

Decolonizing the urban

COORDINATOR

Carlos B. Vainer

IPPUR / UFRJ, Brazil

carlosvainer@ippur.ufrj.br

PANEL

Agustin Lao-Montes

FLACSO, Ecuador

Ananya Roy

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, USA

Raquel Rolnik

Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

Vera Telles

Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

Sophie Oldfield

University of Cape Town, South Africa

One of the main claims in the debates we all have been engaged in refers to the understanding that "center-periphery" (How to name ourselves? We must also revisit the discussions on this and other analytical categories that we use to talk about "us": global south, periphery, and so on) can't be reduced to a descriptive emplacement notionrelationships are not only economic, politic, cultural.... They are intellectual as well. Post-colonial studies, subaltern studies, decolonial studies point out the need of a theory or of theories able to produce a perspective and a critical thought "at the periphery" or, better, "from the periphery". The development of the concepts of ethnocentrism, centercentrism, westerncentrism, cultural imperialism, coloniality of power and knowledge, among others, as well the seminal works by Said (Orientalism) and Fanon (The Wretched of the World) demonstrated the relevance of center-periphery relationship in the making and diffusing of (social) theories intended as universal explanations about different social, economic, politic and cultural realities. In the field of urban and regional studies and planning, the critical literature on policy

mobility, diffusion of models, multilateral agencies, international consultants have shown that urban and regional knowledge and policies are a chapter on the uneven distribution of the means of production and dissemination of models and, consequently, on the uneven conditions of making territories, cities, metropolises, regions... The challenge is quite clear: to make "our own theory", i.e., decolonize the ways we think peripheral cities (and peripheries of central cities). New theory(ies) and new narrative(s) cannot be produced without going beyond local studies and monographic approaches. When we talk about a peripheral perspective, we are thinking not only a peripheral perspective about peripheries, but also a peripheral perspective of the complex fabric of uneven relations connecting multiple scales - local, regional, national. How to do it in the field of urban and regional studies and planning? How to build a platform of territorial knowledge which is not that produced and dominated by a geographic imaginary, imagination or imagery nurtured in the Northern context and Northern cities and landscapes? (Even if it is elaborated from the point of view of the critical theory). What are the possibilities of an alternative thinking in a world where the means of production and dissemination of knowledge (theory) are uneven distributed? How to avoid and escape of "ideas out of place" (Schwartz), these concepts and representations about our realities that have been conceived in other "worlds"? We are aware that a lot of work has already been done in different parts of world. In peripheral spaces and in the center by different kinds of critical intellectuals: a) intellectuals from the periphery based in peripheral universities that have been able to escape to the coloniality of knowledge and try to overcome the limits imposed by their peripheral position; b) intellectuals from the periphery based in the center (central universities); and c) in some cases, intellectuals from the North, rooted and based in central universities, who have been working on and contributing to a non-ethnocentric/northern-centered knowledge. Many times, because of the obstacles we face to circulate the outcomes of these efforts, often dispersed and blocked by the language frontiers, there is also a need to collect, gather, integrate and confront the intellectual production already available. If we aim to build a collective effort to face these challenges, we ought to build an agenda or program that should necessarily include the discussion of: - Theoretical framework and conceptual tools: the very

conceptualization of theory, the nature of the knowledge needed and currently produced, the concepts or family of concepts needed; local/national and universal meanings, translations - Methodological tools: local studies, comparative approaches, etc. - A preliminary research program - main issues and topics to address - A networking strategy.