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LONDON WORLD CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF *uneven* DEVELOPMENT

Palestra proferida como professora convidada na disciplina AUP 840: *O mercado e o Estado na organização da produção capitalista (2002)*
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APRESENTAÇÃO

Recebemos com grande satisfação Doreen Massey, professora da Open University, que veio para contar a experiência de Londres em urbanismo através das últimas décadas de tensões políticas e econômicas da era neoliberal.

Doreen Massey tem uma longa trajetória de pesquisa e ensino ligada à Open University – uma universidade de cursos por correspondência, que já formou mais de um milhão de alunos – em que ocupou por muito tempo o cargo de chefe do Departamento de Geografia. Tem uma rica produção de publicações, de mais de uma dezena de livros e inúmeros ensaios e artigos, alguns desses últimos publicados também no Brasil, notadamente na revista *Espaço & Debates*. A sua resenha-crítica de David Harvey: *Justiça social e a cidade*, reputo ser um primor de crítica, aliando rigor infalível com avaliação generosa. Finalmente, ela tem experiência direta em planejamento urbano – no caso, de Londres, precisamente – em duas situações históricas distintas: como assessora da Greater London Council, na qualidade de membro da London Enterprise Board, que elaborava a política econômica da GLC, e mais recentemente, como assessora do Green Party para uma avaliação crítica da versão preliminar da

estratégia de desenvolvimento da London Development Authority.

O título da palestra era originalmente *The London experience in neo-liberalism*, que acabou sendo alterado por sugestão da própria palestrante para *London world city in the context of uneven development*, um título mais ativo, talvez, que o primeiro, que mais sugere uma mera reação ao neoliberalismo. De todo modo, o tema em sua forma mais geral talvez pudesse se definir como urbanismo na era do neoliberalismo, razão pela qual gostaria de lembrar aqui a origem e a história do liberalismo, que perpassa a história do próprio capitalismo.

O liberalismo é essencialmente o postulado da primazia do indivíduo sobre a sociedade, do mercado sobre o Estado. A forma política que lhe corresponde é a *democracia*, baseada na *igualdade formal* entre os indivíduos (“todos são iguais perante a lei”) e governada pela “mão invisível” do interesse individual. Essa ideologia predomina em todo o primeiro estágio do capitalismo, de crescimento galopante e desenfreado. Com a crise desse, pela exaustão de mais lugar para expansão após a colonização do mundo inteiro pelo fim do século 19 – esse



Doreen Massey (segunda, da esquerda para a direita) após a aula
Foto de Nuno Fonseca

momento poderia ser visto como o início da globalização – o capitalismo mudou de caráter. O progresso técnico se tornou primordial, uma vez que o aumento da produtividade do trabalho ficou sendo o único recurso para ampliar a produção de mercadorias, aliado à elevação do nível de subsistência, e com esse, dos níveis de consumo. A forma política correspondente a esse estágio, denominado de intensivo, é a *social-democracia*, cuja base material é o *Estado de Bem-estar*. Sob a égide da social-democracia houve um certo refluxo da ideologia do liberalismo puro e simples e algum reconhecimento das funções do Estado e dos valores coletivos, mas com a crise de superprodução que sobreveio após o *boom* da reconstrução pós-guerra, na década de 60, esse estágio do capitalismo entrou em crise, por sua vez, e o capitalismo se tornou mais e mais “ingovernável”. Na frenética busca de uma saída que se seguiu e na qual se conceberam até o fim da história com “novidades” tais como neofordismo, neocolonialismo, pós-modernismo e a própria globalização, a idéia que acabou vingando foi a volta ao liberalismo, que agora passa a ser neoliberalismo, como a melhor justificativa para uma onda de privatizações e de

desmonte do Estado de Bem-Estar na tentativa de revigorar o âmbito do mercado – pedra de toque do capitalismo.

Esse é o contexto no qual se insere a experiência de Londres, um dos grandes centros mundiais de acumulação. Evidentemente, no Brasil a situação é outra; aqui nós não fabricamos ideologia, e sim a importamos; importamos, desse modo, liberalismo e a social-democracia sem, no entanto, “importar” suas bases materiais, a igualdade formal entre os membros da sociedade, no caso do primeiro, e o Estado de Bem-Estar, no segundo caso. Ademais, o Brasil certamente participa na configuração do capitalismo mundial em posição muito diferente, quase oposta, da Inglaterra. Ressalvadas tais diferenças, porém, a experiência de Londres no trato das tensões surgidas com a crise do Estado de Bem-Estar e o crescente peso da “globalização” pode constituir valioso elemento para uma interpretação de nossas próprias respostas e perspectivas diante das mesmas tensões – é essa nossa expectativa.

Csaba Deák

LONDON WORLD CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT

Doreen Massey

The aim of this talk is three-fold. First to present some empirical history about London in the context of uneven development both nationally within the UK and internationally. Second to reflect theoretically on that history with specific reference to the conceptualization of the possibility of policy intervention at local level. And third to present some politically engaged commentary.

The long history of uneven development within the United Kingdom has been dominated by the existence of a “North-South divide” within the country, within which London, as capital and as headquarters of the important financial sector, has maintained a significant dominance. But in the 1970s “the problem of the inner cities” emerged on to the political agenda as a major issue. The rising levels of unemployment and poverty in the centres of all the big cities of the country were due predominantly to the accelerating process of “deindustrialization” – the loss of employment in manufacturing industry. In this context in 1979 Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party, was elected to power with a right-wing agenda of reducing the power of the state and of pursuing an economic policy along the then newly fashionable neoliberal lines. Looking back this can be seen as – and is often interpreted as – a period in which the social democratic consensus around the welfare state, which had been more or less hegemonic since the end of the second world war, began to break down. On that reading the victory of the right marked the opening of one possible path out of the questions raised by that breakdown.

There is much that can be said about the policies of the new Thatcher government, but

from the point of view of the questions being addressed here, a few points are important to note. The combination of neoliberal economic policy and a world economic downturn meant that the early years saw a dramatic acceleration of the trend in the loss of manufacturing jobs. Both the problems of the inner cities and the North-South divide were in consequence exacerbated. More generally, economic inequality increased including especially within London (where the loss of manufacturing jobs took place alongside the growth in size and in salaries of the financial and associated sectors).

In this context there was very little imaginative response from the Labour Party. The old social democratic project seemed indeed to have stalled. Resistance to Thatcher came principally from two grassroots movements, very different in social character and each with clearly defined geographical bases. On the one hand there was an important strike (1984-1985) in the mining areas in the north and west. On the other a “new urban left” came to power in a significant number of cities. In London this was the period of the left-led GLC with its radical experimental politics of democracy and empowerment. On the one hand then a white male-dominated traditional trade-union movement; on the other a variety of alliances of social groups and social movements (gay and lesbian, feminist, anti-racist, trade-union). For a brief exhilarating period there was exciting and constructive contact between these two very different forces and one dared to hope that a new kind of left politics might be born. But it ended in defeat. All the forces of reaction were mustered against this threat: the miners’ strike was broken and the Conservative government simply abolished the metropolitan level of government including the GLC.

It is important to reflect on this moment. First, my interpretation is that this grouping of movements represented one possible “left”

response to the breakdown of the older social democratic model. Second – and I think for that very reason – the GLC in particular was hated and feared as much by the official Labour Party as it was by the Conservatives. Certainly they did little to help combat its abolition. Third – and again following on from the previous points – there has been in subsequent years a real attempt to destroy the good memory of this period and thus to eradicate also a potential imaginative resource for future action.

There followed more than a decade of Conservative hegemony in which the response of the Labour Party was, under the banner of “modernization”, to move to the right and to construct what came to be known as The Third Way. In this it was part of an international shift, shared for instance with Clinton in the USA, towards a politics which accepted neoliberalism in its economic strategy but accepted also the need to be more active in the sphere of social policy. (This evacuation of much of the ground which could in any way ameliorate the worsening position of the working class can now be seen to be having repercussions through the space which it has left open for far-right politics.) Within the UK social and economic inequality were not to be ameliorated when the Labour Party finally was returned to government in 1997.

Among the strategies of this New Labour government was a commitment to spatial devolution (alongside a real unwillingness actually to decentralize power) and a greater attention to cities. The proposal that cities should elect their own mayors fitted into this. The New Labour imagination was that these would be figureheads, often envisaged as businessmen, who would act as transmission belts for New Labour politics into the metropolitan areas. London, also, was to regain a metropolitan level of government (the Greater London Authority) though with different and more constrained

powers than the former GLC. When the moment came to elect the mayor the leader of the old GLC, Ken Livingstone, put himself forward as Labour Party candidate. He was, basically, refused (a sign of the continuing hatred by the Party of this radical experiment). Ken therefore decided to stand as an independent candidate. The New Labour Party expelled him. He won, and the New Labour Party candidate was defeated. The stage was set for a new period of potentially radical experiment.

During this whole period there had also been changes in the analysis of the possibilities of left intervention through action in the local state.

When the inner-city problems first came on to the political agenda in the 1970s the characteristic analysis promulgated in government circles was that there must be something “wrong” with the cities. They had failed in the competition for jobs and thus what was needed was area-based policies to improve their potential. The answer to this by the left and by progressive intellectuals was to reverse the terms of the argument. It was not the inner cities which had failed capitalism but capitalism which had failed the inner cities. The cities were at the sharp end of a more general process of deindustrialization. In consequence it was no good having policies based only at the urban level; wider changes were needed at national level too.

So when the new urban left gained control of municipal councils in the early 1980s there was a puzzle. Was there now more possibility of local intervention? There were a number of elements in the response to this. First, much of the politics adopted in the cities, and especially in the GLC, was exemplary and rhetorical. The aim was to argue for alternatives and to establish through small and symbolic interventions the fact that an alternative politics was possible. In other

words, if there was not the possibility fully to address the problems of the cities nonetheless the possibility in principle of doing so could be established. This, then, was a politics which was also addressed to the world beyond the cities themselves. Second, of course, such a strategy was particularly important and effective because it was directed against a national government which was Conservative. London was used, effectively, as a “voice” against the dominant national politics. Third, nonetheless, there was also an analysis which attempted to establish the possibility of effective intervention at local level. Here the argument was that capitalism itself was changing, away from the cost-sensitive mass production of Fordism towards smaller-batch and higher quality production. This was argued to be true particularly in “First World” countries and in their cities. Moreover such production focussed on quality and skill rather than only on price. Maybe, then, there was room for manoeuvre for improving the conditions of inner-city labour while still remaining competitive. An enormous programme of research was set in train in order to explore these possibilities and to work out a strategy of “restructuring for labour” (as opposed to restructuring for capital). The published documents, *The London Industrial Strategy*, *The London Financial Strategy*, and the *London Labour Strategy*, stand as a monument to this inventive period.

That is now nearly twenty years ago, and since then it would appear that there have been further shifts in left analyses of the possibility of local intervention. Firstly, capitalism is less and less imagined as a “big system” somehow “up there” or only attackable at global level. There is no systemic closure, far more local variety, far more recognition of the fact that this thing called capitalism itself only exists and is reproduced through locally situated processes. At the same time, secondly, space itself is conceptualized

more relationally, as being itself the constantly shifting outcome of mobile social relations. Local places can thus be conceptualized as specific nodes in this wider power-geometry of social relations which is space-time¹. These two shifts in perspective mean, thirdly, that the local and global can be seen as more clearly mutually-constitutive (rather than, for instance, as in opposition). The “local place” is not a victim of the global; rather it is one of the moments through which the global is constituted. There is thus some purchase, at the local level, on so-called wider mechanisms, some possibility for active intervention. Moreover, because different places will represent distinct nodes of relations, distinct positionings, within the wider power-geometries, so the possibilities for intervention, the degree of purchase on the constitutive social relations, will also vary.

This perspective is particularly important in any consideration of London as a location of local intervention. London’s constitution as a node of social relations within the wider power-geometries is one of comparative relational power (in most accounts, for example, it is one of the three most significant “global cities”). There should, in other words, be some leverage. If not in London, then where?

We have then at this moment a conjunction of two things: the re-election to power of the man who led the radical GLC of the 1980s and a more elaborate and promising analysis of the possibilities of local intervention. So far however the general strategic direction which the mayor has adopted has been deeply disappointing. Not only does it fail to take advantage of London’s relative power and wealth but also, because power brings with it responsibility, it is also failing to take up its potential political responsibilities as a global city.

Once again we have a new London Plan (so far only at draft stage, and subject to further

scrutiny – see below) and a whole set of supporting strategies. But their central and overwhelmingly dominant aim is that London should maintain, and even strengthen, its position as a global city. Moreover, and equally significantly, the notion of “global city” is narrowly defined in terms of finance. London’s imperial history is to be reproduced.

Of course there are limits to what can be done, but a radical government of a powerful city could do more than this. The new draft London Plan presents no critical analysis of the power relations on which London is built. It fails in consequence to recognize both its own power and the subordination of other local places, and the global inequalities, on which its own wealth and status depend. Rather than taking cognizance of this its analysis of “relations with elsewhere” is pervaded by an anxiety about competition from places which might usurp its position. Frankfurt in particular plays this role. [Note here – this is too big a question to pursue – that this anxiety might be real (and then the question becomes to what extent it might matter) or it might be manufactured (the need to fend off competition is the classic capitalist strategy for getting its own way; in this case it might be being mobilized in order to justify what is anyway a political alliance with the financial sector).] This lack of a full positioning of London within wider power-geometries is one aspect of the imaginative failure of this new plan.

But there is another, which relates to the social and spatial dynamics within London itself. In brief, the plan does not recognize the tensions within London economy and society *of being* a world city in this narrowly-defined financial sense. It is above all the burgeoning of finance which leads the rapid rise in land prices, and which in turn is part of what precipitates the difficulties so often experienced by other sectors of production, manufacturing in particular. (The

success of finance, in other words, can lead to loss of jobs in manufacturing.) Or again, right across the metropolitan area, the spectacularly high costs of housing – precipitated in great part by the ridiculously high salaries in the “global city” sectors – make the maintenance of public services increasingly difficult (public-sector workers can simply not afford to live in London). The high salaries indeed are part of what lies behind the generally higher prices and cost of living in London than elsewhere. The point is often made (for instance by those defending the interests of finance) that while salaries in London are higher than elsewhere so is the cost of living (the implication being that the higher salaries are therefore justifiable). This is disingenuous. For while the higher cost of living is borne by everyone in London the very high salaries are received by only a minority. London is the most unequal city in the country.

Over and over again we are told that “London is a very successful city but it still does have some poverty”. My analysis is quite different: it is that the very terms of London’s success (in particular its reliance on and promotion of finance) *are part of the reason why* such serious poverty continues to be reproduced within the city. What is necessary, it follows, is to question the notion of “success” on which the official formulation relies; and this in turn implies challenging the current central dynamic of the economy. Consideration of the power-geometries which construct London as it is today, both globally beyond the city and within the metropolitan area, in other words, points towards a critique of the reliance on this dominant dynamic.

There is, moreover, and as implied earlier, “room for manoeuvre”. Even quite moderate changes could make a difference². Most obviously, and most easily, the strategy could broaden its definition of being a global city to a

wide range of sectors beyond finance. In the documented response to the London Plan this point was argued by numerous organizations³. The effect would be to shift the distributional implications of global citydom both socially and spatially. Moreover such a broadening could, more politically and more radically, be extended to the explicit promotion of elements of what has been called “globalization from below”⁴. Strategies such as those pursued by the GLC of the 1980s, including the encouragement of efforts towards internationalism by trade unions, the sponsoring of fair-trade organizations, the promotion of the internationalization of ethnic minority businesses, and so forth, would not only help those sectors themselves but also do something to raise the central question – what it might mean to be a different kind of global city. That question should also be pursued by a more honest and explicit recognition of its current meaning and by attempts to resist the temptation of endless competition by the establishment, at the very least, of networks and collaborations between major left-led cities.

At the moment, the London government’s response to the poverty within the city is on the one hand to set up other regions as the enemy (“London has poorer boroughs than they do” etc – a strategy the 1980s GLC refused to adopt) and in one way or another to buy its way out of the problem – for instance by promoting the

provision of “affordable” housing. My response is to challenge both these strategies. On the one hand the greatest need for redistribution is within London itself, not from north to south within the country. On the other hand providing “affordable” housing, which in a market situation would anyway be difficult to maintain as affordable, is only to fan the flames of a dynamic of London growth which will continue to reproduce its problems. In that sense, and to return to the beginning of this talk, we also have to set London back into the context of the regional uneven development within the nation of which it is capital. London would be a better, more equal (and in those terms more “successful”) city were it to lie within a country which nationally suffered from less interregional inequality.

NOTES

(1) See, for a further explanation of this view, “A global sense of place” In: MASSEY, D. *Space, place and gender*. Oxford: Polity Press, p.146–156. 1994.

(2) Some of the policy implications are spelled out in more detail. In: MASSEY, D., “Opportunities for a World City: reflections on the draft economic development and regeneration strategy for London”, *City*, v. 5, n.1, p. 101–105.

(3) See Spatial Development Strategy Investigative Committee: Scrutiny of “Towards the London Plan: Initial proposals for the Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy”, Final Report January 2002. Greater London Authority.

(4) Here the politics links up with the arguments and experiments being pursued through the Social Forum.