



The crisis of representation: the limits of liberal democracy in the global era

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Abstract

In liberal thought, democracy is guaranteed by the unity of community and government. The community of citizens elects its government according to political preferences. The government rules over the community with powers which are limited by unalienable human, civil, and political rights. These assumptions have characterized Classical Liberalism, Revisionist Liberalism and contemporary Neo-liberal theories. However, the assumed unity of community and government becomes problematic in Global Post-Fordism. Recent research on the globalization of the economy and society has underscored the increasing inability of nation-states to exercise power over their communities which, in turn, limits the ability of communities to express their will at the nation-state level. The current phase of capitalism is characterized by socio-economic relations which transcend the jurisdictions of nation-states and local spaces. This paper addresses the issue of the fracture of the unity of community and government by introducing feature characteristics of Classical Liberalism, Revisionist Liberalism and Neo-liberalism. Moreover, it analyzes the contribution of the theory of Reflexive Modernization which represents a novel attempt to rethink democracy within the liberal tradition. The paper concludes that the inability of governments to control economic and non-economic environments creates a crisis of representation which implies serious limits to liberal democracy. This situation is particularly important for rural regions as their socio-economic development, and programs for its democratization have been historically based on the intervention of agencies of and control by the nation-state. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The betterment of the socio-economic conditions of rural regions has been a central topic of debate in a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary circles. In a significant number of cases, this debate assumed the establishment of democratic social relations. Indeed, for a significant portion of the 19th and 20th centuries discourses about democracy revolved largely around two opposing readings of its characteristics and content: Liberalism and Marxism. The end of the cold war and consequent talks about the unsurmountable limits of Marxism (e.g., Fukuyama, 1992) left Liberalism as the only viable context within which to conceptualize democracy. Despite various and valiant attempts to defend Marxism (e.g., Derrida, 1994; Kellner, 1995), its association with the dissolved Soviet system appeared too delegitimizing to allow it back into the realm of

democratic alternatives. Even in settings where Soviet socialism and Marxism were clearly considered two separate entities, the dissolution of the Soviet block largely meant the disqualification of Marxism as a possible theory of democracy.¹

The triumph of Liberalism, however, has not been followed by a significant scrutiny of its limits. Discourses about democracy often take for granted the assumptions and conditions called for by classical and contemporary forms of Liberalism. Indeed, analyses of works of liberal thinkers, such as John Locke, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are significantly absent from the copious

¹ This is the case of Western Europe's most powerful communist party, the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The PCI renounced its Marxist roots and name for a new version anchored in the liberal parliamentary form of democracy. The former PCI is now called New Democratic Party of the Left. It is important also to note that throughout its history the PCI maintained a strong distance from the reading of Marx and strategies of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Spriano, 1967).

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production of social science papers, in general, and those pertaining to rural issues in particular. These classical works set the ground rules of liberal democracy and the framework from which contemporary renderings of Liberalism originated. In effect, in a situation in which Liberalism is forcefully proposed as the dominant framework for democratic discourses, its classical theorists and its fundamental characteristics are regarded only as footnote material in analyses probing the issue of democracy in society and in its rural settings.

The first objective of this paper is to rectify this situation by introducing the basic tenets of Classical Liberalism. This task is carried out through a succinct review of the work of John Stuart Mill, arguably the most significant representative of this current of social thought. Additionally, more modern forms of Liberalism are reviewed. In particular, a synopsis of the basic tenets of Revisionist Liberalism and of Neo-Liberalism are presented. These tenets are examined in relations to the crisis of 20th century Fordism (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996) which, I argue, invalidates Liberalism's "*assumption of unity*", that is, the existence of the unity between the community of citizens and their government.²

This unity is one of the most important aspects of Liberal thinking and it is maintained by classical and contemporary versions of Liberalism alike. However, current literature on the development of Global Post-Fordism — the socio-economic phase of mature capitalism which emerged out of the crisis of Fordism — underscores the fracture between community and government and the consequent *crisis of representation*. More specifically, the nation-state is increasingly unable to represent its citizens as its capacity to control and regulate economic and non-economic environments is greatly diminished. This situation implies limits to liberal democracy and to attempts to improve the conditions of society carried out theoretically and practically. The analysis of these aspects constitutes the other focus of this manuscript.

The above is particularly relevant for debates about rural issues. Over the years, students of this topic have been particularly concerned with the elimination of obstacles to the improvement of rural regions' human and natural environments. The State has been one of the instruments often employed to carry out these tasks and, through its agents and agencies, it has played a prominent role in shaping the current conditions of rural areas.

² In this work the concepts of government and State are employed interchangeably. Though the current usage of these words involves differences, classical theorists employed the concept of government in a much broader way than contemporary uses. It was much closer to the meanings expressed by the contemporary concept of the State. Here, government and the State are employed to indicate the political apparatus, its agents, and agencies.

Indeed, many rural studies and programs assumed the existence of unchallenged State powers within a given national territory which could be employed to satisfy social and individual needs. At a time when significant changes are occurring at the socio-economic level and when State powers seem increasingly inadequate to represent its community of citizens and address societal concerns, attempts which scrutinize liberal democracy's limits appear overdue. Equally relevant is the current effort to redefine rurality. Calls to overcome the crisis of rural regions and to establish emancipatory processes assume the definition and construction of new forms of rurality which contemplate enhanced participation of local residents and communities in decision-making processes. This posture is often articulated in terms of communities and citizens' ability to affect the formation and implementation of local, national and now supranational policies and implies a notion of democracy which is firmly anchored in liberal readings of social and political actions. In this context, the issues of democracy and the availability of its liberal forms emerge as central in the process of defining the space of rural regions in the global society.

The paper opens with a presentation of the tenets of Classical Liberalism which is followed by the illustration of the most salient aspects of Revisionist Liberalism and Neo-liberalism. The subsequent section is devoted to the presentation of the theory of Reflexive Modernization. This theory attempts to address the issue of democracy in a context in which the limits of the State and the crisis of representation are acknowledged. Even Reflexive Modernization, however, maintains the unity of community and government. This situation, it is argued in the concluding portion of the paper, motivates a call for further theorization of the limits of liberal democracy and scrutiny of the assumptions underlying programs aimed at the improvement of conditions of the rural society.

2. Classical liberalism and the assumption of unity of community and state

Liberalism argues for the centrality of a complex set of individual rights (e.g., property, conscience, religion, movement, press, speech, suffrage), which emerged in opposition to premodern absolutism and dependency and later were embodied in modern citizenship. Liberal theorists asserted the new rights against patriarchal, authoritarian, corporatist institutions, which stressed reciprocal obligations between unequal estates (i.e., mostly duties of subordinate to privileged strata). Their ideas originated in medieval towns from the rupture with seigniorial authority and the birth of the bourgeois class, market relations, private property, and "free" labor. As indicated by John Dewey in his 1935 essay *Liberalism and Social Action*, early forms of Liberalism established the

existence of “natural” rights (Locke, 1988 [1689]) which were aimed at protecting individuals from the exercise of aristocratic arbitrary rule. Economically, this situation indicated that the emergent bourgeoisie was able to create discourses in which taxation and other economic practices could not be carried out without people’s support. Politically, it symbolized that the new society required a corresponding unity between the actions of rulers and the will of the people. The *government* must follow the will of the *community* of citizens which freely elected it. Simultaneously, citizens should obey legitimate decisions made by their representatives elected to political offices (Locke, 1988). This is the essence of Liberalism’s *assumption of unity*.

Subsequent forms of Classical Liberalism departed from the notion of natural rights to stress the consequences of socio-economic actions. In Dewey’s formulation this is the distinction between the old Lockean philosophy and the subsequent utilitarian proposal of Bentham (1996 [1789]). The utilitarian philosophy of Bentham indicated that human actions were not based on the existence of natural laws and rights. Instead, he pointed out that humans followed behaviors whose consequences they deemed beneficial and legitimate. According to Dewey, Bentham’s philosophy reflected the evolution of market relations and the movement against the existence of significant legal limits to the free circulation of labor and capital (Dewey, 1963, pp. 16–20). The emphasis on the introduction of *laissez-faire* policies, which was theorized by Bentham and by Adam Smith in his 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1976), represented successful strikes against anti-capitalist restrictions which widely existed in 18th century Europe.

These events marked a split between American and Continental versions of Liberalism. Bentham and Smith renderings of Liberalism appeared much less relevant in the United States than the earlier Lockean formulation. In the US, the non-existence of pre-capitalist forms of production, the agriculturally based economy and the pioneer conditions provided grounds for the domination of local interests over national interests. For Bentham and Smith *laissez-faire* did not preclude State intervention if the latter generated an augmentation of the general well-being. The utilitarian principle of the *greatest good to the greatest number* allowed for the introduction of redistributive and socially oriented State intervention at the national level. In the US, the benefits of self-help and unrestricted private action were such self-evident realities that made Bentham and Smith remarks about State intervention much less appealing than Locke’s call for unchecked individualism. Similarly, in Europe Conservative Romanticism and Socialism — albeit from opposite view points — attacked the negative consequences of industrialization. Romantic Pietism and Socialist Egalitarianism lamented the deprived conditions of lower segments of society and in so doing made a funda-

mental impact on the retheorization of Continental Liberalism toward its collectivistic, pro-social measure orientation which emerged in the 19th century. In the United States, social conditions which allowed for the retheorization of Liberalism appeared much later³ (Dewey, 1963, p. 21).

2.1. Classical Liberalism: John Stuart Mill’s contribution

The utilitarian and the collective dimensions of Liberalism were integrated in 19th century Continental formulations. John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* is arguably the most eloquent rendering of the liberal philosophical position (Collini, 1989, p. vii; Danley, 1994, pp. 30–31; Gray and Smith, 1991, p. 1). In this short essay published in 1859, Mill illustrated the most important tenets of Liberalism, its historical origins and its ethical desirability over competing ideological propositions. The following account of the classical liberal position rests primarily on Mill’s seminal work.

For Mill one of the most important aspects of human civilization was the struggle between liberty and authority. In ancient societies, such as feudal England, it referred to the conflict between serfs and the seigniorial class who ruled them. The latter obtained power from inheritance or conquest and ruled regardless of the will of the former (Mill, 1989, p. 5). Despite abuses, Mill argued, people viewed the presence of absolute rulers as a necessary protection from the community’s external and internal enemies.

The collapse of feudalism and the birth of capitalism paved the way for a fundamental reorganization of the relationship between rulers and communities. The successful struggle for liberty meant that absolute powers of rulers were replaced by constitutional powers which recognized unalienable political and human rights and the community’s ability to appoint its political leaders (Mill, 1989, p. 6). In Mill’s view the notion of community represented the combination of individuality with external social relations. Departing from the Lockean idea that uncontaminated individuality constituted the essence of liberty, Mill acknowledged that social relations played a fundamental part in the creation and maintenance of communities. He certainly remained distant from contemporary idealist interpretations (such as those theorized by Right Wing Hegelians) which equated the realization of individual freedom with its dissolution into the community. However, he contended that the attainment of self-interest should be based on the broader notion of the common good which constituted the moral grounds on which liberty was to be established (Dewey, 1963, pp. 24–25). For him, community meant a network of social

³ See the following discussion on Revisionist Liberalism and its American application in the New Deal.

relations based on the actions of individuals freed from arbitrary restrictions. Because Mill understood community in terms of individuality and social relations, his notion transcends current popular readings of the term which equate communities with geographical “localities”. Instead, he employed it to indicate an entity which was socially constructed and socially reproduced.⁴

Mill stressed the assumption of unity as he maintained that the State should be a direct expression of the people and that governing should be carried out in accordance with the will of the community. Change in the rule of government should be authorized either directly by the people or by a political body which represents them. For Mill, the essence of liberty was the elimination of the ancient regime distinction between rulers and community (Mill, 1989, pp. 7–8).

2.2. Representation

To be sure, Mill viewed the identification of the State with the community in much more problematic terms than originally argued in continental debates. He contended that the idea of a government which represented the entire citizenship was inaccurate. The State represented the will of only a portion of the citizens who, through active and successful intervention, established their views as those of society. Society is affected by the power of dominant classes and by their ability to condition behaviors and ideas. He wrote: “Where there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feeling of class superiority” (1989, p. 10). Because of the imperfection of the representative system, he called attention to the danger of “the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling”, and urged communities to allow the presence of mechanisms and sensitivities which would prevent the majority from oppressing minorities.

Mill considered de Toqueville’s concept of the *tyranny of the majority* as one of the more dangerous types of political oppression. In particular, he argued against governmental interventions which would establish rules of conduct limiting the articulation and practice of dissent. For example, Mill forcefully denounced communities which equated the rules of conduct of the dominant religion to those of society. He viewed this action as a fundamental infringement upon minorities’ freedom of religion (Mill, 1989, pp. 16–17; 62–64). In his opinion,

freedom of religion indicated that every individual should practice the religion of his/her choice without interferences from political authorities. Believers should be able to act according to their faith as long as they did not impose their views and behaviors on others. In his account, Puritan communities in the United States (1989), pp. 16–17) and Catholic countries such as Spain (1989), pp. 30–31) represented cases of oppression based on religious monism.⁵

Mill’s extensive critique of the perils associated with the liberal system of representation (that is a government which is a direct expression of the will of its citizens) indicated that his brand of Liberalism was centered on the substantive unity of community and government. His point was that democratic principles, such as “self government” and “the power of the people over themselves”, could no longer be considered self-evident as they were in early stages of the evolution of capitalism (1989, p. 7). The growth of market forces and the social inequalities associated with it made differential access to political power quite evident. These conditions mandated a distinction between formal and substantive liberal democracy. The establishment of the latter required corrective measures which he identified in limited State intervention and in a decision-making process based on continuous debates.

2.3. Limited state intervention

As far as limited State intervention is concerned, Mill stood clearly in support of *laissez-faire*. For Mill social and economic *laissez-faire* indicated that “...leaving people to themselves is always better, *ceteris paribus*, than controlling them” (1989, p. 96). He argued this point by differentiating between ancient and contemporary societies. In ancient societies, conditions were so primitive that wars and civil violence were widespread. Because of these conditions, State intervention was desirable and often required (1989, pp. 14–16). In modern societies, the spread of political rights and participation as well as the separation of spiritual and temporal authority

⁴ For Mill the concept of community can be equated with those of the nation and the national society. His point was that when there exists a community of individuals linked through social relations, these individuals should be free to express their wills through the use of political means. The government is the collective expression of these wills and, therefore, should represent the people from whom it is originated.

⁵ His critique of the tyranny of the majority included other instances as exemplified by his comments on Comte’s positive philosophy (Mill, 1989, pp. 24–25). Mill described Comte’s claim about the desirability of a social system based on positive knowledge as “despotic” (1989; p. 17). Furthermore, he denounced the positivist claim about the existence of ultimate truths as oppressive. Comte and like-minded thinkers contended that applications of the scientific method allow humankind to find ultimate “truths”. These truths would forever disqualify alternative interpretations as the former would permanently disprove the validity of the later. Although Mill was a strong supporter of rigorous scientific inquiry, he was equally committed to the idea that scientific inquiry should be grounded on continuous and open debates (1989; p. 22). He stressed that humans are fallible, therefore, assuming that any final truth can be achieved endorsed humans’ infallibility, which is a position inconsistent with human nature (1989; p. 23).

made strong State intervention unnecessary and even counterproductive. The State, therefore, should limit itself to the performance of two roles. The first was to prevent abuses of individual liberties. The second role consisted in the enforcement of democratically established rules of conduct. More specifically, in Mill's opinion, liberal democracy signified that individuals were free to act as long as it would not create harm to other human beings (a condition known as the *harm principle*). State intervention, therefore, should have been limited to the defense of the harm principle. Additionally, he was forever warning of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of State bureaucracy which prevented him from endorsing any project which relied on significant State intervention.

To be sure, Mill stood in disagreement with positions which interpreted the harm principle in terms of radical non-interference of the State. He recommended a much more extensive State intervention than was commonly acknowledged in 19th century England (Collini, 1989, pp. xvi, xxxiii–xxxiv). For instance, he was in favor of a State regulation of professions. It was inadmissible, for him, that the State would allow anyone to practice a profession without a license. He was also sympathetic to the plight of the working class and recognized the importance of intervening to improve the scant living conditions of lower classes. However, and contrary to socialist accounts, he attributed workers' conditions to the malfunctioning of social institutions and lack of capitalist development. Accordingly, his sympathetic reading of socialist proposals was countered by his conviction that socialist theorists lacked adequate knowledge of the functioning of capitalism and of the benefits that market competition provided to society.

In essence, Mill's interpretation of the harm principle was a flexible one. He recognized that the State should not limit individual rights nor should it interfere with the right of individuals to pursue "new and original experiments in living". Simultaneously, he allowed State intervention in some spheres which past experience revealed as requiring corrections (1989, p. 81). In this case, the community of citizens would empower the State to prevent "generation after generation from falling over the same principle which has been fatal to their predecessors" (1989, p. 81).

2.4. *The role of debates in society*

Mill's point was that substantive democracy cannot be guaranteed by State intervention alone. It was in the sphere of individuals' free action that ways of maintaining and enhancing democracy were to be sought. In Mill's liberalism, however, human initiatives entailed control which he envisioned to be carried out through open and free societal debates.

Mill contended that human actions should be centered on moral grounds. Ethics, in his view, occupied center

stage in the establishment and maintenance of liberal democracy. In this construct, ethics took primacy over economical and political institutions. More specifically, for Mill, (but also for other classical liberal such as Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith (Danley, 1994, p. 148; Pack, 1992)) the free functioning of the market and society was subordinate to the objective of human happiness. Because of the complex and varying nature of life, ultimate decisions could not be left to inanimate mechanisms such as the market, but they needed to be grounded on human experience and reflection. Mill argued: "human beings owe to each other help to distinguish the better from the worse, and encouragement to choose the former and avoid the latter. They should be forever stimulating each other to increase exercise of their higher faculties, and increase direction of their feelings and aims toward wise instead of foolish, elevating instead of degrading, objects and contemplations" (1989, p. 76).

The ethical posture, for Mill, required that human beings be engaged in open and honest criticism. In his view, it was the duty of any mature human being to point out the limits of others' behaviors even if this conduct called for a disregard of established rules of politeness. He wrote "It would be well, indeed, if this good office were much more freely rendered than the common notions of politeness at present permits, and if one person could honestly point out to another that he thinks him at fault, without being considered unmannerly or presuming" (1989, p. 77).

3. **Socio-economic changes and the critique of classical liberalism: revisionist liberalism and neo-liberalism**

Revisionist Liberalism and Neo-liberalism stand as the most salient revisions of Classic Liberalism. According to Revisionist Liberal theory, the concentration of economic power typical of advanced capitalism makes the Classical Liberal assumption of a free market society obsolete. It follows that the regulation of the economy and the satisfaction of social needs should be addressed through State intervention (Galbraith, 1952). Neo-liberal theories, conversely, point to the ineffective and inefficient performance of the State and call for a system based on market oriented mechanisms. In their accounts, economic and social matters should be addressed through individuals voluntary association in the context of an unrestricted free market society (Friedman, 1982).

Revisionist Liberalism and Neo-liberalism developed in different historical periods. Revisionist Liberal theorizations appeared in Europe in the second portion of the 19th century, gained visibility in the first portion of this century and reached their highest level of popularity in the post-World War Two era of "High-Fordist Capitalism" (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996). Neo-liberal theories have occupied center stage in social and economic

debates since the 1970s and they have been proposed as solutions for the crisis of Fordism arrangements. Thatcherism and Reaganism popularized them in the 1980s and since then they have been informing the economic policies of a number of countries around the globe.

3.1. Revisionist Liberalism

The diffusion of Liberalism in the 19th century was followed by the rapid development of revisionist positions in the 20th century (Dewey, 1963). At the historical level, the growth of large corporations and concentration of economic power made the classical liberal idea of self-regulating markets⁶ increasingly inadequate to represent mature capitalism. In the classical liberal tradition, the efficient functioning of the market assumed the exclusive presence of small operators. Their limited size did not allow them to affect market outcomes which were determined by the aggregate working of all of the economic activities. The development of oligopolies and monopolies made these assumptions untenable. Through concentration of resources, corporations were able to increase control over market outcomes and enhance their competitive positions. Size created barriers to market accessibility and made assumptions about intrasectorial mobility of capital and equal market information highly questionable (Gordon, 1996; Reich, 1991).

The expansion of capitalism fostered social polarization and economic instability as well (Mishel and Bernstein, 1993; Strobel, 1993). Despite periods of sustained economic growth, the first third of the 20th century was characterized by a series of economic crisis which culminated with the 1930s' Great Depression. Economic downturns highlighted market instability and the economic vulnerability of members of the middle and working classes as gains obtained during periods of expansion were quickly erased during crises (Dubofsky, 1994). Distrust for the self-regulating capacity of the market was widespread and calls for the alteration of *laissez-faire* economic policies came from various sides of the social spectrum. Unions' demands for economic stability were echoed by industrialists' concerns over social unrest and limited consumer markets (Polenberg, 1980). Overall economic and political instabilities constituted fertile grounds for a revision of Classic Liberalism.

At the theoretical level, attacks on Classic Liberalism came from various sources. Economic theory was characterized by the emergence of Keynesianism. According to

Keynes (1935), market failure was a constant condition of capitalism. More importantly, market generated prices did not reflect hidden costs (externalities) which were unfairly charged to the community at large. These conditions fostered widespread economic instability and recessions. According to Keynesian economics, growth and stability could be reached only through government spending and overall State intervention.

At the level of social philosophy, classical liberal *laissez-faire* postures were criticized from pragmatist, idealist, and materialist positions. Pragmatists, such as John Dewey, viewed Liberalism as a doctrine which, over the centuries, called for the elimination of oppressive forces. Classical liberal formulations established prior to the 18th century were expressions of actions against, slavery, serfdom and despotic aristocratic rule. Nineteenth century Liberalism represented a call for the elimination of legal procedures which hampered the flourishing of capitalist forces of production. In the early portion of the 20th century, Liberalism for Dewey signified "liberation from material insecurity and from the coercion and repression that prevents multitudes from participating in the vast cultural resources that are at hand" (Dewey, 1963, p. 48). Because, classical liberals failed to view the connection between their theories and historical events, Dewey maintained, *laissez-faire* strategies have been elevated to the status of desired rules of conduct in situations where the historical conditions were overwhelmingly different. In Dewey's view, the ahistorical dimension of *laissez-faire* strategies disqualify them from representing viable solutions to the issue of emancipation (Dewey, 1963, p. 49). From a pragmatist point of view, government intervention aimed at the enhancement of the common good was desirable when it represented the most effective manner to resolve current problems. Indeed, even for classical liberals, such as Smith, Locke and John Stuart Mill, government intervention in economic matter was not totally inconceivable (Danley, 1994, p. 148). In a situation characterized by social and economic instability, pragmatist postures offered justifications for abandoning *laissez-faire* policies in favor of those calling for State intervention (Galbraith, 1952).

The Hegelian idealist tradition provided another important source of critique against Classical Liberalism at the outset of the 20th century. In a now classic volume, Hobhouse ([1911] 1979) attacked the classical liberal assumption that freedom was established through the elimination of external constraints. Following Hegel, but also Kant, Hobhouse pointed out that elimination of external constraints does not lead to substantive freedom for all people. He shared with classical liberals the idea that Liberalism should be a means to achieve human development. However, he contended that people who did not have sufficient economic, cultural and social resources were not free to develop. The State must intervene to eliminate inequalities and to provide individuals

⁶ The Classical Liberalism's concept of self-regulating markets refers to the assumption that, if left untouched by external intervention such as that of the State, market mechanisms tend to establish the best possible combination of supply and demand of goods, services, and labor. This way of reaching market equilibrium represents the core of the "*laissez-faire*" economic theory.

with opportunities to actively participate in social and economic life. If human development was the most important objective in liberal democratic societies, State intervention was necessary to remove the obstacles to the effective participation of people in the life of society.

Theories developed with the materialist tradition provided an even stronger critique of Classical Liberalism (e.g., Hilferding, 1981; Luxemburg, 1972). Following Marx's accounts of the exploitation of the working class and crises in capitalism, materialists pointed out the false equality of market relations. The working class, they argued, was forced to enter market relations as it was expropriated of its reproductive means. Their assumed voluntaristic participation in the market, therefore, masked social inequality and class exploitation.

The economic crises of the first portion of the 20th century and the availability of discourses objecting to Classical Liberalism constituted grounds for the development of Revisionist Liberalism. New Deal politics arguably represented the most systematic implementation of these ideals and one of the most significant attempts to establish a State regulated and managed market (Parsons, 1971; Rostow, 1960).

The Classical Liberalism *assumption of unity* seemed to come to full fruition in post-World War II capitalism. Revisionist Liberal policies seemed to work to reduce the uncertainties of capitalism's unwanted consequences as State managed resource allocation was considered to outperform the free market and address social needs. In the opinion of many, the problems of Classic Liberalism were resolved without abandoning democratic liberal ideas. The specters of unbridled capitalism and command societies appeared to be forever eliminated.

Although greatly exaggerating this period's inclusionary features, the rosy American vision of "postindustrial society" (e.g., "classless", "pluralist", and "meritocratic") expressed a perceived broadening of equality of opportunity and actual ideological and institutional changes that made significant new substantive rights an important part of the reproduction and legitimation of capitalist production. *Progress* seemed substantial given the fresh memories of depression, fascism, war and continued Stalinism. Moreover, despite new types of mass media manipulation, elite planning, exploitation (e.g., of "guest workers" and "illegal immigrants"), depoliticization (i.e., through mass consumption) and security mechanisms, the period should be seen through its own emergent cultural critiques of technocracy, non-participation, and consumerism as well as through postindustrial theory. Even the new post-materialist opposition who held that the working class was now integrated into the system (e.g., Marcuse, 1964), implied that the *belief* in capitalist legitimacy was strong among the "alienated" masses.

3.2. From Fordism to Global Post-Fordism and the crisis of Revisionist Liberalism

Revisionist Liberalism's strategies of the much larger, interventionist State successfully sustained steady growth, balancing mass production and mass consumption. Most importantly, firms generated very high levels of productivity by refining widely instituted Taylorist strategies. Managers substantially enhanced their technical control by further centralizing and rationalizing the labor process. While this strategy sharpened the distinction between production workers and managerial, professional, and technical employees, the labor force was pacified by steadily increasing wages, job security, opportunity for advancement, and expanding welfare (Harvey, 1990; Lipietz, 1992).

This *Fordist* capitalism combined highly rationalized, centralized, and vertically integrated firms with nationwide unions and a substantially expanded State; it had highly specialized and mechanized production, bureaucratized firms, extensive planning, and top-to-bottom bureaucratic control. "High Fordism" is the term which defines post-World War Two capitalism, or the mature, hyperrationalized type of Fordism (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996). It had an elaborately segmented labor force, a very large and complexly organized body of professional managerial and technical employees, and extremely sophisticated means of information, communication, transportation, and control. The High Fordist State employed advanced Keynesian policies of much broader fiscal controls, socio-economic plans regulation, and health, education, and welfare.

High Fordism enhanced inclusion of marginalized people, raised the social wage substantially, and, in the social democracies, sharply increased labor participation. Even in the United States, however, unions enrolled historically high percentages of workers, and wage/benefit packages increased sharply (Chandler, 1977; Aglietta, 1979; Gordon et al., 1982; Harrison and Bluestone, 1988; Lipietz, 1987, 1992). Overall, High Fordism coordinated mass production and mass consumption, steady accumulation, and enhanced legitimacy and produced historically unparalleled economic growth and abundance. The tacit "*capital-labor accord*" left control over the production to management, but labor's role in political discourses, policymaking, planning, and legislation was increased. The middle class grew substantially, and enjoyed sharply increased standards of living. Under High Fordism, civil, political, and social rights were expanded and regulatory legislation was increased. Equal opportunity was advanced, though the lowest strata benefitted little and sharp inequalities between the primary and secondary sectors, production workers and professional employees, and races, ethnic groups, and genders were primary facets of the pattern of rationalization and bureaucratization.

Fordism impacted rural areas and some of their primary activities such as agriculture in a variety of important ways. Indeed it is not a coincidence that in the United States, one of the first and most important acts of the New Deal was the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) which shaped the future of agriculture for years to come. Fordism involved the intervention of the State to regulate production, labor and their relationships with the territory and to stabilize unwanted consequences of capitalism. Under Fordism, through an elaborate and growing set of price support and other commodity programs as well as measures to enhance the well-being of agricultural workers and rural residents, the State was able to regulate markets and manage a steady flow of rural-to-urban migration along with an unprecedented explosion of production and productivity. Fordist agriculture worked well not only in the United State, but also in other world regions. In the European Union, for instance, Fordist regulation of commodity production and rural development transformed a chronically deficitary and sub-developed agricultural sector into one of the major actors in the global food scene. It is also important to note that Fordist market regulation was not simply a domestic issue, it mandated regulation of world commodities and market. In the United State, for example, agricultural and food programs were actively employed as tools of international policy. PL 480 (the act which regulated food aid to developing nations) and the strategic use of agricultural and food commodities are cases in point.

Though under Fordism the agricultural structure became increasingly polarized and both the number of workers and farms declined, inclusionary processes emerged. Commodity programs helped stabilizing farm income and provided needed security in volatile markets. Large producers overwhelmingly benefitted from State intervention. However, medium and small farm operators received support which often made the difference between remaining active in farming or leaving the sector. Relatively low interest rates and inflation further allowed for expansion of farm operations across the sector. Simultaneously, consumers' demands for better food quality translated into pertinent legislation, enhanced sensitivities about better nutrition, and expanded consciousness about the need for a more adequate relationship between agricultural production and the environment.

Fordism was functioning at nearly optimum levels from the middle 1950s to the late 1960s. But, in the early 1970s, the regime was faltering badly and exposing serious contradictions (Harvey, 1990; Aglietta, 1979). In the United States, the rise of the civil rights movement, urban violence, growth of white fears and white flight, and other problems related to de facto segregation and the Black underclass intensified the contradictions surrounding

welfare and poverty. Also, student resistance to the war in Vietnam and the intensifying protests and countercultural activities also began to split the Reformist Liberal majority.

Economic crisis accelerated High Fordism destabilization. Increasingly competitive international markets (resulting from the full recovery of Europe and Asia from the ravages of World War Two), American capital's insufficient investment in new technologies and organizational stagnation, the failure of the polity to develop an industrial policy, inflationary impact of the Vietnam war, increased costs of social welfare, and other factors began a new, downward phase of post-war capitalism. The oil crisis, severe recession of 1973, the end of the Bretton Woods concord, and stagflation signified a possible decomposition of United States centered multinational capitalism. Harrison and Bluestone (1988) refer to this period as the beginning of the "U-turn" in American capitalism; a shift to low-wage, part-time jobs and disintegration of the post-war "capital-labor accord". In the late 1970s, Thatcherism and Reaganism marked a decisive shift to low-inflation/high-unemployment (and underemployment) policies (Strobel, 1993; Harrison and Bluestone, 1988; Bowles and Gintis, 1982). The basic features of Revisionist Liberalism inspired Fordism began to be viewed as the source of crippling *rigidities*.

Heightened global competition and the above-mentioned political and economic crises brought new strategies aimed at reducing inflation by slowing growth, weakening the power of organized labor, tolerating higher unemployment, and slashing the social wage (e.g., Aglietta, 1979; Akard, 1992; Gordon et al., 1982; Harrison and Bluestone, 1988; Lipietz, 1992; Strobel, 1993). Revisionist liberal policies that earlier had been envisioned as chief motor forces of post-war growth were now treated as causes of the economic contraction. Critics held that the capital-labor accord produced a crippling profit-squeeze that endangered capitalism and that a substantial part of the High Fordist institutional and ideological complex ought to be dismantled (Akard, 1992; Lipietz, 1992; Harvey, 1990). Most importantly, many of the core Revisionist Liberal policies which were employed to expand opportunity and rights were made into prime targets of strategies aimed at increasing the freedom of property holders at the expense of wage workers and subaltern strata and distributing wealth and power upward⁷ (Harvey, 1990).

The new conditions which have emerged from the crisis of Fordism have been grouped under the concept of

⁷ These strategies were inspired by the Neo-liberal theory which will be illustrated in the next section.

*Global Post-Fordism*⁸ (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996; Bonanno and Constance, 1996). Post-Fordism's most decisive aspect has been increased "flexibility" on a global scale; mobile capital, free to colonize and commodify practically every sphere has shattered the relatively fixed social and temporal-spatial boundaries and generated decentralized production. Production is now decomposed into sub-units and sub-production processes, carried out by globally dispersed firms with highly divergent forms of labor, managerial, and financial organizations. Public enterprises are privatized, and increasingly the availability of vital services depends on the capacity to pay and/or overall profitability. Global Post-Fordism is difficult to map, but is not aleatory or "disorganized" (Lash and Urry, 1987; Offe, 1985; Piore and Sabel, 1984). The new "flexible" structures serve financial rationalization, concentrating resources, by-passing obstacles, locating more efficient forms of production, hedging against possible economic shifts, and taking advantage of new financial and tax instruments. Decentralized production goes hand in hand with more highly centralized control of finance, research, and information. Global Post-Fordist "economic development" and free trade policies utilize the State itself to enhance capital mobility, erode its own local, regional, and national regulatory instruments, and reduce labor's bargaining power and influence.

The turnabout from record post-war growth produces a pervasive sense that post-war structures of accumulation have failed and that social policy needs to be reversed quickly. Global Post-Fordist efforts to reignite growth weaken or eliminate post-war mechanisms aimed at increasing equal opportunity, providing for the unemployed and needy, and blocking the colonization of valued non-economic environments by capital. Rather than equal rights, emphasis is increasingly on the costs of regulation and need to increase discipline and security. Several key points should be highlighted.

(1) The free mobility and global extension of Post-Fordist capital render permeable virtually all spatial-temporal, political, and social "borders" that once constrained capital, creating new vulnerabilities for the well-being and identities of individuals and national, regional, and local communities.

(2) New patterns of socio-cultural differentiation and socio-cultural homogenization are stimulated by Global Post-Fordism's break with post-war structures of accumulation and the new highly disjunctive pattern of socio-cultural structures and processes (e.g., decentralizing and centralizing tendencies; new mechanisms of global transport, information production, and media; highly divergent and unequal forms of production and consumption).

3) Post-Fordism generates a "crisis of culture" that problematizes post-war "culture", bankrupts "modernization" theories and politics, stimulates diverse challenges to specialized science, technology, and other cultural practices, and generates new "cultural theories" about the "end" of history and modernity, signifiers without referents, and fresh modes of "cultural politics".

(4) More importantly for this study, the *spatial-temporal unity of the polity and the economy* that characterized the earlier phases of capitalist development has been fractured. In previous phases of capitalism — from the early competitive one to the most recent monopolistic phase — the growth of economic relations was centered on the existence of nation-states whose polities (the State) coordinated and mediated activities of economic actors. The historical role of the State was twofold. First, it enhanced processes of accumulation of capital. And second, it legitimized accumulation to those segments of society which did not benefit from it (e.g., O'Connor, 1986; Offe and Ronge, 1979; Poulantzas, 1978). However, subordinate segments of society (such as the working class) were able to use the State to advance their interests and introduce legislative measures which benefitted them (e.g., pro-labor legislation, creation of social services, enhanced education opportunities, etc.) (Block, 1980; Carnoy, 1984; Miliband, 1969). Overall, though, the alliance between States and national bourgeoisies characterized the creation and growth of national economies first, and the expansion of the interests of these bourgeoisies across the globe later (Braudel, 1982, 1984). In these phases of capitalist development, key elements were the State ability to control economic activities which took place within its jurisdiction,⁹ and the identification of corporations with countries of origin (Sassen, 1990). In this context, international operations were treated as extensions of entrepreneurial activities designed and engineered in the home country and supported by its State apparatus.

Under Global Post-Fordism, the ability of the nation-state to control economic activities and to be identified

⁸ A portion of the literature on the changes which occurred in this period has rejected the notion of the end of Fordism (e.g., Gordon, 1996, 1988). Despite the importance of the debate between the scholars who argued the end of Fordism and those who refute this conclusion, it remains outside the objective of this article. In terms of the following discussion, it is maintained that the socio-economic conditions constituting Fordism have been significantly altered. However, this does not imply that all the aspects constituting Fordism have been altogether eliminated.

⁹ To be sure, processes of mediation and coordination of socio-economic activities carried out by the State have always been contested as various social groups acted to advance their interests. However, because of its powers, the State was able to generate capital accumulation and social legitimation.

with corporations has been greatly diminished (Bonanno and Constance, 1996; Harvey, 1990; Lash and Urry, 1994). As indicated above, in order to enhance economic viability, corporations have transnationalized their operations by spreading production processes across national borders (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996; Spybey, 1996; Reich, 1991). This move achieved the primary objective of bypassing State regulations and requirements. Today, if unfavorable legislation and climates emerge in one country, corporations can bypass them by moving operations to other locations. This *hyper-mobility of capital* is one of the major characteristics of Global Post-Fordism (Bonanno and Constance, 1996; Harvey, 1990). By decentralizing and restructuring production processes, transnational corporations also created a situation in which corporate products and overall identity cannot be associated unambiguously with a particular country (Reich, 1991). The automotive industry exemplifies this change. Until a few decades ago, almost all automobiles were built from domestic components and assembled in plants located in the same country. Today, components have diverse national origins and relatively few might be made in the nation where final assemblage takes place.¹⁰ Similar consideration can be made for the agro-food sector. For example, while Cargill, the largest agro-food corporation in the world, is headquartered in Minnesota, it has a subsidiary called Tradax which operates from Geneva, Switzerland. Tradax also coordinates Cargill's global agro-food enterprises which include operations in about 50 countries around the world. Simultaneously, Sun Valley Thailand is a joint venture between Cargill, Inc., and Nippon Meat Packers, the largest meat company in Japan. Sun Valley Thailand sources modern production facilities and the formal production contract system from Cargill, Inc., rapidly expanding consumer markets in Japan from Nippon Meat Packers, and high-quality low-cost feed, low-paid, docile workforce, and lenient government regulations from Thailand (e.g., Bonanno et al., 1994). In essence, the lack of national identity increases flexibility by reducing loyalty and responsibility to national entities and their economic, social, and political requirements.¹¹

The point is the State's capacity to mediate between market and society has been weakened. The State is increasingly unable to control the flow of economic resources according to the rules established through

democratic processes. However, this does *not* mean that the State has been generally weakened. It indicates that Global Post-Fordism has substantially reduced the local, regional, and nation-state's control over its economic and non-economic environments (Antonio and Bonanno, 1996; Bonanno and Constance, 1996; Harvey, 1990; Ross and Trachte, 1990). Global Post-Fordist firms seek settings with good "business environments". While this can mean a skilled labor force and highly developed and well-maintained infrastructures, it also very frequently means low wages, docile and unorganized labor, and lax regulation of the workplace and environment. "Economic development" often means encouraging competitive rollbacks in all these areas (Lambert, 1991, p. 9; Mingione, 1991). Moreover, States use tax abatements and various other subsidies to attract or simply hold businesses. Consequently, socio-political controls that contribute to the relative autonomy of community and national institutions and that provide them limited safety from unrestricted economic rationalization undergo serious erosion.

The fracture of the spatio-temporal unity between the polity and the economy affects the *assumption of unity*. Because the State is increasingly unable to control economic and non-economic environments, the directions that it receives from its community of citizens cannot be fully implemented as assumed by Liberal theory. The fracture of the spatio-temporal unity between polity and the economy, therefore, signifies a crisis of *political representation*. The State is increasingly unable to represent the will of its people. The tendency is a move away from a situation in which community members maintain the *possibility* of expressing their wills at the political level as mandated by Liberalism. This situation is replaced by one in which powerful economic actors disproportionately increase their political power at the expenses of other groups whose interests are at stake. It is an expansion of the class dimension of society and a departure from the realization of the notion of substantive participation called for by Mill. More importantly, this is not due to contingent inadequacies of the functioning of the State, but it is the outcome of global processes which transcend the sphere of action of the State. This crisis of democracy limits the participatory capacity of citizens and their actual possibilities to influence socio-economic outcomes. As Ulrich Beck puts it: "We are already in the initial stages of a global social culture and economy with pseudo-independent regional governments. The democratic electoral structure, organized on the basis on a nation-state, does not reflect global dependancies" (1995, p. 45).

To be sure, in the liberal tradition political representation was understood as a contested terrain and it was not taken for granted. As indicated by Mill, political representation needed to be actively pursued and defended from various perils, including that of the tyranny of the

¹⁰ However, companies still utilize national identity as a marketing strategy (e.g., Chrysler's flagwaving "America's back" advertisements). The hypocrisy of the "buy American" is epitomized by Wal-Mart's use of "made in the US" labels on goods made outside the country.

¹¹ The ability of transnational corporations to by-pass nation-state has been widely documented in the literature. See, for example, Bonanno and Constance, 1996; Friedland, 1994; Gouveia, 1994; Heffernan and Constance, 1994; Sanderson, 1986; Skladany and Harris, 1995.

majority. However, Mill and other liberals assumed that political participation should be a substantial dimension of democracy and never supposed that there could have been a dissolution to the basic ability of citizens to participate. The danger to this liberal assumption today is that access to the realm of substantive participation is jeopardized by the vanishing unity between community and government stemming out of the transformations generated by the emergence of Global Post-Fordism.

3.3. Neo-liberalism

The emergence of Global Post-Fordism points to the exhaustion of the type of post-war Revisionist Liberalism that dominated culturally and politically the post World War Two socio-economic expansion. In this context, Neo-liberal theories claimed to be the liberal responses to the new social, economic and cultural conditions. Milton Friedman's work (e.g., Friedman, 1982, 1977; Friedman and Friedman, 1980) arguably constitutes the most relevant representation of these formulations. His best known book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, was originally published in 1962. But, as Friedman indicates in the preface of the 1982 edition, his work went mostly unnoticed until the 1970s when the crises of Fordism and of Revisionist Liberalism created a favorable intellectual climate for the diffusion of his ideas. Friedman's Neo-liberalism stands in sharp opposition to the Classical Liberal view of the relationship between ethics and the market. In the Classical Liberal tradition, ethics governs the conditions within which market relations develop and the quest for human happiness takes primacy over economic freedom. Markets presume the existence of "society" and without its cultural bases the functioning of economic institutions is highly problematic. Conversely, for Friedman, market relations take primacy over other spheres of human activity (1982, p. 8). In this context, political freedom is subordinate to economic freedom as it is "an end in itself" and the most basic condition for the development of a free, democratic society (1982, pp. 8–9; 1977, pp. 10–11). "The kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom" (1982, p. 9) Friedman contends.

According to Friedman, the primacy of economic freedom translates into the superiority of laissez-faire arrangements over solutions which contemplate State intervention. This position refutes Revisionist Liberalism call for a regulating and intervening State, but also departs from Classical Liberalism's notion that the State can intervene in spheres which have been appropriately identified by the community. For Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and other classical liberals, the primacy of

ethics over the market signified that the pursuit of happiness could include strategies which involved State intervention. These strategies, however, should have represented the best possible solutions to the problems at hand. Classical liberals viewed the market pragmatically and it was considered only a means to achieve the betterment of human and social conditions. In Friedman's view the free market is *always* superior to other arrangements and, therefore, it is always superior to State regulation of the economy and society. More importantly, State intervention is considered the primary source of crises in capitalism (Friedman, 1982, pp. 38–39). For Friedman, for example, the American Great Depression was generated by the US government mismanagement of monetary policies (1982, p. 38). He and other like-minded theorists redefine public policy interventions to cope with inequality as the real social problem, singing praises about the virtues of self-help, eliminating social programs, and shrinking inefficiencies by reliance on market mechanisms. For example, Mill's contention that the State should regulate professions through licensing is refuted by Friedman who argues that: "a citizen of the United States who under the laws of various states is not free to follow the occupation of his own choosing unless he can get a license for it, is deprived of an essential part of his freedom" (1982, p. 9).

In populist sounding pronouncements about competitive individualism, Friedman treats poverty and marginalization as unalterable natural conditions, arising from aggregated inherited differences in individual cognitive skills and/or inevitable variance in individual character and morality. Moreover, he holds that elimination of special protections and programs for racial and ethnic minorities, gays, and women makes for a more just society (Friedman, 1982, pp. 108–118). Most importantly and strongly departing from Classical Liberalism's call for compassion and care for the disenfranchised, Friedman and other Neo-liberals write off efforts to reduce class disparities and the growing numbers of people who lack resources for the nurturance of selves capable of competing for middle class roles in the private economy and exercising their citizenship rights. They argue that the increased flexibility and tax savings from the dismantling of these aspects of High Fordism will stop the erosion of the "middle class". They call for a "Two-thirds society", which revives opportunity for the middle classes and increases control over marginalized people.

Neo-liberal individualism embraces liberties without a sense of the importance of equality for maintaining the overall interdependence on which the specialized division of labor depends. This Global Post-Fordist ideology is more individualistic than classical economic and social theories, which stressed the idea of a division of labor and, at least, an idea of economic cooperation and inter-

dependence.¹² By contrast, Neo-liberalism transforms the firm into a projection of the supposedly entrepreneurial ego of the CEO, and employees, when they are considered at all, are viewed as individual psyches to be approached in terms of human relations strategies. Consistent with the Global Post-Fordist vision of repressive rigidities, Neo-liberals see wider languages stressing the value of social interdependency and public institutions as coercive and even totalitarian concepts. One's location with regard to occupation and wealth is viewed as an outcome of individual attributes, skills, and motivation (i.e., biological inheritance, individual psychology, and "luck"). Additionally, class is, by nature, a more abstract and less visible "social" phenomenon, easily conflated with race, ethnicity, or characteristics of concrete groups. The individualistic purview of Neo-liberal theories denies the reality of class. They seek claims that class is a collective phenomenon that provides potential for group formation as a fiction and reflection of the resentment of unsuccessful individuals and those progressive liberal or left forces that seek to manipulate it for their political interest. Consequently, Neo-liberalism equates justice with liberty, explaining away the contradiction between formal and substantive freedom. In this framework, social equality is seen as a leveling ideology inherently opposed to genuine individuality and contradictory to liberty and democracy.

Today, especially in the United States, Neo-liberals hold that public institutions, particularly those devoted to health, education, and welfare and to regulation of capital, are wasteful drags on the economy. In the case of agriculture and other rural-related issues, commodity programs, quality of food legislation, farm income support programs, program for the protection of the environment and agro-food trade controls are considered primary sources of the sector's problems. Indeed, it is maintained that issues such as agricultural overproduction, low farm income levels, farm bankruptcies would have not existed if market institutions were allowed to function without external interferences. At the international level, the case of Chile is often cited to illustrate the effectiveness of Neo-liberal policies in agriculture. Advised by Friedman, Chilean authorities eliminated state intervention and opened up labor and agricultural commodity markets to foreign competition. More

importantly, they eliminated pro-labor legislation and other measures to enhance the local business climate. The result was that, despite stagnant wage levels, agricultural production, employment and profits grew considerably (Gomez and Goldfrank, 1991).

Neo-liberals emphasize the need to diminish the sphere of public goods and politics, subordinating them to the private economy. The growing hegemony of the market and erosion of its social mediation again raises issues brought up in Durkheim's critique of Spencer, i.e., the argument that the market itself arises from and depends upon social institutions and solidarities and that the market or that the market alone cannot provide the social and normative bonds necessary to maintain a society (Durkheim, 1984, pp. 149–65). In modern societies, as Durkheim argued, these bonds require a sense of social justice or fairness to maintain a primarily "voluntary" or at least not directly coercive (i.e., formally free) system of socio-economic relations. Without justice, we must heed Durkheim's warning about a "sociological monstrosity" — unmediated atomistic individualism and a surplus of external inequality call forth the total State to fill the breach left by the absence of voluntary social interdependence (Durkheim, 1984, liv).

Despite its significant differences from Classical and Revisionist forms of Liberalism, Neo-liberalism maintains the *assumption of unity*. Friedman's critique of State interventionism is based on the contention that more than minimal State action hampers the will of the community as it prevents some of its members to pursue wanted objectives through desired strategies. In this respect, for Friedman a State which represents the community is a State which protects it from external enemies and guarantees the conditions for internal harmony and peace. Simultaneously, community members must obey the collectively established laws which the State is called upon to uphold (1982, pp. 34–35). The correspondence between State and the community of citizens is, in Friedman's view, to be criticized only in contingent terms. But, it remains an assumed theoretical condition of his Neo-liberal formulation. Friedman's objection is that Revisionist Liberal policies and other forms of *collectivism* have undermined the unity of community and State by allowing the latter to oppress the former. A return to unrestricted *laissez-faire* would reestablish the appropriate balance of power so that communities can prosper and the State can assume a much more efficient and much less wasteful posture.

¹² The works of Adam Smith (1976) Mill (1989) but also those of Marx (1977) Weber (1949) and Durkheim (1984), albeit in significantly different ways, point out the importance of maintaining cooperation and solidarity in society. These classical social theorists recognized that completely unrestricted markets would destroy their own socio-cultural foundations. Even those among them who advocate *laissez-faire*, from Adam Smith to Jeremy Bentham, contended that market societies depend on "interdependence" and altruism, which insure that the atomistic and individualistic aspects of capitalism have positive social outcomes.

4. The proposal of Reflexive Modernization

The crises of Revisionist Liberal theories and Fordist arrangements have not exclusively been grounds for conservative responses. In the progressive camp, a number of theories have proposed analyses of and solutions to the

problems of contemporary Global Post-Fordism. *Reflexive Modernization* is perhaps the most eloquent of these theories and certainly a formulation which has received considerable attention in academic and intellectual circles.¹³ Though it is not a unified theoretical construct, it refers to the works of theorists who reject the idea of the end of modernity and insist on the availability of newly generated opportunities for critically informed action. This *reflexivity* emerges out of the crisis of Fordist arrangements and becomes the most significant emancipatory tool in Global Post-Fordism. Though Reflexive Modernization theorists often discuss the work of Marx and share some of the tenets of the Marxian critique of capitalism, they stand outside the Marxian tradition to embrace a vision of democracy and society which is much more consistent with the Liberal philosophical tradition.¹⁴ Their acceptance of capitalist arrangements and their distancing from a class-based discourse locate them away from the Marxian left and into the liberal radical tradition. Key examples of Reflexive Modernization are the works of Beck (1995,1992) Giddens (1994,1991,1990) and Lash and Urry (1994) (see also works by Beck, Giddens, Lash and Urry in 1994) which will be briefly discussed below.

The common starting point of these authors is that contemporary society is experiencing a *crisis of modernity*. Rather than embracing the often discussed concept of post-modernity, they argue that we are in a period of *high modernity*. Modernity in their views is characterized by the process of individualization. Individualization mandates a social organization which breaks sharply with that of pre-capitalist societies based on collective and seignorial dominated social relations. In previous phases of modernity, however, the process of individualization was hampered by the existence of powerful institutions such as the welfare state, the family, trade unions, political parties and above all institutions producing formal science. These institutions limited the ability of individuals to make decisions about their lives and to develop individualized selves. Accordingly, decisions concerning areas such as work, family, politics, sexual preferences, and ideological postures were largely left to institutional realms. Giddens refers to this period as

simple modernization (1994, p. 42). Simple modernization reached its highest point during Fordism. During this period, society produced enough goods that its primary feature was its ability to distribute them — albeit unequally — to all the segments of society. Beck (1992), p. 13) argues that today we do not have a society which distributes goods, but rather a society which distributes *risks*. By risks Beck and the other authors signify the development of global dangers such as environmental degradation, nuclear disasters and economic and social decay. These risks, they continue, are global in nature (i.e., they concern everyone in the world) and cannot be controlled by traditionally established institutions such as the nation-state. In other words, the scope of current risks transcends the spatial and temporal limits within which available countervailing strategies can be applied. Responding to the claims that the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992) has forever dissolved threats to democracy, it is argued that this situation creates the conditions for a deeper crisis of democracy and freedom which re-proposes the struggle for democracy more forcefully than ever (Beck, 1995, p. 151).

The risk society is, then, characterized by a discrepancy between risks and instruments to address them. Currently, we have a society in which institutions can only partially address these risks. More importantly, in many cases, they have no instruments to seriously address these problems. This crisis, however, contains elements for possible solutions. Today, these authors contend, the process of individualization is accelerated. The crisis of institutions leaves individuals with expanded opportunities to make decisions about their lives. Giddens calls these enhanced opportunities the conditions for the expansion of *life politics*, a term which indicates individuals enhanced ability to select life styles once adjudicated by nature or tradition (Giddens, 1994). The crisis of institutions gives individuals possibilities to decide about issues which previously were defined within institutional frameworks. Accordingly, individuals are much freer to make decisions about political, cultural and economic issues. In other words, cultural, technological and structural changes enabled people to be more directly responsible for their lives and to assertively act in the web of everyday life. This possibility to act is defined as reflexivity and the current historical period as *Reflexive Modernization*.

Reflexive Modernization refers to the “possibility of individuals to reflect critically on these changes and their social conditions of existence and hence potentially to change them”. (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 32) Giddens, Beck and Lash and Urry, are forever warning of the repressive consequences that the end of simple modernity and the globalization of economy and society have brought about. Moreover, they are aware of criticisms directed against premature generalizations of new social movements accomplishments in advanced societies to the

¹³ It could be argued that a number of other theories could better address current social concerns. In effect, my selection of Reflexive Modernization is not based on a claim of scientific superiority of this theory over others. Rather, it is a selection based on the fact that Reflexive Modernization is a theory based on liberal assumptions and one which maintains the assumption of unity. For these reasons it can be employed to illustrate innovative proposals from a liberal perspective and to point out the limits of this perspective in Global post-Fordism.

¹⁴ This is an evaluation which does not apply equally to the various authors considered here. Lash and Urry (1994), for instance, ground their *Economies of Signs and Space* on Marx's theory of circulation.

rest of the globe. In other words, they are aware of the fact that repression against emancipatory processes is strong and that the possibility of establishing them is unevenly distributed around the world. Yet they see the current period as one in which a positive reconstruction of society is possible. Beck compares the current situation with that of the end of pre-modernity and argues: “just as modernization dissolved the structure of feudal society in the nineteenth century and produced the industrial society, modernization today is dissolving industrial society and another modernity is coming into being” (1994, p. 10).

In their accounts, the dissolution of modern institutions derives from their incapacity to address current issues. The concept of globalization is employed to summarize today’s problems. The risk society is a global society in which phenomena affect the entire globe and, more importantly, cannot be addressed exclusively at the local level. Though local action is paramount, it is the global nature of these issues which qualifies the difference between this period and previous historical periods. In various ways, these authors stress the importance of the relationship between local and global and the manner in which it qualifies the crisis of institutions.

As indicated above, the transformation of the State is based on global processes. These authors contend that the flows of commodities, capital and information cannot be controlled at the national level. These flows are too complex and differentiated to be monitored by previously established institutions and their strategies. In particular, Lash and Urry (1994), p. 292–295 speak of the end of organized capitalism and the development of *disorganized capitalism*. They equate organized capital with the Fordist period. Under organized capitalism, social and economic problems were understood to be solvable at the national level. Accordingly, the State intervened in the economy and in society to address “risks” generated by the evolution of capitalism. Keynesian strategies were paramount in this process. Under disorganized capitalism, global actors and flows make these strategies ineffective. Risks now transcend national boundaries.

The inability of the nation-state to address these problems is interpreted both in negative and emancipatory terms. The end of organized capitalism and the failure of the welfare state have created social and economic degradation which the State cannot correct with traditional forms of intervention. Unemployment, urban decay, uncertainties are some of the negative characteristics of the current situation. Additionally, these authors indicate that in the last two decades economic growth (i.e., increases in GNPs, increases in production and productivity) translated into decreased levels of employment and sharp polarization between the wealthy and the lower classes. As Lash and Urry (1994), p. 160 put it “the new lower classes suffer ... from increasing poverty. At the same time the wealthy have got richer. In the USA,

Britain and elsewhere, middle income groups are becoming scarcer as income distribution increasingly assume a bimodal pattern”. It is their thesis that the bottom segments of society become increasingly excluded from economic and social rewards which are funneled toward the upper social strata. Arguing against those who interpreted these changes in terms of “end of the working class” they maintain that the lower classes represent a “sort of structural downward mobility for substantial sections of the organized-capitalist working class, as well as a set of structural social places into which large number of immigrants flow”. (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 145)

The end of organized capitalism creates also the conditions for progressive outcomes. Above all, emancipatory conditions are fostered by the existence of reflexive modernization. However, the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state also generates emancipatory possibilities. Despite its progressive nature, there has always been a repressive dimension of the welfare state. Its expansion mandated the existence of “rigidities” which prescribed constricted behaviors and hampered the practice of alternative strategies. Accordingly, its crisis frees individuals and communities to explore patterns of actions unavailable before. This condition, these authors contend, forms the basis on which “new” progressive movements and practices can develop.

In this context, the evolution of the State is viewed as potentially progressive. The crisis of the nation-state favors the reproduction of local “states” which can respond more rapidly to the demands emerging from the community. Simultaneously, local “states” can be more open to direct participation, to the inclusion of diverse groups and consequently they can foster substantive democracy. The concept of *subpolitics* (Beck, 1992, p. 190–194) indicates the move away from democratic actions through traditional political channels. It is in the generation of movements from below and in the displacement of political action away for sclerotized political spheres that these authors locate the existence of elements for the generation of concrete democracy.

The progressive and regressive character of the high modern disorganized State is paralleled by a similar vision of the economy. These authors in general, and Lash and Urry in particular, argue that processes of restructuring of corporations have not only increased their power but have also created new forms of democratization in the production process. Lash and Urry insist on the notion of *reflexive accumulation*. This concept is considered superior to previously employed concepts such as those of flexible specialization and Post-Fordism. In underscoring the characteristics of reflexive accumulation, they point out that contemporary economies are based on services and that knowledge and information are central aspects of capital accumulation. Additionally, contemporary economies should be analyzed not only in terms of production but also consumption. Furthermore,

specialized production and consumption require a production of *signs*, indicating symbolic processes and the *aestheticization* of production and consumption are central in contemporary capitalism. In other words, commodities acquired value not only because they are produced for exchange but also because specific “aesthetic” meanings are attached to them. For example in the case of the agro-food sector, the diffusion of organic foods is based on the recognition of the existence of important socially valued meanings attached to them. The aestheticization of production and consumption increases the possibilities for individuals to select consumption patterns in more meaningful manners than in the past. In turn, this situation allows individuals to have broader spaces for the construction of their identities. Furthermore, this situation allows consumers to establish free spaces despite the actions of agro-food transnational corporations. In essence, the conscious freedom to choose becomes a political weapon against corporate control.

5. Liberalism, Reflexive Modernization and the unity between community and the State: implications for the democratization of rural regions

Classical and Revisionist Liberal, as well as Neo-liberal theories maintain the assumption of unity. In the light of the emergence of global capitalism, these formulations are problematic vis-a-vis the objective of establishing free spaces in the rural as they offer no solutions to the impasse generated by the nation-state’s inability to control global actors and actions. Traditionally established actions in defense of the environment, food consumers, the quality of agricultural production, labor and other aspects of rural life mandate that the State retain the possibility of exercising ultimate power within its political jurisdiction. Once this situation is altered, legitimate avenues for the satisfaction of social, economical and political needs are decreasingly available to individuals and groups. More importantly, communities find their ability to defend political gains and to establish desirable conduct of action severely limited.

Instances of the inability of the State to control global actors and actions and to maintain democratically established free spaces abound in rural study’s literature (e.g., Bonanno and Constance, 1996; Heffernan and Constance, 1991; Gouveia, 1994; Sanderson, 1986; Skladany and Harris, 1995). For instance, in the case of agro-food sector, in the United States environmental groups were successful in introducing legislation which regulated the killing of endangered marine species by commercial fishing vessels. Agro-food corporations viewed this democratically established law as damaging to their economic interests and decided to by-pass it by reflagging their boats. By flying the flag of a different country, corporations maintained that their fishing vessels were not

subjects to US laws. Simultaneously, claiming their American nationality they were able to import their “foreign” products without paying import tariffs. The US state, in this case, was unable to defend the spirit of the law nor was it capable of retaliating against corporations (Bonanno and Constance, 1996). Similarly, pro-labor and pro-environmental legislations created increased production costs to poultry corporations operating in some American Midwestern and Southern states. These norms were bypassed by moving operations to adjacent states and/or to Central American countries where either more relaxed or simply absent (Heffernan and Constance, 1994).

From a historical viewpoint, Classical Liberalism’s sharing of the unity of State and community is understandable as this theory emerged in a period in which the identity of community and government was a historical condition of modern Western societies. The Liberal understanding of the relationship between the State and community reflected the process of European nation-state building which was one of the fundamental aspects of the expansion of capitalism. European capitalism was based on the creation of markets contained within politically independent States. The existence of the State guaranteed the conditions for the reproduction of emerging economic relations (Anderson, 1974; Braudel, 1982,1984; Wallerstein, 1979). In this context, Classical Liberals not only maintained the assumption of unity, but considered it the central element for the development of democracy. The power that the community of citizens delegated to the State was one of the most fundamental conditions for the free operating of the market and for protecting citizens from external and internal constraints.

Revisionist Liberalism emerged in a historical situation in which the economy had clearly transcended its original national dimension. Multinational and imperialist capitalism, however, represented the expansion of nationally based corporations into colonized territories (Brewer, 1980; Spybey, 1996). As the classical accounts of Hilfeding (1970), Bukharin (1972) and Luxemburg (1972) indicate, early 20th century imperialism referred to the constitution of economic and political blocs which metropolitan countries employed to extend domination over lesser developed countries. World development was characterized by the confrontation between imperialistic blocs and national capitals that they represented. It follows that the Revisionist Liberal account of the identity between community and the State was largely justifiable. While Revisionist Liberal theories of modernization grossly misunderstood the conditions and opportunities of developing societies, in advanced Western societies the State could still exercise control over social and economic processes. As Beck (1992) pointed out, the State’s ability to distribute wealth to all strata of society gave the impression that the State could forever control the risks emerging from the evolution of modern society. This was

particularly the case in rural related sectors such as agriculture and food where commodity programs, programs for the enhancement of food quality and food availability, and other inclusionary measures were implemented through State intervention.

Contemporary Neo-liberal theorists insist on the importance of a minimalist State. Yet their criticisms of the role of State in society do not acknowledge the State's emerging limits. For Neo-liberal theorists the State still fully represents the community of citizens that expresses it. However, Neo-liberal theorists' call for a minimalist State makes the issue of the inability of the State to control social, economic, and non economic environments much less problematic than in other forms of liberalism. For them, the hypermobility of capital (Harvey, 1990) represents one of the major positive aspects of Global Post-Fordism. Heeding to the idea that the State exercises too much control over society (Friedman, 1982; Hayek, 1973), they consider the fact that State rules are bypassed by transnational actors as a positive event in itself. From this viewpoint, the crisis of the nation-state is an element which strongly contributes to the enhancement of democracy and freedom. Despite these claims, the issue of democratic political representation forcefully remains. Following the Liberal tradition, Neo-liberals maintain that democratic political representation should be a substantial component of democracy. However, in their support of globalization they are silent about the limits that Global Post-Fordism creates for representation. For them, these limits simply do not exist.

The view of the relationship between the State and communities expressed by Reflexive Modernization theorists is much more complex than that presented by Neo-liberal thinkers. Reflexive Modernization theorists are aware of the dislocation between community and State generated by the evolution of Global Post-Fordism. For them the State is "squeezed between global and local processes". (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 301). This situation transforms the State in two ways. First, it leaves political structures with less power to monitor agency than in the past. Second, it allows for the emergence of new forms of the State. One form is the supranational State (e.g., the European Union, the United Nations), while the other is the creation of autonomous regional sub-states which are physically smaller than nation-states yet are endowed with independent powers and therefore can allow the establishment of free spaces.¹⁵

¹⁵ Despite these considerations, they do not accept the often articulated position of the "end of the State". On the contrary, they maintain that despite its crisis, the "space" of the State will continue to exist. To be sure, their emphasis is not on the persistence or disappearance of the State, but rather on the characteristics of its ongoing transformation. Indeed, they underscore that the current crisis is a crisis of the nation-state form of the State, rather than the crisis of the State considered as a socio-political institution.

According to Lash and Urry, for instance, "the demise of the nation-state might favor the proliferation of local and regional states which could more effectively respond to the wishes of its citizens, a much more localist and pluralist democracy" (1994, p. 325). In this case, it is the creation of democratic spaces outside the spheres occupied by the State and/or left vacant by its crisis which motivates optimism in these circles. Indeed, through concepts such as *dialogic democracy* (the refusal of power established solutions in favor of dialogue-based alternatives) and *life politics* (the struggle for the selection of wanted life styles) (Giddens, 1994), Reflexive Modernization theorists indicate the possibility of emancipatory politics outside traditional arenas and procedures.

The implications that the proposal of Reflexive Modernization has for the democratization of rural related activities and sectors are manifold. Their reading of the crisis of the nation-state indicates that actions of direct democracy which empower individuals and communities are historically possible. Emerging community-based initiatives in favor of alternative forms of agricultural production, food consumption, and environmental protection are examples of Reflexive Modernization theorists' ideas about the possibility of establishing an emancipatory new modernity. Similarly, the insistence on the availability of organic food, the monitoring of agro-food production and the enhancement of the quality of the environment are instances of the emergence of the aestheticization of social relations and of the related capacity of individuals to exercise new forms of power. Indeed, even in a context in which agro-food transnational corporations disproportionately expanded their powers, their vulnerability vis-a-vis the actions of informed consumers is evident. Recent food boycotts, demands for better food quality, alternative products and respect of the environment indicate that transnational corporations' control of markets is a contested matter. More importantly, they show that corporations' dominance of the agricultural sector still depends on their ability to "realize their production", that is to transform commodities into money. Here reflexive individuals and communities, in their roles of consumers, environmentalists, workers, etc., can exercise control of corporate actions. In essence, This type of democratization of rural activities implies empowerment of communities as it shifts powers away from the State apparatus.

Despite Reflexive Modernization's theorists insistence on the fact that the crisis of the nation-state can be turned into a proposal for direct democracy, they are also aware that the question of the monitoring of agency remains open. More specifically, they are aware that emerging reflexive strategies are, by themselves, not sufficient to control unwanted consequences of capitalism. Reflexive Modernization's theorists are conscious of the fact that the hypermobility of global economic actors transcends the political space occupied by subnational

and/or supranational states (e.g., Harvey, 1990; but also Lash and Urry, 1994: p. 312; but also Antonio and Bonanno, 1996; Danley, 1994; Friedland, 1994). Indeed, they acknowledge that while the ability of new forms of the state to control economic and non-economic environment — albeit expanded — remains at a regional level, the mobility of capital is global. For rural regions this fact signifies an increased inability of the State to implement emancipatory rural programs and to control the actions of transnational corporations. This situation reposes the crisis of representation as the scope of action of global actors remains broader than the political instruments available to citizens to control them. To paraphrase Beck, *the process of representation has exhausted its capacity to represent*.

Furthermore, the ability of communities to exercise reflexive actions is not independent of their socio-economic conditions. In effect, the hypermobility of capital is possible because of communities' desire to attract corporate investments (Harvey, 1990; Lash and Urry, 1994). In this context, more economically and politically advanced communities and regions are able to control their economic and non-economic environments in a much greater extent than their less developed counterparts. Because of their relative deprivation, the latter become much more exposed to the negative consequences of the crisis of the nation-state and of their diminished ability to exercise community based reflexive actions. It also appears clear that conditions for the emergence of new forms of solidarity — which could bring together different and distant communities — are problematic at best. It is, perhaps, through the establishment of these global solidarities that the possibility to generalize reflexive action across socio-economically unequal contexts could become a historical reality.

While the observations of Reflexive Modernization theorists can generate optimism among some, it is obvious that the crisis of the nation-state implies a crisis of democracy which is particularly problematic in less-developed communities and regions. Though partly acknowledged at the theoretical level, this situation is often overlooked pragmatically as talks about democracy continue to revolve around Liberal assumptions. Programs of economic development, protection of the environment, enhancement of the conditions of disenfranchised groups, protection of food consumers and other similar initiatives in rural regions call for forms of State intervention and monitoring based on public support obtained through direct or indirect representation. Because of the limits of the State and the related crisis of representation, it is clear that the issues of “whom” is represented and “who” does the monitoring remain largely undetermined.

In this context, efforts seem to be required at least at two interrelated levels: theoretically and pragmatically. Theoretically, a further scrutiny of the concept of democracy seems imperative. In a situation in which many

argue that the end of the cold war has left liberalism as the only viable form of democracy, the present historical conditions constitute arguments for rethinking the extent and meanings of the concept. The contribution of Reflexive Modernization is a welcome addition. However, attempts which philosophically transcend traditional liberal understandings of democracy should be reintroduced to strengthen the debate. More importantly, discourses which underscore the limits of the *liberal representation* should gain space. The fracture of the spatial unity between community and the State leaves little room for democratic utilizations of this notion. Pragmatically, too often socially oriented initiatives, such as community development actions, pro-environmental initiatives, programs for the enhancement of the quality of life of rural residents, and programs for the improvement of the quality of agricultural activities, take for granted the State's ability to effectively represent its citizens and control unwanted socio-economic events. Though these initiatives need to continue, it is obvious that their assumptions and directions require scrutiny. The community of social scientists is called into question here, as we play major roles in the task of carrying out efforts of this nature. It is to our disciplinary societies and to our practitioners that the call for critical reevaluation of assumptions and practice is directed. As pointed out by John Stuart Mill, the broadening of the debate and the critical evaluation of alternative proposals constitute the most fundamental premises for the establishment of substantive democracy.

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