city, the residents of the metropolitan periphery constantly referred to job opportunities as the principal advantage of São Paulo. There are also positive references to availability of "resources", but responses are less uniform in this regard, particularly because of transportation deficiencies and lack of urban services on the city's outskirts. Pollution and the violence are frequently cited as city problems. What is not uniform in research data pertaining to São Paulo is the value given to calm and tranquility. While, at times, small cities are positively valued in regard to these attributes, the inverse response is also common — other cities may be negatively evaluated for "lack of activity" or for being "too slow".

It is necessary, however, to note that these representations with respect to the city are, in general, very synthetic and tend to be summarized in one or two phrases, or just a few words. In contrast, when questions focus on the more concrete level of the neighborhood, home, and occupational perspectives of the informants, the discourse is rich and elaborate. It is at the level of real life experience, and of specific living and working conditions, that the informants' evaluation of the city acquires meaning in relation to life goals and plans for social mobility.

These are, then, the great themes around which the discourse is extended and enriched: the urban, when understood as neighborhood and home; the economic, when understood as employment. These are the questions around which immediate experience is structured, the areas in which individuals, as citizens, assume positions and make decisions concerning their own destinies. According to this framework, they visualize the impersonal social forces, or external limits, which define the field in which decisions are possible.

The neighborhood: a vision of progress

In São José dos Campos, Marília and Rio Claro, as in São Paulo and other growing Brazilian cities, the making of the periphery is a constant process. The urban poor and recent arrivals from rural areas tend to locate themselves on the fringes

of the city, where absence of services such as water, electricity, sidewalks and sewage diminish land values, making land more accessible. In outlying areas, residences are modest and rents are less expensive. Over time, as population density increases, city government tends to extend networks of public services, increasing land values. The unfinished and precarious residences which date from the initial settlement of the area undergo a series of reforms, improvements and additions. The city swallows up the old periphery, which is recreated in new fringe areas.

This entire process is part of the life experience of the population, and is assimilated as part of the given conditions under which survival strategies and plans of social mobility are worked out. On the whole, the process, which is characterized by the population as "urban progress", is positively evaluated and utilized; it is seen by the population in terms of the transformations of global society from which it can benefit directly.

The periphery, which is seen as a process by its own inhabitants, implies in a differentiated and historical view of city neighborhoods. The manner in which inhabitants located themselves in urban space correlates with their present position in society and their perspectives of progressive improvement. The interviews are very clear in this respect:

> Today there are good houses, even a rich guy is living here. There's a professor there, another over there. If you don't count the houses of the poor, there are several good-looking homes. But back then [when they first moved to the area] it was embarrassing. There were only shacks. (Rio Claro)

> There was no electricity before, we bought ice for beer and made do. Now, we already have electricity [...] There's still no street lights, sidewalks, or sewers but at least this area is ahead of other places. Things take longer in other places. The mayor and authorities haven't gotten in the way. Everybody built their houses and the housing inspectors didn't create any problems. The mayor pays attention to the residents. (São José dos Campos)

Responses such as these were obtained by different researchers working in São Paulo. In the evaluation of progress, positive aspects relating to urban life appear most clearly:

> This neighborhood here is good. Before it was quieter. Now, there are a lot of people. There are good houses, stores to buy clothes, a lot of butcher shops, a lot of businesses. There was nothing here before. We had to go downtown to shop. And there weren't any buses, electricity or water. We still don't have water, really, because they turn it off at 7 and only turn it back on at 4 in the afternoon or sometimes only at night... On the radio they say we're going to get sewers. So I think they'll have to fix the water. They'll have to. Sewers without water [...] (Rio Claro)

The process is so clear that it is easily verbalized and counted on as an investment.

There is also a clear hierarchy in the evaluation of these "resources" which correspond, in general, to the order in which they are usually provided: in first place, electricity, without which it is the same as living in the "woods". Water and transportation follow. Afterwards come schools, stores, and health clinics. In last place, sewage, asphalt and public lighting.

People rely on this process. One of the families interviewed in Rio Claro had just finished building a house on the distant outskirts of the city. As there was no electricity in the area, they rented out their house, which was of superior quality, and continued to live and pay rent in an inferior one which had electricity. They were waiting for electricity "to arrive" at the house which they owned.

The lot and the house: raising the quality of life

The process which begins with purchase of the lot, and continues with piecemeal construction of the house, is the same as found on the outskirts of São Paulo. In regard to São Paulo, it has already been extensively analyzed.

As one of the owners of housing lots for sale on the outskirts of Rio Claro affirmed, the impor-

tant selling factor is that the installment price should be lower than the cost of renting a house. "Then it's worth it to the buyer." Funds which were being used for rent can be used to "pay for what's yours", and it is just a matter of arranging a little money to build a shack, where one lives temporarily until improvements can be made, according to a strategy of continuous investment.

> With a little money which I brought from Jaú [another town], I made the down payment on the lot: $30,00. With the rest I bought bricks and roof tiles. I built these two rooms and got inside. It was low, it wasn't as tall as it is today. Didn't have a floor or even a door. We were given a door and a few boxes of wood. I made the window with the boxes. It was a shack. Made of brick, but a shack. I kept working, improving. I increased the height. As payment, I had only my friendship, but no obligations. (I mean, when someone helped over here, when I was able to, I helped him, but I wasn't obligated.). In two years I managed to get these rooms in the shape they're in now. I made one more room. From then on it began looking more like a house. (Rio Claro)
> We came, we paid. I had some boards, we could live on the lot, but we couldn't build yet. I made a wood shack, the front door was the wardrobe. It was June, it was cold, and the walls were just plastered and still humid. We stayed there and worked hard. I had a construction job during the day and at nights and on Sundays, I was here. And we kept on building [...] Today [a year later] all this is already built [a bar and 5 rooms]. If you work at it, and have the courage to work, you can succeed. If you wait for something to fall down from heaven, it won't happen. (São José dos Campos)

Without exception, all of the other respondents expressed similar opinions. Common to all is the story of the construction of the house, according to which the phases of construction serve as the best example that things are improving, slowly and always: that is progress.

Previous responses have indicated that owning a house means much more than having "a roof over your head" or safe place to live. On the one hand, it is proof that it is possible to move up; on the other, it means savings and an investment. Lot values rise, adjoining rooms can be added, some of which for extra income. In the end, the house can always be sold to finance another project: the purchase of a small farm in the country, or investment for going into business.

The existence of more than one house per lot is frequent. The house at the back of the lot, which is usually the oldest and most precarious construction, may be added to and improved towards the front, or vice-versa. In situations involving multiple residences, rooms are frequently rented or used to accomodate relatives, usually siblings or children.

The entire process is arduous and frequently requires the prolonged effort of the entire family. The employed children help the father, get married and stay at home, continuing to contribute to family income while adding on one or two separate rooms for their own new families. Collective property, however, always creates problems. With the death of the parents, problems relating to inheritance are sources of many conflicts.

There is no end to the process. As soon as the painful *via crucis* of paying for the land and constructing the parent's house is done, the process begins anew with the children. Hopes are that the children, having attended school and gotten better jobs, will be able to start off from a little higher up. Those who manage to realize these hopes, dedicating their years of youth and maturity to making these dreams come true, may consider themselves to have succeeded in life. The same process and the same evaluations are found in São Paulo as well as in the other cities investigated.

From this set of evaluations of the city, neighborhood and house, a basic common direction is oulined: the project of improving the quality of life. The belief in the viability of this project is based on the belief in *progress*. The experience associated with the transformations of Brazilian society is seen, in general, in a positive way, the implication being that, through its own efforts, the population can take advantage of possibilities of upward mobility. This experience of *progress* is

also the experience of urbanization, which, while becoming concrete in life histories, is thought of as a *process*, with increasing access to urban resources: living in a house of your own in a neighborhood with paved streets, electricity, water, sewage, transportation, and nearby schools and health clinics.

The construction of this model of a decent and comfortable life, by which the population appraises society and its own social standing, is closely linked to the concept of private *property* — not of the means of production, but, rather, of the space where life unfolds, that is, the home. In this sense it can be said that the property which is positively valued is private in a double sense: juridically and in terms of the object to which it refers.[4]

Employment

As was previously made clear, the population feels that it has benefited from the advantages of the city, not only in so far as they are able to use urban "resources", but mainly in so far as they became homeowners and live in a neighborhood that "progresses".

Yet, all this constitutes only one dimension of the city. Conditions for staying in the city and using urban resources depend on getting a job. Employment is always an issue and gives rise to discussion which, among respondents, is the most elaborate, articulated, and uniform. In the representation of the population of Marília and Rio Claro, the problem is clearly associated with demographic growth.

The older inhabitants have a "historical" view of the problem:

> I think the city is good, but I think there are too few jobs. I have a son who had to go work elsewhere because of the lack of jobs. He has a diploma, attended SENAI [vocational school] [...] and even so he didn't find a job. [...] What I say is, the only thing missing in this city is industry. Streets are paved, there are nice city parks, [...] no problem. That's all fine. [...] There are too many people wanting to work. The farm people all came to the city. That's why there's a lack of jobs. This started

a while back. There was a law that made it difficult for farmers to keep workers on the land. Before, when farm workers retired they could be sent away. Now, no, they have to let the worker live there. So they no longer want workers living on the farm. So, the workers have to come to live in the city and take the truck to work on the farm. In one way this helped the city grow. They had to divide up city land into housing lots because there wasn't any other way. But also, many who worked on the farm now work in the city and that's how the number of jobs decreased. (Rio Claro)

These interviews are not isolated cases. The notion that in Rio Claro and Marília the labor market is saturated is very general, and appears in almost all interviews. Besides local and regional migration, there are also indications of large-scale interstate migrations from Paraná, Minas Gerais, the Northeast and North (a category which sometimes includes Bahia).

One sees there is a clear perception of the existence of a labor market. It is this understanding of the labor market that is associated with the high value attributed to large industry, as pointed out previously. In peoples' perception, only large industries can guarantee a favorable labor market for workers, offering better paid jobs and increasing the value of the work force within all occupations.

> To be a good place to live in, a city needs to have industries that pay well. And there are none here. (Rio Claro)
> Here in Marília the lack of work is what makes things difficult [...] Many industries that had jobs for men have already left. We have jobs now, but only for women. (Marília)

There also seems to be a general consensus that in order to solve the problem of lack of work the industrial park would not only have to be enlarged, but also modernized.

> What's really good is industry, to provide more jobs and improve the standard of living. Without industry, there are no jobs. Stores provide jobs but very few. A big store may hire 15 employees; 15

and nothing are basically the same thing. The city is growing in every direction. The population increases and industry doesn't provide (enough) work. A city, to develop properly has to have heavy industries, like those in ABC [cities in the metropolitan region of São Paulo], where the steel workers are. That's real industry. Industries with 2,000, 3,000 employees. Without these industries it doesn't do any good to increase the population. Here, 7 years ago, there were 50,000 inhabitants. Today, give or take, there are 130,000. Not just those who came from elsewhere, no. There are also those that were born, there are more people who are born than die. And then there are the people from the farms. (Rio Claro)

The value which is attributed to large industry is linked to the perception of the labor market as structured in terms of three types of employment: first, the jobs of rural migrant workers (the so-called "*bóias-frias*"); then, urban jobs that pay the minimum wage or a little higher, as found in traditional type industries, civil construction or a few dispersed job placements, such as gas station attendants, street vendors, car mechanic assistants, and lower level occupations of public service and hospitals; finally, modern industrial jobs, which offer the best pay. This, in a general fashion, is the labor market in which the unskilled population can compete for jobs. Outside of this framework, the alternative, for those who dream of a career for their children, requires efforts to put members of the younger generation through years of schooling at secondary and higher levels for the chance of moving up to non-manual or highly skilled manual positions. A second alternative for upward mobility, perhaps even more difficult than the first, would require conditions for opening up one's own business.

The modern factory is, under any circumstance, a central reference. It serves as a standard for those who are looking for work, including the unskilled; besides a certain wage level, factory work offers a series of guarantees or advantages. The issue is clearly addressed by respondents in São José dos Campos, where factory work is abundant.

We live here because we depend on the factory, the only way to live is to depend on the factory. Small cities with no factories won't do. He [the husband] is a professional, but depends on the factory: if he worked anywhere else, he'd only make half his salary. (São José dos Campos)

I like the factory better, I'm already used to it. Factories have all the guarantees, INPS, HMOs [labour benefits which include vacations and retirement pensions and hospital services]. The factory is preferable: there's an hour to start and an hour to quit, and we know that when the hours are up, it's over. On the farm or in a shoe repair shop there aren't any set hours, you have to work from morning to night. (São José dos Campos)

As can be seen, for the population of medium size cities, the problem is very clear. The more accessible urban jobs pay the minimum wage, which is too little to support a family. Migrant workers make more, but it is hard and uncertain work, and no workers' benefits are guaranteed. On the other hand, better paid urban manual work, available in modern industries, is in short supply and requires skills which many don't have. Now, the solution would be to increase the availability of better paid work, increasing the number of modern industries. This would make it possible to absorb all of those in the work force with some schooling and skills, lowering the availability of workers for the other sectors, thereby promoting a general wage increase, also benefitting rural workers, as has occurred in São José dos Campos. The alternative solution would be to prevent population growth and migration.

There are countless interviews in which these issues are clearly stated. It would be unnecessary to multiply the examples. Yet, it is important to emphasize that all of the discussion about the labor market is entirely permeated by concerns with wages. It is remarkably clear that the richness of discussion regarding this theme indicates an attempt to understand the mechanisms responsible for the low wage levels. In this context, references are frequently made in regard to the *value* of the worker, not of the work. This occurs, for example, when complaints are made that "the worker has no

value here", or in discussions about the advantages which result from presence of large industries, as when it is said that "only in this way will the worker have any value". For the worker, wages represent an expression of the worth society attributes to him and, as such, is an objective indicator of the position he occupies in society.

The comparison with research done in São Paulo cannot be made directly, for the material is not equivalent. Research material related to labor in the metropolitan area has accumulated over the years and is much more encompassing, extensive and detailed than the information we collected in the medium size cities. The labor market is also much more extensive and complex, as reflected in the diversity of the occupational perspectives and professional goals. Yet, here also, we find that modern industry is valued as a dynamic element of the labor market (even when the occupational preferences are oriented in other directions). We also find the same concern with wage level as an expression of the worth or "value" of the worker. The most recent studies, which were carried out as economic stagnation was beginning to set in, also demonstrate levels of concern with the saturation of the labor market due to continuing flow of migration.

As much in one case as in the other (medium size cities and the metropolis), within the limits established by the labor market and the low wage level, the solutions are variable and normally include a family strategy of distributing its members according to different types of occupations, in an attempt to increase family income so as to make possible investment for buying a lot and building a house. A parallel course involves great efforts to guarantee schooling for the children, as a mechanism to raise their skill level and assure a more competitive position in the labor market.

The state

References to the state appear in different contexts referring to two levels: Federal Government and local power.

When the conversation is about cost of living and salary level, the "government" is always re-

ferred to: it is the "government" which should "do something". In this context, the word "government" always denotes a sphere of influence which is more distant than the one found at the local level. There is not much variation in the statements collected in different cities: the "government" should control inflation and raise wage levels. We can infer that, in this context, "government" refers to the Federal Government.

> Inflation is rising day by day. It's useless to try to control inflation. The situation is tough. I don't even know who's to blame. Some people say it is the *government*. (Rio Claro)
> The only way to improve the cost of living is for wages to go up. Gasoline goes up every month, the salary doesn't go up, it goes up once a year, and goods go up 12 times [...] It makes things difficult. What needs to be improved is the salary, but only the *government* can make it happen [...] If it wants to pay 10,000 it says so and the firms are obliged to pay. (Marília)
> The cost of living can't be fixed. It has always been like this and it's going to get even worse. We have to consume, there's no other way. Only if everyone planted. But here too, the *government* has to protect us. (Rio Claro)
> The cost of living goes up and wages don't. Part of the responsibility for the cost of living has to do with the resident, the head of the household: you have to try to buy at the least expensive places. The other part has to do with *government*. (Marília)

In São José dos Campos, responses are similar. The cost of living problem is not viewed as a city problem, but as a general responsibility of "government" itself.

In Rio Claro, a city with many rural migrant workers, the question of the cost of living tends to be related to the rural exodus: "It's the government's responsibility to make the people plant, plant food [...] the government should buy the farms and put people there to plant." (Rio Claro).

The same occurs in Marília: "If the government decided to produce rice, beans, then prices wouldn't go up like they do." (Marília).

However, none of the interviews expressed expectations of influencing this far away government. There does not seem to exist any mediation between this level of the state and the population in general — it is entirely "other". Discourse is vague and empty.

On the other hand, when talking about public institutions that act on the municipal level, the expectations are more concrete and relations between the authorities and the population are perceived with more clarity. References to local government always appear in discussions about neighborhood problems. Responses show greater variation when cities are compared in so far as problems are seen to derive specific urban settings.

What is general in these expectations and ways of conceiving relations is that all of these institutions are designated simply as "they". This clearly defines the "otherness" of public political organs; not even city council members and mayors are seen as representatives of the people. Nonetheless, they are closer than the distant "government". The people know the mayor and local organisms: they have an idea of what they do or fail to do.

There are, however, some variations in ways of conceiving the responsibilities of municipal government and other public institutions which act on the local level (CESP, DRE, SABESP).[5] According to the most general view, municipal administration is responsible for all urban services. Even when it is acknowledged that the responsible organs are not part of city government, the mayor is considered to be responsible for finding the means to provide for public improvements.

> The neighborhood lacks a lot of things, principally sewage. But we can't do anything. It depends on the mayor, city council, those people from over there. (Rio Claro)
> I heard on the radio that now there's going to be sewage. And also they're going to pave the street the bus runs on. He [the mayor] promised. We've been asking for a long time, making up petitions. (Rio Claro)

As for the belief in the efficacy of popular pressure, of requests and petitions, there is a lot of variation:

> The city always needs a lot of things. If we just sit around and do nothing [...] as the city's very big, has many districts, it's not possible for the mayor to do everything. You have to divide things up. So people have to ask. [...] Now the best thing in this city is that the mayor does everything the way we ask. Look at the 12Noon show on the radio. The city asks and he gives. (Rio Claro)

On the other hand, there is skepticism or even disbelief:

> Before, the mayor came here a lot. Now he doesn't even come anymore. I couldn't say, because I don't understand anything. But that group over there, they badmouth him — like the sewers here. They say that it's just promises. (Rio Claro)

In any case, as municipal administration, above all, is considered to be responsible for the city, and, as the vision of the city and its growth is ordered in terms of a vision of progress, city government acquires some legitimacy. It should be noted, however that that people are always very careful when venting criticism. They say "I've heard", "some people think", avoiding personal responsibility for direct criticism.

Besides being responsible for public services, city government is expected to take care of the population's well being. The general assumption, as already indicated, is that the city's biggest problem, lack of jobs, can only be solved through incentives for modern industries, which are also considered a responsibility of local authorities. The mayor and city council should attract industry.

It should also be noted that relations between local authorities and the population is defined in terms of one side which *gives* and the other which *asks*. The population *asks*. The mayor *gives* or *does not give* and is judged accordingly. The mayor's role is to do things. Some think that he is *doing a lot* and others think *he isn't doing anything* or very little.

There is also the notion that the mayor does more for the central neighborhoods. It is in this way, indirectly, that the problem of class differences emerges with references to separate and diver-

gent interests, generating a model of spatial stratification and processes of identification of *we* as those who occupy the same place in the hierarchy of the neighborhoods. But, normally, when evaluating the activity of municipal organs, people think strictly in terms of their own neighborhood, and not in terms of the city in general.

In São José dos Campos, references to city government are more favorable than in Rio Claro or Marília. The idea is that local government is doing what it should, progressively addressing the legitimate demands of the population.

> São José doesn't have a wealthy city government, but it's being well administrated. The mayor's idea is that there's a downtown and there are the neighborhoods, and each should have everything they need. This is, actually, an international standard. The standard is that there should be one school in each neighborhood. Sometimes, when a school can't be built properly, they make do, using prefab modular construction. (São José dos Campos)

This expectation that demands will be gradually addressed, as confirmed by experience in São José, may explain the fact that we did not find protest movements in São José dos Campos as we did in Marília and Rio Claro. In one of the neighborhoods, a social movement for obtaining electricity was extinguished before it had time to consolidate, due to positive city government response. In summary, local government in São José dos Campos apparently fulfills expectations of the population regarding city government's role.

Here, once more, although a direct comparison with the research which has been done in São Paulo cannot be made, due to differences of research focuses and aims, we find a clear correspondence with the type of discourse which is common on the metropolitan periphery: a more direct and demanding relation with local authorities, the opposition between "asking" and "giving" (which may sometimes become "demand" and "obtain"). "The (Federal) Government" is also seen in São Paulo as something which is distant and unreachable, being held responsible for rises in the cost of life and lowering of real value of wages. Obviously, however, due to the presence of stronger and more active union organizations, a socially active sector of the "new" Catholic Church and, recently, the emergence of PT (Worker's Party), situations diversify and discourse is sometimes altered, indicating higher levels of politicization. On the whole, however, here also, conceptions and formulations which we found in medium sized cities predominate.

Conclusions

The results of an exploratory study like this would have very little significance if it were not for the uniformity of the results obtained by different research groups working independently in diverse cities. Moreover, the judgements and evaluations of the residents on the peripheries of medium size cities are very similar to those revealed by research done in the city of São Paulo in recent years.

Results which differ from these are being revealed only by very recent research on the outskirts of São Paulo. These studies, including some of which are still in progress, have found evidence of growing pessimism and increasing levels of criticism and tension, which are not apparent in previous research studies or in the data which we collected in smaller cities. In fact, simple direct observation of the peripheries of the city of São Paulo and of the other cities reveals a greater deterioration of the quality of life of the urban poor. The neighborhoods on the outskirts of Marília, Rio Claro and São José dos Campos are far from giving the same impression of poverty, pollution, and overcrowing which characterize the periphery of São Paulo. Also, the contrasts between wealth and poverty which are so astonishing in the city of São Paulo are less visible in smaller cities. For this reason, the belief that the quality of life can be improved through personal effort and family collaboration appears to be more rapidly disappearing in the metropolis than in other places.

Thus, the comparative study of the results of many research investigations appears to reveal, simultaneously, the generality of a certain representation of society and the beginnings of its

transformation. Making use of the available material it is possible, perhaps, to outline more precisely this interpretation of social reality which can be found in widespread practices of the population, and which now appears to be undergoing a process of change.

Analysis of the responses shows, in a very clear way, that this vision of the world is structured in terms of two independent but articulated dimensions. One is related to private life and is seen to depend directly on the initiative and responsibility of each family. The other, which we will call public, may be said to include, on the one hand, society itself, and, on the other, the state. The articulation between these dimensions is established by compatibility between beliefs and values that characterize each of the dimensions: in private life, the belief in the possibility of improving one's conditions; in society, the belief in *progress*; in the state, the hope for *social justice*.

At the level of private life, the individual and family are seen as complementary. At the individual level, discourse refers, basically, to the problem of employment. Here, emphasis is always put on the necessity of individual effort as the indispensable instrument for "improving one's condition".

On the other hand, individual employment is associated with the social dimension of the labor market, conceived according to the categories of "abundance or scarcity of jobs", or "to have or not have a job", which are always very noticeable in the discourse of the informants. For this population, the labor market clearly constitutes a basis for their understanding of society, which is conceived as "other" in respect to workers' capacity to act. The labor market is understood as a reality that people must deal with, but cannot alter. The nature of this labor market is determined by large industry, whose presence or absence, in the view of the workers, determines job opportunities. On the other hand, the very use of the term "job" (*emprego*), which is used to characterize this aspect of social reality, is very meaningful, for, as a category, it refers simultaneously to the quantity and quality of existing positions in the labor market, as well as to the wage level that can be attained. In this way, the impersonal structure of the labor market is immediately related, through wages, to living conditions, expectations and life experiences of the worker.

Family also pertains to the dimension of private life. The importance of the family as a basic element in the organization of the way of life of the popular classes is amply documented in all of the interviews. Also, one notices that references to family are constantly associated with consumption. In contrast to work, which necessarily possesses an individual reference, consumption essentially occurs at the family level, requiring contributions from different members of the domestic group. The family thus appears to be a unit of income and consumption, as well as the locus of sexual division of labor. The social counterpart of the private sphere of the family is, therefore, the consumer market, that is, the supply of goods and services that are made available to buyers. The understanding of the nature of this market is revealed by the constant reference to the *cost of living*. Like the terms "have a job" and "salary", "cost of living" refers simultaneously, to the impersonality of the market and to living conditions which are concrete. In view of the cost of living, the private life of the family is organized in terms of *savings* and *sacrifice*.

From this perspective, society, as a reality which is external to private life, appears as the market in its double dimensions, as labor market and consumer market.

Thus, we encounter an initial set of articulated categories that structure the perception of social reality. By placing in parentheses the terms introduced by the researcher, so as to distinguish them from the categories used by the population, we are able to construct the following table:

Table 1

Private Dimension	Categories of Connection	Social Dimension
(individual) work – effort	salary	(labor market) job – industry
family savings – sacrifice	cost of living	(consumer market)

The family, it may be noted, performs a key role in this articulation, for, by placing its various members as individuals in the labor market and combining different incomes obtained for common consumption, it constitutes the instance in which the salary (obtained individually) and the cost of living (which limits collective consumption) are related to one another. This connection between salary and cost of living determines one's social position. Besides this, it is at the family level that the project of "improving one's condition" becomes applicable. This project, which is thought in terms of an intergenerational process, requires the acquisition of higher skills for the children through the education. The acquisition of skills is always considered to be the private responsibility of the individual and family.

The project of improving one's social condition, which organizes individual and family activity, appears to become concrete in a very remarkable way in the *ownership of one's home.*

As the result of the work and efforts of different family members, the sacrifice and savings of the whole family, the ownership of one's own home synthesizes, one might say, the private dimension of social life. Furthermore, the house, which constitutes a very rich moment of discourse, objectifies the degree of one's success in life. It is a concrete and public symbol of one's achievement. As a privileged space of private life, the house has a counterpart in the societal dimension, the urban services: water, electricity, asphalt, public lighting, transportation, schools and health clinics. House surroundings which exhibit levels of urbanization of the neighborhood constitute the social aspect of the living conditions objectified by the house. The improvement of living conditions is achieved by two complementary ways. On the one hand, the access of individuals, through their own effort, to good jobs which make possible, with family savings, the construction of one's own house. On the other, the increasing access to the benefits of urbanization. The "progress" of society that guarantees the possibility of improving conditions of private life consists of the process of expanding the labor market and increasing access

to the consumer market. "Progress" is determined by industrialization and increasing availability of urban services to the population.

Our initial table can now be amplified:

Table 2

Private Dimension	Categories of Connection	Social Dimension
(individual) work – effort	salary	(labor market) job – industry
family savings – sacrifice	cost of living	(consumer market)
house	resources (services)	neighborhood – city
Value: improving one's conditions		*Value: progress*

Some additional observations can be made in relation to this scheme. In first place, it should be considered that the understanding of society (in contrast to private life) is dominated by the perception of the market in its double dimension as "job opportunities-cost of living". This implies a notion of "civil society" in the classic sense of the word, conceived here as external to individual action, as a "given" that constitutes the parameters within which people (in families) should seek possibilities of improvement. In second place, it is necessary to show that the crucially important connection between beliefs in "progress" and in the "improvement of one's condition", as elements which structure perception of society and social practice, does not indicate the existence of a static view of social morphology, as much as it reveals the understanding of a process. This process corresponds to the synthesis of the way in which people lived through the recent transformations of Brazilian society, as centered on the twin concepts of industrialization and urbanization.

Finally, we should observe that the growing dissatisfaction which has been observed recently on the periphery of the city of São Paulo results, basically, from increasing inviability of the dream of improvement, due to stagnation of the process.

The economic crisis, with its corollaries of unemployment, shrinking family income, and the rise in the cost of living are unraveling the scheme by which the popular classes organized their social practice in past decades.

Within this framework, the place and functions attributed to the state remain to be analyzed. Public power appears in popular discourse in two very distinct moments and in a very diverse manner.

The first, which is also the clearest, has to do with the discourse about neighborhood and city. Local powers (basically the city administration, but also state government) are always mentioned in this context as being responsible for the supply of public services: water, electricity, asphalt, public lighting, transport, schools, health clinics and police stations. In smaller cities, the holders of local power are known and identified. There is also a clear perception of the possibilities of popular pressure to attain public goals. The acceptable and well-known mechanisms of collective demand consist of petitions and demonstrations of residents in front of the City Hall building, or direct contact of people (or commissions) with the mayor.

This type of collective action, although it does not dispel the need for leaders, organizers and mediators, and while it can either erupt spontaneously or result from the political activity of outside groups, always implies in a direct confrontation of the population with those vested with public power. In other words, it fosters the appearance of organizers and spokespersons moreso than it stimulates the emergence of representatives. This is a very primary type of political action which, by placing "the people" and "the authorities" in confrontation, affirms the "otherness" of the authorities in relation to the people.

The other moment in which popular discourse refers to the state is that in which reference is made to a vague and ill-defined entity called the "government". This entity is much more nebulous than the local powers — it does not have a discernable face, even though it may sometimes be personified by the president of the Republic. The word "government" basically refers to the federal public powers, particularly the executive branch. Considerations about "government" appear in the context of considerations about jobs and the cost of living, with expectations that the first be increased and the other decreased. Government's function appears to be conceived, essentially, as that of controlling private interests in the market sphere in such a way as to prevent excessive exploitation of the poor or "weak" by the rich and powerful. According to this conception, "government" is an entity which stands above class divisions and outside of society for purposes of promoting social justice. In this way, the market sphere, which is considered to be independent of civil society, can and should be controlled by the state in the interest of the common good. This conception is certainly reinforced by the following fact: the moments in which the population feels most clearly the direct action of the state (or its omission) occur when government sets the value of the minimum wage and establishes systems of price control. On the other hand, the institutional relation of the people with the Federal Government occurs almost exclusively through the system of social security and leads to notions of the "rights" of labor.

What needs to be pointed out in regard to this image of government is precisely its complete "otherness" in relation to the population. In the first place, since the institutional mechanisms of governmental action in the sphere of market controls are ignored, this type of action always appears as an act of pure power and will. It is believed that the government *can* and *knows* how to do it. Sometimes, pressures which result from oversupply of labor in the market give rise to the idea that government interference is necessary so as to contain the migratory flow to the cities, something which could be accomplished, it is supposed, by facilitating access of rural workers to land. In this way, it would be possible, simultaneously, to reduce the supply of labor in the market, boost wage levels, increase food supply, and reduce the cost of living. At other times, demands are made for government to take purely repressive action "forbidding abuses". In one way or another, the function of government is thought in terms of control-

ling, stimulating and planning productive activities in the interests of the collective good; it is also said that government must correct social differences, assisting "the poor" and guaranteeing their rights (especially in regard to medical assistance and retirement pensions).

The "otherness" of the Federal Government also manifests itself in terms of the absence of recognized institutional mechanisms of action or pressure which might offer mediation and allow for influence from below. The political resources that the population is accustomed to use, petitions and popular demonstrations in the presence of authority, which are useful at the local level, are inapplicable and inoperative in the face of this distant government, as made clear by the relative ineffectiveness of the "Cost of Living" social movement. There are no conceptions referring to a system of political representation to establish institutional links between the people and this level of the state. In this sense, it can be said that the dismantling of the system of elections for executive positions, promoted by the revolution of 1964, effectively destroyed the mechanisms through which the working classes could conceive of their political relations with central government, which, thereby, became far removed from the popular sphere of influence. By excluding political participation it destroyed the institutional basis of a democratic society. The reconstruction of democratic institutions has been a slow and difficult process.

In our analysis, which has been centered on residents, neighborhoods and cities, we have omitted an important link which workers have with society and government: the union. It must be observed, however, that, while considerations about work opportunities emerged spontaneously during the interviews, the same did not occur in regard to the union movement. In any case, it would be important, on another occasion, to complement this study with a deeper analysis of the conceptions concerning labor unions.

The previous scheme, which was developed in terms of a dichotomy between private life and society, can now be completed by the addition of a new dimension: the state.

Table 3

Private Dimension	Categories of Connection	Social Dimension	Political Dimension
(individual) work – effort	salary	(labor market) job – industry	(Federal) (Government)
family savings – sacrifice	cost of living	(consumer market)	government state
house	resources (services)	neighborhood – city	(local powers) mayor
Value: improvement of one's condition		Value: progress	Value: social justice

In conclusion, one may observe that, as long as the working poor could maintain belief in progress and the viability of a project of improving their level of life, allowing Federal Government to maintain some degree of legitimacy despite its "otherness" and inaccessibility, the *economic crisis* that threatens this project appears to have led the population to seek for new mechanisms to manifest their discontent and despair. Increasing political activity stimulated by the electoral process constitutes a privileged occasion for the manifestation of discontent and, therefore, for the emergence of new forms of political action whose necessity seems to be felt by all.

The preliminary interpretative scheme which we have here presented is too simplified to take into account all the nuances and contradictions that permeate the image of society constructed by the popular classes. Besides not including an analysis of political parties and unions, categories which did not spontaneously appear in discourse, but which, nevertheless, are certainly important references in the social universe of this population, it would also be necessary to analyze references to INPS (Social Security), as they establish another connection between private life and government. Obviously, we have not included other important dimensions of private and public life, such as leisure and religion. Even so, we believe that this attempt to develop a more global analysis of the assumptions that inform political practice of the popular classes offers a starting point for a more global reflection, beyond the specificity of monographical studies.

NOTES

1 The bibliography presents major works which have been consulted concerning the city of São Paulo. Valuable ethnographies regarding the city of Rio de Janeiro are also available, and, although they have not here been systematically examined, some of the works have been cited as references. On the other hand, much of the knowledge about the periphery of São Paulo comes from unpublished or partially published studies carried out by students under Ruth Cardoso's or my own supervision.

2 The research group, coordinated by Ruth C.L. Cardoso, included Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, José Guilherme Cantor Magnani, Elizabeth Bilac and myself. I thank each and all for permission to use research material for this article, as well as for their contribution to the countless seminars which were organized for purposes of systematizing the ideas which are here presented.

3 The cities were selected in consideration of statewide regional differences and diverse types of urbanization. Three cities were chosen in the process: São José dos Campos, which represents an urban nucleus undergoing accelerated expansion with high levels of concentration of large industry; Rio Claro, a city with a long history of urban labor due to the presence of the *Companhia Paulista de Estradas de Ferro* (Paulista Railroad Company) and small traditional industries. Besides this, due to its location in one of the most developed and productive agricultural regions in the state, the city attracts a large number of rural migrant workers, called "*bóias-frias*" ("cold-meals"); and Marília, as one of the famous pioneer towns of the 1930s, constitutes, in contrast to the other cities, a very recent urban formation. Its industry, which is tied to the processing of regional agricultural products, is being deactivated and population is decreasing. One of the research teams studied São José and Marília, and another studied Rio Claro. In the three cities the procedure was the same: a succinct survey of the history of the city's development, using secondary sources; interviews with qualified informants (sociologists and researchers who worked in the city, political and union leaders, inhabitants considered to be knowledgeable about the city); layout of recent city growth and location of new peripheral areas; overview of the entire peripheral area of the city for visual identification of apparent spatial characteristics; selection of diverse neighborhoods for interviewing; informal interviews with local leaders and inhabitants contacted at public health clinics, bars, etc.; formal interviews recorded at the residences of neighborhood inhabitants. In São José, 4 neighborhoods were studied and 28 interviews were recorded. In Rio Claro, 14 interviews were recorded in 3 neighborhoods. In Marília, the study covered 3 neighborhoods and 24 interviews. (These numbers do not include informal interviews.) Research reports were written for each of the cities, and Teresa Caldeira did a special study of the city of São Paulo on the basis of bibliographical material.

4 It is necessary to make an observation concerning the BNH housing projects. Participation in this system does not radically alter the discourse. In first place, since these projects are usually built on the periphery, they also depend on expectations that "progress" will get to the neighborhood, with urbanization of empty space and increased availability of public services. All the discourse about effort and sacrifice is also present, even though house payments tend to take the place of lot payments, and remodeling of the house takes the place of construction. The necessity to build a wall around the lot appears to be the priority after moving in. Later on, the process of adding on space is initiated (always beginning with the kitchen), followed by beautification of the front of the house. In the oldest projects, the original uniformity almost totally disappears, a process which is highly valued by the population ("it no longer looks like a BNH project").

5 Most of these are state organisms responsible for services such as electricity and water.

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