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CONFUSING EVENTS IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE – A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE*

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1. Introduction

For an understanding of what I call the “European process” at least four different, yet interconnected, theoretical approaches are needed.

Perception

The first is the assumption that human beings act and react according to the way in which they perceive situations. Perceptions or orientations are based on acquired experiences, values, aspirations, beliefs, convictions, etc. – everything which builds “the mind”. Although the mind is basically structured by those perceptions, it is a learning system – a lifelong learning system. Perception is seen as a collective and individual method of orientation, permanently varying, according to societal as well as personal development.

Inequality

The second theoretical approach aims at understanding how different socio-cultural experiences (cognitive, affective, physical) – different experiences generated by different preconditions like age, gender, and environment – produce and reproduce inequalities – social, cultural, regional, individual, and collective inequalities of perceptions and living conditions. The real consequences of inequalities crucially depend on the perception of inequality – whether it is seen as legitimate or illegitimate. (The perception can be manipulated by priests, teachers, the media, in general, by all ideologies.) Social order is nothing else than legitimated social inequality. Social conflict results when social inequality is perceived as illegitimate. In general, social inequality is conceived as a socio-anthropological universe of varieties among human beings.

* First presented at the University of Northern Iowa and Washington State University, September 1992. – I wish to thank my friend Martin Hansen for his help in shaping my considerations.

Identification

The third theorem concerns the complex world of nations, nationalities, ethnicities, tribes, communities, organizations, families; i. e., groups of individuals sharing a collective identification. Identification is a form of perceiving other people and oneself as belonging to specific groups, smaller and larger, that we can refer to in general as a “social system”. The second theorem suggests that social inequality is present in all such “social systems”. However, the first theorem asserts that social inequalities must also be collectively perceived and structured as parts of specifically identified social systems. These processes of identification are oriented to the perceived frame of references – as a friendship or membership, rivalry or competition, as conflict, or even war. Identification can be called a specific part of perception, concerning persons or things as belonging to exclusive contexts.

Capitalism

Capitalism is a specific form of social order and development. Its main components include Individualism as opposed to Collectivism, Industrialism as opposed to Craftism, and Democracy as opposed to Oligarchy. Individualism/Collectivism refers to the manner in which successes and failures are attributed. Industrialism/Craftism refers to the organization of the modes of production and distribution of goods and services.¹ Democracy/Oligarchy refers to the manner in which decisions are made. The manner in which these concepts – Individualism, Industrialism, and Democracy – are interconnected by basic perceptions gives the system its name: Capitalism. Capitalism can be defined as a system in which every thing and object (even subject?) is thought of as capital, i. e., as a means to make profit. This system developed slowly in the cities of Upper Italy in the Middle Ages and was originally focused on markets. It made commodities out of products and services. It expanded markets and communications. It developed machinery and trade. It created science and technology. It increased human productivity and/through the rationalization and instrumentalization of nature. It eventually came to permeate all kinds of behaviour and action. It is becoming the most powerful and demanding socio-economic system on earth. Its components – Individualism, Industrialism, and

1 E. g. mass production according to Taylor’s systems of work organization for a completely anonymous market versus the specific manufacturing of products according to individual demands and for personally known clients. The concept Industrialism/Craftism generally corresponds to the distinction of pattern variables Universalism/Particularism that Talcott Parsons made.

Democracy – form specific patterns of perceiving and constructing the social world; they are now paralyzing former, yet different, systems of life and culture. Capitalism can be defined as a historic societal process resulting from applying the principle of looking at every object in terms of how it can be used as a means to obtain profit.

As one might expect, changes in perceptions and material life are not without conflicts. For example, wars and conflicts in the former socialist countries, third world conflicts (of course, one must include class conflicts, civil wars, the Cold War, even gender conflicts), and also the environmental conflict can all be seen as outcomes of the development of capitalism. The perception of every thing as capital, and the capitalist construction of social systems, is now shaping what is coming to be defined as the *global society*. As long as, in this ongoing process, inequalities are perceived as legitimate they remain latent sources of conflict. However, once these perceived inequalities are collectively defined as illegitimate, different forms of conflict will arise. It is, in fact, a complex counterbalance of perceived legitimacy and illegitimacy of social inequalities that promotes capitalism as both an ideology and a social system. Which leads us to the description of the European processes of transformation.

2. Process of Transformation in 1989

In 1989 the political systems of Eastern European countries broke down – first in Hungary, then (to the surprise of most observers) in East Germany. Subsequently, Czechoslovakia and the enormous Soviet Union followed. The fall of the Berlin Wall was of great symbolic value. In a discussion called “Current European Transformations” (1990), I tried to analyze the ongoing process.² By the word “transformations” I primarily meant changes in Europe as a region formerly divided into three clearly shaped segments. These segments were built separately by the Western European Community, the so-called Socialist Eastern European Block, and finally, those states choosing to remain neutral. At that time the neutral states ranged from Switzerland on the one hand to Yugoslavia on the other; Austria, Finland, and Sweden fell in between.

2 Kellermann, P. (1990), “Current European Transformations”. In M. Hansen (ed.): *Sociological Considerations: A Series of American Seminars*. Cedar Falls, IA: Center for Social and Behavioral Research. (Reprinted in *Innovation* (1992), Abingdon, UK: Carfax Publishing Company).

All of Europe and most Western countries were fascinated by those transformations and celebrated the process as the final victory of the democratic free-market system – in effect, the victory of Western Capitalist Society. Some spoke of the end of ideology – even the end of history. Of those who are socially aware, only a few were uneasy with the process. This uneasiness grew from a concern with the resulting rapid changes in basic economic orientations and cultural patterns of public life, for example, in systems of work, money, leadership, and class. Some people forecast governmental and administrative problems; others spoke of the huge costs that the reconstruction of Eastern Europe's failed economic systems would demand. Nonetheless, people on both the East and West side of the former Iron Curtain remained enthusiastic and optimistic about the future. Almost no one anticipated the cruelties that were to follow in parts of the Soviet Union, for example, in Armenia – the worst case yet being in the former Yugoslavia. In contrast with Karabach and Sarajevo in 1992, the 1990–91 crisis in the Baltics appears to have been not much more than a large but manageable administrative problem. – In retrospect, in 1990, we were already identifying disintegration processes in the Soviet Union, in Yugoslavia, and in Czechoslovakia. Frankly, looking back, I must admit that I did not then expect the seemingly insane civil wars raging in former Yugoslavia.

3. Confusing Events in Europe

“Mare Nostrum” was the name of the Mediterranean Sea at the time of the Roman Empire. Now, in 1992, the most famous athletic contest in the world, the “Olympic Games”, has been celebrated in Barcelona, on one coast of that sea. At the same time, on the opposite shore in Yugoslavia, a genocide continues to terrify millions. This disparity characterizes what I call “confusing Europe”. Ironically, during the classic Olympic Games, it was forbidden to engage in war. What does it say of our contemporary Western culture that we are able to sit in a comfortable chair with a TV remote controls and flip between the Olympic Games, a detective story, and on-the-spot coverage of the real killing of real people?

These disparate events – occurring in different places at the same time – are paralleled by forces which are occurring across Europe and at different times. In 1989, Europe and the so-called free world witnessed the transformation of so-called socialist countries behind the Iron Curtain into the liberated democratic nations of the Eastern Europe of today. As the old division of “Eastern versus Western” hemispheres broke down – the West under the influence of NATO,

OECD, and the USA and the East represented by the Warsaw Pact, COMECON, and the USSR – no one expected the result to be a worsened political, economic, or social situation. In fact, people were sure that a peaceful, wealthy, and reasonable world would come about. Yet only two years later it becomes clear that the political collapse of the Soviet Empire has generated sorrow, famine, and death for millions. While it is difficult even to believe all these events, it is more difficult to understand or explain them.

Besides these shocking events, one can think of some relatively minor, yet similarly confusing, events in Europe today. For instance, whereas three European states (USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia) broke into about 20 different parts, 12 Western European countries have integrated into the European Community, and others (Austria, Switzerland, Sweden) have asked for participation. But, in effect, even inside the European Community – seemingly an integrated body – one finds extremely different living conditions. For example, the rate of unemployment in 1991 was 15.9% in Spain but only 1.4% in Luxembourg. During the same year the gross national product increased by 3.2% in Germany but decreased by 1.9% in the United Kingdom. The inflation rate in Greece rose to 18.4%, but only to 2% in Denmark (OECD p. 39–40).³ Nonetheless, in Spring 1992 at Maastricht, governments of the member countries decided on a single integrated currency for the entire European Community. Inside the most powerful country of the European Community, Germany, with its 80 million inhabitants, the Western part enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world, while the Eastern part's infrastructure remains relatively undeveloped despite the German government's investment of billions of marks. Italy is no less divided, with its industrial North and Mafia controlled South – while corruption characterizes both parts. Still other confusing and apparently contradictory forces are at work throughout Europe, most of which elude a quick scientific explanation. Still, as in 1989, I contend that all these events and aspects are different, yet interdependent, products of the "European Process".

4. On the Role of Sociology

It has never been my intention to provide a detailed description of events in the manner of a political historian. My purpose remains to develop a theoretical understanding of the process itself. I must confess, however, that my first response to the social disasters of Eastern Europe – Yugoslavia being the most prominent case – was compassion for my fellow human beings. On that hu-

3 OECD (1992). *The OECD Observer*. 175 (April/May).

man level many of us would like to help – financially and/or even militarily – but our role as sociologists and scientists first calls for a better understanding of the forces that threaten so many people. This calling, however, cannot be an end in itself. Science in general, and sociology in particular, developed with the rise of Civil Society for the purpose of improving living conditions for all. Contribution to the ideals of society remains the ultimate foundation of sociology today. This is my conviction – despite the fact that the social sciences have not prevented wars in the past; neither the two world wars, nor the wars in Palestine, the Gulf, nor any other. The social sciences may even provide the tools to organize the armies and the administration for orchestrating those wars. But I doubt that there is anything like a natural law which obliges scientists to improve all kinds of human efforts, even the effort of war. As social scientists, our primary task is to understand and explain social problems, crises, and disasters in order to better cope with them. At some time in the future there will be – perhaps – a group of people with both the power and the knowledge to create a reasonable society. In this sense, Plato’s vision was a combination of kings and philosophers. But whomever and whatever these people might be, we should improve our science as the foundation of their support, knowledge, and power.

5. The Process of Integration and Concomitant Differentiation

The theoretical conclusion of my former analysis was that one should view the processes of integration in Western Europe and disintegration in Eastern Europe as two different, yet connected, steps in the same direction – that direction being the continuing crystallization of a global society. As in 1989 and before, we still have no grand theory to explain and predict such future events. Nonetheless, historic description and scientific analysis lead us to the assumption that there is an ongoing societal movement from the feudal system of the Middle Ages to the present predominant type of civil, industrial, capitalist society. I don’t assume that this is some inevitable end-state that drives all processes in a teleological manner. Of course, I don’t assert that there exists some transcendent rationality, reason, or “Weltgeist” that produces history. Neither is there a fatum, or “big book” in which all events are foreseen and described. It is also a mistake to see history as a huge conspiracy of elites. What is most probable is that different elements emerged inside everyday social life, akin to variations and modifications inside nature. Most of these elements disappeared, but a few remained as successful and enduring means of coping with the given conditions of existence. Generated by small groups of

people – elites or classes inside tribes, communities, regions, and nations – those elements became factors in the process that Herbert Spencer called *the unit of integration and concomitant differentiation*.

6. Four Interdependent Theoretical Approaches

I believe that, for an understanding or explanation of the events and processes in Europe today, at least four theoretical approaches are useful and necessary, regarding:

- the development of Capitalism as the most dynamic and permanently expanding socio-economic system in the world;
- the proscriptive ethnic identification of self and others;
- the malevolent power of inequality in cultural regions where integrative forces have broken down;
- and finally, the orientation system which drives behaviour and activity, collectively as well as individually.

In the following I will offer some concepts and illustrations from the Yugoslav case in order to further explicate these four interdependent theoretical approaches.

7. The Rise of Capitalism

In the eleventh century the rise of cities began in Upper Italy; as an illustration, the University of Bologna was founded more than 900 years ago. At that time a new and very dynamic class – later to be called the “industrial class” by Henri de Saint Simon – created new styles of work, new markets, and new transportation and communication systems. Finally, the solstitial point was the idea – Adam Smith called it the essential reason for the new wealth of nations – that one should work not for the production of use values but, instead, for gaining exchange values, i. e., money. This idea started to permeate more or less all economic endeavors and became the elementary orientation for using means of production, all kinds of energy, and resources. – In this sense I define the basic orientation of that type of society, i. e., the concept of “capital”, as follows:

Capital is all kinds of wealth, ability, asset, and/or every means that are, or will be, acquired and invested in the expectation of making a “profit”.

Profit in this theoretical conceptualization is the acquisition of resources or means for securing one's own status. – To this I would like to add three further considerations.

7.1 The Concept of "One's Own Status"

"One's Own Status" is to be understood as relative to the frame of real conditions within which a person or collectivity has to act; this frame of real conditions might be a friendship or rivalry, a family or neighbourhood, an institution or organization, a country or society. The real frame depends on the actual situation people find themselves in. (One can look at the concept of "One's Own Status" within an understanding of the category of "social situation" in the frame of action theory.)

7.2 The Strive for More

To secure one's own status is best done by striving for more than one strictly needs because profit is always at risk. Given an elementary basis of competition, striving for the same goods or privileges when such goods and privileges are in limited supply creates competition. The intent, or need, or social instinct to strive for more generates the dynamic power for capitalist development. It is very important to see that this dynamic process itself permanently creates questions and doubts regarding the security of one's own status. Philosophically we call this a dialectic process: aiming at individual security, people just provoke social uncertainty. The more people are oriented to the idea of individually secured status, and the more that idea penetrates social life – from the market and labour systems through education and medicine to churches and the sexual sphere –, the faster the development of society. But of course, it would be naive to suppose that there is only one line or direction of development.

Because of conflicting interests of personal orientations to different frames of one's own status, the real activities of people can be contradictory and even anachronistic with regard to the capitalist movement as total development. In that sense I have spoken about the integrative and disintegrative processes of European transformation as different steps in the same direction, namely, to the formation of a – now decidedly capitalistic – global society.

7.3 Money as a Means for Organizing Activities

Money is today's most socially essential generalized medium, not only for the marketing of products and services but also in the process of the acquisition of means for securing one's own status. Money is seen as a special kind of hidden social contract between persons who give and take money expecting to be able to exchange it for "real" goods and services. I find it most interesting that this belief in money – I call it the "Money Myth" – makes people forget the second part of that contract, i. e., the acquisition of goods and services. Those goods and services can be delivered only by human efforts, i. e., by work. Via the reduced understanding of money as a promise to do work, money ideologically becomes a "thing in itself": All Eastern European countries – from the unified parts of Germany, through the remains of former Yugoslavia, to the enormous Russian Republic – cry for money. On the one hand, they enlarged their money supplies, the result being inflation rates of up to 2,000%. On the other hand, they urgently ask for foreign currency. With this fixation on money they can't see the most important and only way to cope with their problems: to organize their own work force and resources. As long as money is seen as the essential means to overcome bad situations, no real economic or social solutions can be reached. From this perspective, one can predict that, for example, Russian President Yeltzin will fail: Foreign money cannot reconstruct economic, cultural, and political life in his empire. Russian reconstruction will come only through an organization of its own collective means, i. e., of the huge volumes of available manpower and natural resources. Only adequate checks and balances of the workforce, means of production, and organization can generate the relative wealth of a company or country. In order to meet this objective, one may – or even must – use domestic and foreign money as a generalized medium. But in this view, money is a means, i. e., a catalyst for organizing activities; money is not a remedy that heals deficiencies by itself.

8. Belief System and Physical Force

I will try to describe my second theoretical approach with the help of the Yugoslav case. One of the most confusing facts of the war in Yugoslavia was that people of different ethnic origin had lived together for decades as peaceful neighbours. I frequently heard that one didn't know whether the family next door was of Croatian, Serbian, or Muslim in origin. But in the Spring of 1991 there suddenly arose tensions and conflicts between these neighbours, escalating to civil war and the death of thousands of human beings. To explain this phenomenon I feel we need a specific socio-psychological perspective, a

perspective which takes into account the forced social identification of people as members of specific ethnic groups.

It was the famous American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, who differentiated between premodern and modern patterns of basic orientations. One of those paired “pattern variables” involves looking at individual attributes as ascribed or achieved. In premodern thinking, ethnic character was seen as given by nature; in modern thought it is generally understood to be achieved through social learning. As long as no one tells a person he or she belongs to a specific ethnic group, that person cannot know of what origin he or she is. However, everyone needs a minimum stock of knowledge about his or her affiliations in order to organize and direct his or her own social behavior. We use the term “role” as a classification of those social conditions and relationships. In every situation everyone plays a specific role that affects the system of expectations surrounding others and oneself. We refer to this as the two sides, or faces, of identification. I, or the others, identify my own person, with someone or something. The kind of identification referred to depends on the given social situation. That given social situation is always structured by power and perceived within latent and/or manifest interests: for instance, by the power to identify people as members or aliens of an ethnic group and on interest in enlarging my own power base. In this situation, as a leader, I try to form an integrated body of membership by ascribing attributes, even by force. You can watch the same procedures in churches and in national groups. In the first case, the church, the instruments defining people as true believers or pagans span from baptism to the Inquisition; in the latter, national groups, from awarding citizenship to genocide. The more attributes are uncertain, but essential, for forming that integrated body, the more force will be used.

After the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict in the summer of 1991, it was relatively easy to differentiate Slovenes from other ethnic groups because they spoke their own language and felt themselves to be inhabitants of a geographically well-defined province. It was more difficult in Croatia due to the fact that, although there was only one formal language, in reality the province – from the Hungarian border in the Northeast to the Albanian border in the Southwest – was very heterogeneous, with different cultural traits throughout. Even for geographic neighbours like myself, it was necessary to confirm by looking at a map that Zagreb as well as Dubrovnik belongs to Croatia. Again, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the situation was different: it was difficult to label a person a Serb, Croat, or Muslim, since all these peoples lived together for over 40 years without deliberate ethnic divisions. Yet a small group of ethnic ideologists and political leaders with a vision of a Serbian Empire in their mind, combined with the power to define people as being of particular ethnic origin, brought

forty years of peaceful coexistence to an end. This movement must be seen as directed by an amalgamation of different factors: the belief system and physical force.

The first, the belief system, contains elements of ethnic history. For the purpose of forming an integrated body, it is completely irrelevant whether history is “truth” or “myth”; it is only important whether it can be believed and used for the formation process or not. The second factor, physical force, usually starts being used by a small, informal, but desperate group of men. The group is organized first by wearing a uniform as a means for overt symbolic identification (transitively as well as intransitively), second by weapons, and third by the desire to belong to an exclusive, progressive, dynamic, and powerful group – the elite of the time to come.

Today we know what we have to do to create such a system. We have learned this historically from the Nazis – to introduce terror which intimidates all opponents, to fill the minds of people with biased information and ideology, and to orchestrate spectacular feats as proof of the legitimacy and success of the totalitarian government. George Orwell’s novel *1984* shows us the mechanisms of a hermetic state, isolated from other cultural systems.

9. Understanding the Yugoslav Case

Of course, to realize the formula for gaining totalitarian power, two political situations must come together. First, social and regional inequalities that groups in the system perceive as illegitimate, result in conflicts and tensions that lead, second, to the kind of social disintegration that Emile Durkheim called *anomie*. This leads to the third theoretical approach needed in understanding these processes: the malevolent power of social inequalities where integrative forces have broken down. Whereas it may not be necessary to explain the details of social collapse and collective disorientation, the concept of social and regional inequalities needs additional discussion. In fact, one finds such explosive latent and manifest inequalities in the U.S.A. as well as in Russia, inside the European Community and, as in my illustration, Yugoslavia.

As I have already mentioned, Slovenia, the northernmost province of former Yugoslavia, had a relatively homogeneous population. Homogeneity was found not only with respect to ethnicity and language, but also in education, the belief system, and economic standards. In relation to the other provinces of Yugoslavia, the two-million Slovenes formed a well qualified, wealthy, Christian, civil society with industry, markets, and a well-organized administration. As a part

of the centralized socialist state of Yugoslavia, Slovenia always had to pay for the less-developed provinces, especially in the south. But instead of seeing greater equality, the Slovenes saw that they were paying endlessly – paying for purposes they saw as socially illegitimate. Their first response was to ask for change – this was in Tito’s time. Finally, they dared to change their situation on their own – this began during the transformation process throughout Eastern Europe. Believing that the dissolution of the cold war between the great superpowers, the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R., meant the dissolution of oppression for all, the Slovenes declared themselves politically independent. Of course, from the point of view of formal state law and the central government in Belgrade, this action by the Slovene provincial government (Ljubljana) in the summer of 1991 was illegal. Thus, perceived social legitimacy stood against organized formal legacy. In reality, I see that situation as generated by regional inequalities in economic, cultural, and political frames of reference. It then became actualized by extremely different interpretations of the given frame, both in and outside of Yugoslavia. Finally, it was restructured by physical force, i. e., the short war in the summer of 1991. On the one hand, the triumph of the small Slovene forces over the state army was a miracle – many different factors must be considered when trying to understand the victory. On the other hand, that event must be taken by Belgrade as the beginning of the end if the formal state can’t confine and control such endeavors.

In Yugoslavia, after the Second World War – as everyone who knows a bit of Yugoslavian history recalls – different nationalities, cultures, and religions were brutally integrated by General Tito. Changing a single part of the whole initiates change in the character of the whole state. Many people inside and outside Yugoslavia perceived this dilemma, but lacked the power to act in realizing a peaceful solution. Germany and Austria (who were both involved in the Balkans through both world wars) were some of the first to recognize Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. The U.S.A. and the United Nations were first to refuse that recognition. Yet Germany – and the real interests of Germany are not yet sufficiently clear – influenced the rest of the European Community in offering that recognition. In fact, that recognition acted as a catalyst that cost Belgrade its elite status as capital of Yugoslavia and, instead, shifted the political position of Belgrade to being the center of the biggest and most powerful nationality in the country, i. e., the Serbs. Belgrade’s government, in an attempt to maintain at least a Serbian state, rallied Serbian support by identifying with choice elements of Serbian history and the “Grand Old Serbian Nation”. This myth had the effect of increasing the need to orchestrate wars against all the other ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia. It also allowed the government to negotiate numerous cease-fires – cease-fires that were never

met. The myth worked as a hidden agenda and it soon became obvious that forces were at work to encompass the largest possible geographical area for the coming Serbian Empire. And what is terrible to see, is that this programme – with its inhumane terrorism of civilians, ethnic cleansing, and genocide – fits the interests of Croatia. Parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina will be incorporated into Croatia's new regimes and other parts into Serbia's.

If my fears are realized, the process will not be finished with the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The next – and it horrifies me to say it – province of former Yugoslavia to be drawn into the war is Kosovo, which borders on Albania. Since 90% of Kosovo's population is Albanian, in all likelihood, the war will not stop at the Kosovo-Albanian border. It is not that difficult to imagine a scenario in which Albania, then Greece, Turkey, and the North Atlantic Pact will become involved.

As I have stated before, as human beings and social scientists, we need to find a solution before this national war becomes an international one. I dare to say it, it was wrong to support the segregation process in former Yugoslavia. In actuality, the current context and the probability of more cruelties to come suggests that – I make this plea – the United Nations should intervene quickly and decisively. I envision a timetabled peace with Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo as capitals of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, respectively. All must agree to a multilateral cease-fire, with an understanding that such a cease-fire would be backed by United Nations forces. The general strategy would be to create controlled areas, then expand the control of these areas until a complete cease-fire is realized and guaranteed. Once the areas are relatively balanced, conferences and dialogue in support of a peaceful cultural and economic cooperation can proceed.

10. Résumé

At the beginning of this paper, I offered four theoretical approaches necessary for understanding the confusing events in Europe today. After the introduction of the macro-perspective of Capitalism as the most pervasive socio-economic system on earth, I tried to use the Yugoslav case to illustrate that a socio-psychological perspective is also necessary if we are to understand the process of forced ethnic identification and exclusion. The Yugoslav case – and its totalitarian ideology – led us to a third theoretical approach: that of the malevoleur power of enforced inequality where other integrative mechanisms have broken down. I will now add the fourth and final theoretical concept: that everyone

acts in accordance with – i. e., is oriented toward – the given social situation. This is one of the most basic sociological theses and it forms an important component in what sociologists call the “theory of social action”. An “orientation” contains experiences, information, knowledge, values, expectations, and all those elements which constitute that which we commonly call “mind”. In this perspective, how we perceive a situation, and consequently, our directed actions, depend on our mind. There are always and everywhere large and small battles to influence the minds of people. This can be seen when a young mother tries to convince her son to wash his hands before taking a piece of bread, when teachers speak of historic events, and when newspapers inform about political affairs and so forth. The relative success – i. e., integration or disintegration – of social movements depends on what kind of perceptions, orientations, and expectations people have. Every movement needs the support of the masses, i. e., the activities and cooperation of the people. For example, no single person can create a unified community, an international market, or a civil war – all those social processes need collective actions; these actions are ultimately driven by a common perception of the given situation, disposition to act, or “mind”.

As I tried to demonstrate, the capitalist belief system forms a “common mind” that has successfully expanded across the globe. In the same manner, groups of people in specific social situations influence other individuals, through ethnically shared identifications of one another. Physical power itself requires a minimum of common knowledge for success – the powerful person and the subject of power must both perceive the situation – in my example, given social inequalities – and act in accordance with their shared perception of that situation.

My final remark alludes to the nature of perception and the title of my discussion. If we reconsider the theoretical position I propose, the title must be wrong: events are not confusing in themselves; confusion is only in our mind.

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