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T. Dwyer

HANDBOOK ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF YOUTH IN BRICS COUNTRIES: GENERAL EDITOR'S ANNOTATIONS

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НАСТОЛЬНАЯ КНИГА ПО СОЦИОЛОГИИ
МОЛОДЕЖИ В СТРАНАХ БРИКС: КОМ-
МЕНТАРИИ ГЛАВНОГО РЕДАКТОРА

*Tom DWYER*¹ — *PhD, Professor of the
Department of Sociology
E-MAIL: tomdwyer@terra.com.br
ORCID: 0000-0002-8366-136X*

*ДУАЙЕР Том — PhD, профессор депар-
тамента социологии, Государственный
университет Кампинаса (UNICAMP),
Кампинас, Сан-Паулу, Бразилия.
E-MAIL: tomdwyer@terra.com.br
ORCID: 0000-0002-8366-136X*

¹ University of Campinas — UNICAMP, São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract. The paper highlights two key subjects of the new Handbook on the sociology of youth in BRICS countries. The first pays attention to mechanisms and structural contexts of youth social mobilization in the BRICS countries. The second deals with the effects of information technologies on social interactions between young people. The author argues

Аннотация. В заметках главного редактора настольной книги по социологии молодежи в странах БРИКС выделяются две ключевые темы. Первая — это механизмы и структурный контекст социальной мобилизации молодежи в странах БРИКС. Вторая — это влияние информационных технологий на формы социальных взаимодействий

that comparative analysis presented in the handbook demonstrates that development of South Africa, Brazil, China, Russia, and India does not follow strictly the path anticipated in the framework of modernization theory.

Keywords: sociology of youth, comparative analysis, BRICS countries, social movements, Internet and society

в молодёжной среде. Автор утверждает, что материалы сравнительных исследований, представленных в книге, свидетельствуют, что пути развития Южной Африки, Бразилии, Китая, России и Индии не укладываются в русло современной теории модернизации.

Ключевые слова: социология молодёжи, сравнительный анализ, страны БРИКС, социальные движения, интернет и общество

Introduction

The construction of the BRICS — a grouping made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — involves massive sense-making efforts which bring together politicians, intellectuals, diplomats, journalists, business people and others. The aim of the *Handbook on the Sociology of Youth in BRICS Countries*¹ is to make a contribution to these efforts by furthering mutual understanding among sociologists in these five countries and also more widely.

The BRICS are usually portrayed as large, regionally powerful, culturally diverse, regionally populous, developing economies, however, such a portrayal is imprecise, but what unites them is that there is very little mutual knowledge and until recently dialogue. Sociologists are fortunate that their founding fathers left a theoretical and empirical legacy that permits limited understandings to be built across national boundaries by a resort to common conceptual language. However, the empirical support for much of sociology's dominant concerns as a discipline is largely based upon 10% of the world's population — those living where sociology is most developed, i. e. in the developed or industrialized world where modernization theory is a central reference.

The publication of the second of two sociology handbooks by World Scientific continues to demonstrate that the development of these countries does not follow the paths laid out in modernization theory. Both handbooks reveal that certain social dynamics are common to some of the BRICS countries, and that these may not be considered of interest to social scientists in Western countries. For example, at the BRICS Academic Forum held in 2014 in Rio de Janeiro, the well-known South Africa sociologist Eddie Webster observed that all of the BRICS had enormous problems. Effectively, the shared problems associated with being 'emerging' and in some cases 'transitional' countries lead some BRICS observers to identify similar sets of social problems: rural exodus, disorganized urbanization, discrimination, extreme poverty, corruption, bad business climates and complex increases in inequalities. The fact they these countries share problems has the potential to bring them closer together. However, positive changes are seen in life expectancies and living conditions, access

¹ *Handbook on the Sociology of Youth in BRICS Countries*. Dwyer, T., Gorshkov, M. K., Modi, I., Li Chunling & Mapadimeng, M.S. (eds). Singapore, World Scientific, 2018.

to health and education, access to information technologies and results of innovation, such shared developments do not mean that these countries share the same vision of development, and much less a Western view [Dwyer, 2017: 101]

This book shows it is possible to arrive at a sociological comprehension of the development of a BRIC partner without having had to spend years of intense and specialized study on its civilization². This is the second edited handbook to be published by World Scientific, the first was the 'Handbook of Social Stratification in the BRIC countries' in 2013 (in Mandarin in 2011). In this new handbook, authors from each of the BRICS nations have contributed chapters to nine sections which treat the following themes: History of Concepts and Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions into Research on Youth; Demographic Characteristics of Youth; Identity and Generation; Consumption and Leisure; Family, Marriage and Sexuality; The State and Political Values; Education and Employment; Internet Participation and Communication; Conclusion. With over 1,100 pages the handbook starts by republishing LI Peilin's 2013 introduction to the *Handbook on Social Stratification in the BRIC Countries* where he writes: «analyzing social structural changes, especially changes in the social stratification structures of the BRIC countries, is a special sociological perspective in the study and analysis of social issues. [That can]...help us achieve a better understanding of the economic growth and social development of the emerging economic powers. This very special perspective... unveil[s] the mystery... [of] how these emerging powers with such dramatic differences in history, geography, culture, language, religion, etc. could have shared a common will and taken joint actions in certain circumstances. In any event, it is the profound social structural changes in these countries that determine their own future and, to a large extent, will shape the socio-economic landscape of the future world.» [Peilin et al., 2013: XXIV—XXV]

Sociologists have discovered what Brazilian diplomats have classified as 'surprising',³ the fact that there exist many more points in common than had been imagined at the beginning of the BRICS dialogue, common viewpoints that could simply could not have been perceived because of historical lack reading and of dialogue. Shared interests and problems are revealed, in addition comparative sociological research has discovered shared perceptions and values⁴. In the next part of this review I shall examine some crucial points in the book.

The handbook

In the past dramatic shifts in power and of resistance, became visible through state-perpetrated or anti-state-oriented violence in some of the countries. Readers see the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, droves of young Brazilian, black males been killed by crime, and that both war and revolution and its aftermath took large tolls on Russian and Chinese youth. Over the last half century cultural revolution, military

² Roulleau-Berger, Laurence, GUO Yuhua, LI Peilin & LIU Shiding (eds) 2008. *La Nouvelle Sociologie Chinoise*, Paris, CNRS Éditions [Roulleau-Berger et al., 2008], demonstrated that it is possible to analyze contemporary China in purely sociological terms, by analogy, this led us to understand that other civilizations could also be researched in a similar manner.

³ Seminar, «BRICS Co-operation: Assessment and Next Steps» Funag, Palácio Itamaraty, Brasília, 1 August 2017.

⁴ [Inglehart, 1997: 263]; see Figure 8.11, Economic development goes with diminishing support for state ownership, in [Covic, 2017]; [Dwyer et al., 2016]] (In Mandarin 2016. *BIAN GE SHI JIE ZHONG DE DA XUE SHENG — ZHONG GUO, BA XI BI JIAO YAN JIU*, Beijing, Social Sciences Academic Press).

rule, poverty, hunger and famine have affected the education, development, horizons and life chances of youth to different degrees in these different countries. Today, war, famine or revolution are happily no longer the dominant types of violence in the BRICS, in Brazil and South Africa interpersonal violence kills beyond levels considered to represent civil war, in Bharat India we discover the victimization of women on one hand and the actions of Maoist guerrilla movements on the other. In other words instability and a fragile social fabric can have great impact in undermining youths' life chances... in the West such factors are often marginalized as 'deviance' whereas in the BRICS they may be seen as total social facts that at the same time as they marked the past, threaten to undermine the future.

The sometimes assumed universality of certain widely accepted Western concepts are relativized in the book, to give just two examples: Erikson's moratorium and the idea of school-to-work transition do not work very well in the BRICS, and this is very clear in the Brazilian texts. However, other ideas seem to work well in cross-cultural settings, to give two examples: theory of generations and of age-class stratification. The handbook also shows the appearance of new phenomena, sometimes they arrive with great force. Some may have already been previously detected in the West, but much of what goes on in the BRICS seems to be relatively unknown outside in Western sociology: Hukou system, cybercrime, censorship, forced marriages, caste system, one child policy, youth violence, Aids' impact on youth etc. This book discusses over 40% of the world's youth and in so doing makes a decisive step towards undermining the pretensions of developing a Western-based unified theoretical systems based on approximately 10%. The handbook therefore throws down the gauntlet, of theory development.

As we can see, the handbook is highly suggestive. Time and space coordinates accompany each indexed item thereby facilitating comparative analyses. At the time of going to press I have been dabbling with understanding a further path it alights, one so important in the history of Western sociology, perhaps providing fertile seeds for theory construction.

Youth, Agency and Social Action

The Handbook mentions and analyzes examples and varieties of social movements developed by youth: The Brazilian movements for direct elections in the mid-eighties and for President Fernando Collor de Mello's impeachment in the early nineties are examples. In Russia in 2011 and 2012 there were protests against the possibilities of election frauds. However, survey results analyzed in the handbook indicates low levels of political activism among young people. They have become oriented towards personal success. Indian social movements opposed to corruption and sexual violence have made headlines in the international press over recent times. Anand Kumar's chapter reveals an extraordinary and complex variety of struggles going on in all parts and segments of India. In *China Chic*, top fashion designer Vivienne Tam writes uniformity gave way to individuation as people put their own markings on their Mao Suits during the Cultural Revolution. Much more recently, youth-led mobilizations followed extraordinary events such as the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, and the Wenzhou high-speed train disaster of 2011. In South Africa the youth movement played a strong role in the anti-apartheid struggle and subsequent social construction. In contrast, in contempo-

rary China open political protest no longer appears to be a focus of youth's exercises of agency, but rather entrepreneurial and scientific activity. Indeed, the differences between China's and India's political paths should not be over-estimated, both have deeply sedimented and millinerian cultures which may be capable of accommodating the forces of modernity.

Such movements are lodged in each society's internal and historical dynamics, which condition possibilities and horizons. Sociology has come to associate its practices with democratic political systems, the fact that all of the BRICS except for India have been run over much of the last seven decades by non-democratic political systems, and today the marks of past authoritarianism affect not only scientific production but the political and social realities. Also I think the handbook provides a warning to all Western sociology students, that they take notions such as Millennials, Generation X etc for granted as representing all of humanity, they are making a big mistake. Maybe a 'BRICS perspective' can undermine several other widely held views, this would help theory to advance.

Everywhere in the handbook structural, political and cognitive barriers to the exercise of agency can be seen: this is identified as a lack of an appropriate political culture in Brazil, the party's monopoly of political power in China and effectively single party rule in democratic South Africa. Structural barriers are both cognitive and access-related, entry into politics is uneven. Furthermore, other opportunities — be they economic, leisure or educational — are also unevenly spread for youth, and as such limit life chances. Chapters often broach such structural constraints, and show that the life-chances of have been being significantly raised whenever there has been fast economic growth, social collapse is associated with the opposite, however even with growth others are left behind, or even worse, fall behind.

Intergenerational dependency in Brazil, Russia and China is a result of a decline in the birth rate, combined with increasing life expectancy. This leads to young people being required to sacrifice themselves in order to permit their elders to have a more comfortable retired life than they themselves will be able to have. Remarkably this state of affairs does not meet with more than isolated criticisms. In China a vigorous blog movement discusses the huge emotional problems generated by such dependence. The fiscal capacities of State spending on public pension systems in both Russia and Brazil have been the challenged, in Russia protests led President Putin to backtrack and in Brazil, President Temer was unable to pass pension reform. In China the one child family policy is already being revived reducing that future demands on a benevolent government to fulfill care obligations to the old.

The Handbook on Social Stratification shows that subsequent to the reform and opening up in China, the fall of Communism in Russia the Independence of India and the end of the Military regime in Brazil spaces for the exercise of agency opened up, especially in the economic sphere. However, where this overflowed into the political system the results were varied.

Agency and information technologies

Even if the authors do not use the vocabulary of 'agency', the handbook shows that the use of the internet seems to be the place where agency is most easily observed

in the five countries — particularly in the eighth section ‘internet participation and communication’.

The rise of enterprise associated with new technologies appears to be a general phenomenon in all five countries. Some of the most important contemporary capitalists in the ITC sector are from BRICS countries and there are many spin-off enterprises and users. Youth turns to political action particularly in Brazil and South Africa whereas in China spoofing aims to subvert official values without directly challenging the political system. We also discover social actors who attempt to use the power of the ITCs to undermine the system of political power: in Brazil hackers use ITCs to fight corruption!

However, the positive news on the economic front gives birth to a negative side product — cybercrime. This appears to grow in the shade offered by the opening up of new and unregulated opportunities. McAfee reports that the world’s four leading cybercrime countries are United States, China, Brazil and Russia. In other words cybercrime is an authentic BRICS problem.

But, at a more general level, we see that defamation, poison-pens and terrorism organize themselves through the internet, however, such activities are not normally associated in Sociology with the concept of ‘agency’ which is mainly presented in a bright light, indeed adapting Michel Wieviorka we might call these «counter-agency actors.’

Methodology and limitations of the approach taken

At the Bandung conference (1955) Nehru had identified the principles of **equality between nations** and **respect for sovereignty** as the bases for cooperation, said differently, no country has a right to carry on as though it were a superior to another, nor to involve itself in their internal affairs. Recently an article has presented an ‘ideal type’ based on a reconstructed post-facto representation of what was done in the two handbooks. Beyond the first two principles a motivation to work together was added in. The central axis of the project involves the acquisition and transmission of knowledge on other societies and social systems, in other words, this is a win — win situation for all involved.

Once the themes of the sections were decided upon the presidents of the principal sociological societies of each country were free to choose their national editor and these, in turn, to choose authors. While India and Brazil were invited late on in the process to write the first handbook, for the second we envisaged that it would come to be read by an international public, and this would give authors visibility they would not normally obtain. National editors were responsible for supervising the production of the chapters without undue interference from the chief editor. Authors were encouraged to express themselves within the limits of their own intellectual traditions, without being required to sterilize their chapters to make them acceptable according to the criteria established by the many blind refereed journals. Our books were works of freedom, which open up spaces for developing dialogue, for teaching, in the future.

Indeed this second book is just a further step by which BRICS sociologists are beginning to get to know their partner societies better and to understand the bases of each others’ sociological practices. For the BRICS to work there is so much work to be done in a short time, and dialogue is extremely fragile and complex. The book’s

greatest strength its innovative nature — which comes from it having been published and able to promote dialogue. However, the conditions under which it was published contain the seeds of its greatest weakness — heterogeneity!

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