

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyse how Brazilian elites view poverty and social inequality and to offer some preliminary comparisons with Bangladesh and South Africa (this volume). My own research began a few years ago and was originally inspired by the revealing studies of Sidney Verba and his associates about elite views in the United States, Sweden and Japan (Verba *et al.* 1987). Concerned about the issue of poverty and intrigued by the extreme inequality that characterises Brazilian society, I set myself the task of identifying the elite's cognitive and evaluative perceptions of such issues. Together with a small group of colleagues, in 1993–94, I conducted a broader survey on the political culture of four elite sectors in Brazil: top state technocrats/bureaucrats, members of the National Congress, top business leaders, and union leaders (Reis and Cheibub 1995, 1996).

Later on, through contacts with the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP), it became possible to expand the Brazilian project, making it comparative to studies of elites in other less-developed societies.<sup>1</sup> Through CROP, I entered into contact with De Swaan, Manor and Oyén, and together we established a plan to investigate the views on poverty held by several elite sectors. Inspired by the work of De Swaan (1988) on the origins of welfare policies in Europe, we wrote a paper that has served as our common theoretical understanding and that has in a way guided the individual country studies now underway (De Swaan *et al.* 1998).

Naturally, each of the national studies has its own peculiarities, reflecting not only the objective conditions of the elites' physical setting but also the research commitments of each one of us. However, apart from the shared theoretical background mentioned above, we also agreed upon the types of elite sectors to be interviewed and upon a general set of questions to be investigated.

In my view, this joint enterprise constitutes a good example of what collaborative research can achieve. While preserving our freedom to explore

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<sup>1</sup> The home page address for the Research Network of the International Social Science Council is [www.crop.org](http://www.crop.org).

# Elite Perceptions of Poverty: Brazil

**Elisa P. Reis**

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particular questions, we have established the common conditions needed to compare across countries. Comparison constitutes the social sciences' best proxy for laboratory conditions. By comparing national elites, perhaps we can better understand the supply of social policies and be able to tackle some of its limitations in counteracting poverty.

In what follows, I first comment on the magnitude and main characteristics of poverty in Brazil. I then describe how the elites view the problem both in cognitive and normative terms. For this purpose, I use information provided by my previous survey research, as well as by in-depth interviews I am currently conducting. My research material also includes a large sample of articles signed by members of the elite in some of the most important Brazilian newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in the third section, I call attention to major convergences and divergences in the perceptions of the Brazilian elites and those of the elites in Bangladesh and South Africa. Despite the preliminary nature of this comparative exercise, it allows me the opportunity to reflect briefly on the relationships between values and beliefs, on the one hand, and concrete interests, on the other.

## 2 Poverty and Inequality in Brazil

What proportion of the Brazilian population is poor? According to official statistics for 1990, around 30% of the total population, or 42,000,000 people, can be deemed poor, while those living in extreme poverty totaled 12%, or 16,600,000 (Rocha 1995). Poverty is more acute in the countryside, where 70.5% of families live below the poverty line – defined as a per capita income less than half the legal minimum wage, which is around US\$110 per month (IPEA 1992). We also know that poverty is more severe among blacks than whites, hits females harder than males, and is more widespread among those living in the northeast than those in southern and southeast Brazil. As has been often mentioned, if you are a black female living in the rural northeast of Brazil, you have a 95% chance of being poor.

However, the large majority of the poor live in urban areas. Rocha (1995) estimated that more than two thirds of the Brazilian poor reside in urban centres.

Even in the less urbanised northeast, the absolute number of poor people is much higher in urban areas, a fact that reflects the country's high rates of urbanisation in recent decades. As indicated in Figure I, in 1996 slightly more than one fifth of the population lived in the countryside, a sharp contrast to the situation in the early sixties when more than half of Brazilians were rural. Official data for 1996 indicate that 78.4% of the population lives in urban areas. There are, however, significant variations across regions: while in the wealthier southeast close to 90% of the population is urban, the figure for the northeast is 65.2% (IBGE 1996).

The demographic trends described above are part and parcel of many important changes in economic and social conditions, changes that put heavy pressure on the supply of public goods and services, and that make the exclusionary nature of the modernisation process much more visible. The weight of the informal sector has grown persistently, as evinced by the fact that in 1990–91 there were 23,000,000 urban workers in informal activities, and 4,000,000 unemployed.

If we opt to include criteria in addition to income, the portrait of the human development process does not get much better. Looking at education, we observe that Brazilians have 5.3 years of schooling on the average, a very low figure compared to countries of similar economic performance (IBGE 1996). The proportion of illiterates among those who are 15 or older is 14.7%, but in the northeast it reaches 28.7%. Infant mortality rates are also higher in Brazil than in countries of its own income group and even than much poorer societies: 44 per 1,000 in 1997.

Taking rates of violence into account as another indicator of a country's welfare level, we observe that Brazil ranks very poorly: based on death certificates, health ministry data for 1995 indicate there were 24.1 homicides per 1,000 inhabitants. The data in Table 1 help us place that figure into comparative perspective. We can infer from it that the Brazilian figure is high even when compared to the average for the whole group of developing countries.

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<sup>2</sup> The sample of press articles on poverty and inequality signed by elite persons was drawn from the two largest

newspapers of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Fortaleza.

**Table 1: Average violence rates by groups of countries**

Group	Homicides per 1,000 Inhabitants	No. of Countries
Less developed	4.2	14
Developing	12.7	52
Industrialised	4.7	42
<b>All Countries</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>108</b>

Source: Kahn (1998)

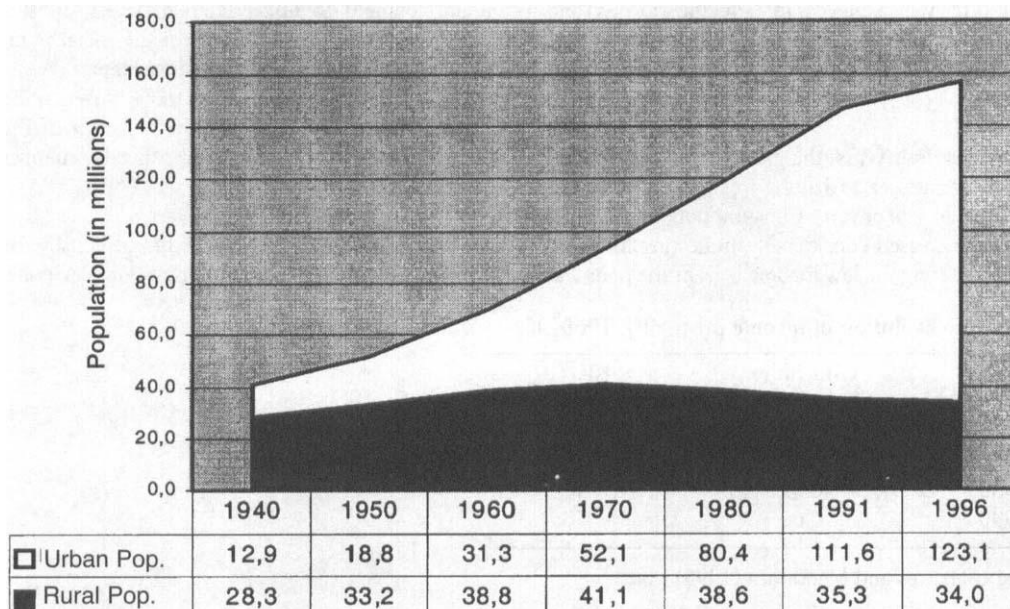
As has been observed, the high levels of violence in Latin America express a combination of factors, which include fast modernisation, rapid social dislocation, social anomie, poverty, extreme inequalities, and a political tradition of authoritarianism. Even if we leave aside the controversial idea that poverty causes violence, there is reliable evidence in the Brazilian case that the poor are more vulnerable to violence: criminality rates are much higher in poor neighborhoods, as has been observed by researchers in this area.

While poverty is a serious problem in Brazil, it is critical to observe that the country as such cannot be considered 'poor' according to standard economic indicators. Thus, taking into account aggregate national income, Brazil is among the 20% of wealthier countries in the world, with a per capita

GDP of US\$ 5,037.13 (Scalon, forthcoming). What makes its poverty problem particularly acute are the immense disparities one finds between social groups. This makes the poverty problem as much a social as an economic puzzle. The data in Table 2 put into comparative perspective the degree of inequality prevailing in Brazil. In recent years the country has disputed the position of being the most unequal society in the world; its competitors are Botswana, South Africa and Sierra Leone.

Contrary to expectations, modernisation and economic growth did not reduce the gap between rich and poor in Brazil. As Table 3 shows, the Gini index for 1960 already indicated a high degree of social inequality, but this grew persistently thereafter, regardless of the ups and downs in GDP growth rates. The growth of inequality in recent Brazilian

**Figure 1: Brazil: urban and rural population, 1940–96**



**Table 2: Ratio of incomes of top 10% and bottom 40% of distribution in selected countries**

Country	Proportion	Country	Proportion
Latin America		Industrialised	
Brazil	5.8	Australia	1.6
Colombia	2.8	Canada	1.3
Venezuela	2.4	Denmark	1.3
Africa		Italy	1.3
Botswana	4.8	United States	1.6
Ghana	1.7	Asia	
Ivory Coast	2.8	Malaysia	2.5
		India	1.4
		Bangladesh	1.1

Source: United Nations (1991)

history is even more dramatically illustrated when we look instead at the ratio between the income of the top 10% and bottom 10% of the income pyramid.

Inequality is a very salient issue in Brazil, as may be deduced from its recurrence in the media. After 20 years of military rule, the initial stages of the transition to democracy brought to light strong demands 'to redeem the social debt', a common expression in the mid-eighties. The first ten years of re-democratisation (1985-94) saw much progressive social legislation and talk of lending true meaning to the term 'citizenship rights', but a close look reveals that little was achieved in reducing poverty and inequality. High inflation rates acted as regressive taxation, neutralising any gains accruing to poor sectors.

In the last four years, the government has directed all of its energies to halting inflation. Success has helped alleviate poverty. Consumption of basic food staples increased considerably, indicating that simply preserving the low income level of the poor was

a strong anti-poverty mechanism. But no progress was made as regards inequality levels, which increased. The high interest rates maintained to attract foreign capital favoured upper social echelons in particular, since they could opt for financial investments.

Poverty alleviation helped the incumbent president secure an easy re-election, but there are serious indications that the economic strategy adopted to curb inflation has reached a dead-end. On top of aggravated unequal distribution, one now sees inflation coming back while economic recession is growing ever more severe, pushing unemployment to unprecedented levels. In this negative context, the extremes of the social pyramid are moving farther and farther apart, while the middle classes are likely to move closer to the bottom. This may aggravate the isolation of the elites and eventually prompt unexpected changes in politics and policies.

Of course, there are serious technical constraints that make economic redistribution a complex issue.

**Table 3: Evolution of income inequality, 1960-90**

Year	Gini Index	10+/10-
1960	0.50	34
1970	0.56	40
1980	0.59	47
1990	0.60	78

Source: Barros and Mendonca (1995)

However, the realisation that there is enough wealth to overcome severe poverty is at once hopeful and disconcerting. It at first suggests that, since the means are in principle available, one must count on good, willing elites for a successful programme to eradicate poverty. A second thought suggests that the scale of ongoing inequalities is such that the rich do not feel responsible for those living in utter poverty. An overly wide gap between social extremes does not permit a sense of generalised social community (Reis 1998). Rather, we may find a situation where social responsibility shrinks among those who could either engage themselves in the fight against poverty or else provide the support needed for public action. In any case, it remains critical to take into account that what the elites think about social deprivation and about the patterns of distribution prevailing in their milieu are important issues when we address poverty and inequality problems.

### 3 Elite Views

Whether they are moved by charitable concerns, by fear of individual or collective violence, or by profit considerations that demand better workers and more consumers, the truth is that the way elites look at poverty and inequality is a key indicator to the likelihood that effective anti-poverty initiatives will be undertaken in any society. Whether measures will be taken to ameliorate the lot of the poor depends upon the willingness of those who control available resources.

To say that the elites do matter is not to deny that pressures from below are important. The elites' attitudes and behaviour often constitute a response to such pressures. In any case, short of revolutionary situations, the established elites necessarily play a key role in supporting and/or implementing actions or inactions vis-à-vis poverty.

To say that elites affect policy decisions is not to say that every member of the elite is a decision-maker. Some do indeed act in that capacity but others are relevant because they influence decision-makers, form public opinion, have the means to act in order to make policies effective, etc. Moreover, the various sectors of the elite may have different perceptions of poverty and inequality, and some groups with atypical views could play a role in

shaping distribution patterns. This suggests that research efforts to compare the views of different elite sectors may contribute to our knowledge of how to devise more effective policies. Right now, however, I will concentrate on the typical views of Brazilian elites, as do my colleagues who analyse elites in Bangladesh and South Africa.

There is indeed a large margin of agreement among the various elite sectors in Brazil, as indicated by my random sample and well illustrated by the in-depth interviews. Notwithstanding the fact that the institutional position which the individual occupies plays a distinctive role in shaping their perceptions, there is indeed a wide margin of agreement across sectors, making for a well-identifiable core of common views. In short, it is possible to say that elites share common values, norms, and opinions on key social issues. In this sense, summarising the major conclusions of my survey research, I would say that:

- The elite confers a high priority to social problems. Answering questions framed in various ways, the respondents always ranked poverty, inequality, poor housing, health, and educational conditions among the country's major problems. With the exception of inflation rates, which at the time reached three digits per annum, social problems were always placed at the top, whether the question posed was open or closed. No matter what elite sector the individual belonged to, he (there were no women in the elite sample!) would rank issues of social policy before economic and political problems.
- Regardless of the elite sector, everybody favours investments in education as the best way to fight poverty and reduce inequality. One could speak of a national elite consensus on the priority of education as a policy target.
- Other top concerns in the discourse of the elites were land redistribution and investments in public health. The first point deserves a closer look as landless people have long been mobilised in the most active social movement in the country, while at the same time efforts to pass agrarian reform laws have persistently failed.
- There are indications that what lies behind the preference for agrarian reform is the optimistic

expectation that land redistribution would improve living conditions in the large cities where the elite lives. They appear to have a dream of exporting the poor to the countryside, where they could not only produce for their own consumption but even generate a marketable surplus.

- Consistent with the previous observation was the fact that respondents would systematically mention high criminality rates and pressure on the provision of public goods in large cities as the major consequences of poverty and inequality. They would blame poverty and inequality for the lack of personal security, dirty and dangerous public spaces, and related problems.
- The different elite sectors conferred priority to voluntaristic factors as major explanations for the failure of public policy in addressing inequality issues in Brazil. In the elites' view, lack of political will is the first reason why social policies fail. Next come bad planning and bureaucratic inefficiency, which are also factors blamed on the actors rather than on structural constraints.
- If the elites in Brazil place poverty and inequality as leading problems facing the country, and if they allegedly experience extreme inequality as embarrassing, they tend to confer upon the state all the blame for the persistence of such problems. The elite do not feel responsible for changing the picture, not even when they act inside the state as top bureaucrats or politicians. The state that they reproach for not taking action is an abstraction, not the set of institutions in which they themselves often operate.
- But if in the elites' view the state has not displayed the required political will to do its job, they are not prepared to confer upon civil society the role of fighting poverty and inequality. With the exception of religious leaders, the elites tend to be skeptical about the contribution of NGOs and non-state actors in general in dealing with poverty problems.

The above findings have been widely corroborated in the in-depth interviews recently conducted.<sup>3</sup> While I have focused my research on elites active either at the federal level or in four large state capital cities (Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the centre south and Salvador and Fortaleza in the northeast), the various elite sectors living in different parts of the country tend to converge when it comes to their cognitive and evaluative opinions about poverty, inequality, and preferred ways of coping with such issues. It is curious how the answers to the survey questionnaire and the opinions expressed in the unstructured interviews are similar. This suggests to me that there is a consensus ideology about poverty and inequality among the elites. In Gramscian terms, one could say there is a hegemonic view of the problem (Gramsci 1966). Within the 'orthodox' view, everyone agrees that inequality is too high; that something must be done; that education is the best channel for lifting people out of poverty.

The picture sketched above is an intriguing one. For one thing, we deal with an elite very sensitive to the social inequality prevailing in its own society. An elite that feels threatened by the consequences of social exclusion and blames a lack of political will for the 'dangerous' status quo but who nevertheless does not feel responsible for changing things. Such findings draw a very different picture from the one De Swaan shows for European elites, who in the past ended up seeing welfare policies as the most adequate way of coping with the negative externalities of poverty (De Swaan 1988). Will the comparison with other national elites today reveal Brazilian elites to be closer to their contemporaries? The next topic addresses this comparison.

#### **4 Comparing Elite Views Across Continents**

If I had to make just one single statement based on the comparison of the three national elites examined in this issue, I would say that in general Brazilian elites seem closer to their South African counterparts than to the Bangladeshi elites. In many ways, it is possible to see that in the former countries those who control most of the resources share some common perceptions with regards to poverty

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<sup>3</sup> The qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews is at a very preliminary stage. To compensate for that I have also used the information available from the sample of

newspapers articles. For statistical analysis of the findings commented here see Reis and Cheibub (1995, 1997).

and inequality. Yet there are significant differences in their views as well, as there are commonalities that the elites of Bangladesh do share with those in Brazil and/or South Africa.

As in South Africa, the elites in Brazil tend to confer priority to economic policy issues over social policy. They would like to contend that, when the 'national cake grows', everybody gets a piece. In both cases, the normative expectation is that the state would do better by creating greater opportunities for the private sector to generate more wealth, which, they argue, naturally trickles down to the less privileged. Realism, though, makes elites in both countries recognise that impressive development rates are not likely in the near future. So they are compelled to think of alternatives.

The elites in both countries place responsibility for alleviating poverty mainly upon the state. If they believe economic growth is the best way to fight poverty, the elites tend to think of the state, not of civil society, as the natural provider of short-term, emergency initiatives. Even if they do not reject voluntary initiatives, in normative terms they see public authority as the legitimate actor responsible for implementing social policies. Their skepticism with regards to non-governmental actors contrasts sharply with the view of the elites in Bangladesh who, as reported by Hossain and Moore, clearly trust voluntary initiative over government action as the most efficient anti-poverty alternative.

Actually, even if not always explicitly, it seems that in these three national cases, the preference for state or civil society initiatives mixes normative and cognitive concerns. That is to say, whatever the revealed preference, it is justified both in ideological and pragmatic terms. Thus, elites in Brazil tend to perceive non-governmental action as uncoordinated, inefficient, and irregular. Furthermore, they attribute to public authority the moral duty to do something against poverty.

One could perhaps suggest that the difference between Brazil and South Africa, on the one hand, and Bangladesh, on the other, reflects the degree of stateness in their respective societies. While the former have long lived with solid state structures, sharply differentiated from civil society, in the latter the relative newness of the state, coupled with a

religious tradition that does not separate private from public responsibilities, contributes to the positive evaluation of philanthropic initiatives and of NGOs. Further investigation will be needed to validate this line of interpretation.

While Brazil and South Africa are both highly unequal societies with income differentials among the largest in the world, it is interesting to observe that the Brazilian elites seem to be much more aware of this fact than their South African counterparts. The latter, as observed by Kalati and Manor in this volume, tend to play down South Africa's rates of inequality, always mentioning there are countries like Brazil and India that are more unequal than their own society. Brazilians instead always refer to Brazil's shameful leadership when it comes to social inequality, and the expression 'social apartheid' to refer to the prevailing patterns of social exclusion is common sense in their discourse.

Perhaps because they live with so much inequality, elites in Brazil and South Africa are very fearful of the consequences poverty may have on their personal safety. Unlike their Bangladeshi counterpart, who tends to see the poor as the repository of social morality, the other two cannot help but feel their personal security threatened by high urban criminality.

However, while in the European past the 'great fear' the elites felt in relation to the lower classes contributed to the adoption of collective measures against poverty, the reaction in the two national cases referred to here is quite different. Elites in Brazil and in South Africa like to believe that life in rural areas is much less harsh for the poor. Ignoring rural poverty as they do in South Africa, or idealising a non-existent agrarian reform as in Brazil, these national elites seem to prefer to remove the threatening poor from their surroundings rather than back social policies to improve the lot of the socially excluded within their surroundings. Once again, the contrast with the discourse of the elites in Bangladesh is striking, but likewise noticeable is the fact that the latter do not face the high urban criminality rates afflicting other two.

While in the three national studies, education is perceived as the best channel for overcoming poverty, it is noticeable that this consensus does not

find very strong correspondence in policy efforts. All three countries have more or less successful educational policies, and progress in educating the poor has been reported. However, the spectacular results one could expect from the consensual priority accorded to education are not forthcoming. In relative terms, educational policies in South Africa have been more successful in improving the lot of the poor than in Brazil (Lam 1998).

It should also be recalled that the consensual preference for educational policies may entail different expectations with regards to distributive measures. Thus, as Hossain and Moore observe, elites in Bangladesh tend to see education primarily as an empowering mechanism. In their view, the educated poor become conscious of their power potential and realise there are alternative forms of action for overcoming poverty. Therefore, self-awareness and autonomy are the major values these elites attribute to educating the poor.

For the Brazilian elites, priority on public investments in education is perceived as a kind of painless solution to poverty. They tend to perceive education as the efficient non-zero sum solution: through education everyone may grow richer without redistribution. Brazilian elites believe everyone should have equal opportunity to reap the fruits of development. But they are not willing to accept that in order to establish equal conditions, you might have to offer special conditions to those who have been persistently impaired so they are effectively able to compete. Thus, while there is widespread recognition that blacks and women are discriminated against, the elites are not prepared to accept affirmative action in either case, arguing that positive discrimination would impair equality. Nor are the elites personally committed to improving education. And if one takes into account the fact that there is a deficit in the supply of schools, both in elementary and secondary education, it becomes clear that indeed the lack of will to meet the problem is a fact.

Social segmentation in the terms discussed by Kalati and Manor is a more complex issue in comparisons across countries. Actually, just what sort of segmentation is more conducive to supporting anti-poverty measures is hard to say. For one thing, both universalistic and particularistic loyalties may be said to

create obstacles to effective social policies. Thus, Kalati and Manor indicate that the broad national identity of South African elites makes them very distant from the poor, relative to the Bangladeshi elites, who have a sense of moral responsibility towards those who are worse off within their much more restricted social segment.

Yet, personal responsibility towards one's 'clan' does not necessarily imply that a sense of urgency should be conferred upon social policy. In their analysis, Hossain and Moore arrive at a conclusion that the elites in Bangladesh do not perceive poverty as an urgent issue *per se*. While it is true that the elites have a benign attitude towards the poor, they tend to favor long-term solutions, and even to extend the problem of poverty to encompass other national priorities.

The broader and less sharply defined lines of segmentation that characterise South Africa vis-à-vis Bangladesh may contribute to reducing the sense of personal responsibility felt by elite people, but on the other hand they make it more feasible to establish a national project that sets reduction of poverty and inequality as a goal. In the peculiar political circumstance of South Africa, a national project plays a strategic role in promoting anti-poverty measures. As Kalati and Manor correctly observe, although poor economic performance may hamper the mystique of nationalism, for the time being national development is a key element to ANC's legitimacy and, I would add, to the enforcement of welfare measures. That South Africa does better than Brazil in reducing the educational gap between both black and white and between poor and rich has to be explained in part as a direct consequence of the challenge there to build a new nation.

It may be true, as many have observed, that the nation-state is an outdated phenomenon, and that nationalism as an ideology is quickly losing ground in the globalised world. But is it also true that where national ideals are still powerful, it is easier to mobilise collective solidarity to promote policies that fight poverty. That is to say, in principle, where a stronger feeling of nation is at play, there seems to be greater sensibility to poverty and inequality issues.

The fate of the poor may be gloomier when neither the national bond invoked by the ANC leadership



nor the direct tie to one's social segment observed in Bangladesh plays an important role in framing the elites' agenda. This is perhaps the case of Brazil, where, despite the elites' high sensitivity to social problems, no active commitment to a social policy agenda develops.

Are we to conclude then that, in the absence of strong national or primordial communitarian identities, we should not expect elites to be willing to support the fight against poverty? Perhaps one way out of such a fatalistic trap is to look at elite values not as fixed, residual essences but as variables which interact with their actual interests. The interplay between values and interests makes it possible to understand why European elites have in the past ended up embracing collective solutions in confronting the negative externalities of poverty.

It is true that elites in the less developed world today do not experience the same kind of threats that the Europeans did. Thus, neither contagious diseases, nor political rebellion – some of the negative consequences European elites feared most – appear to be relevant in the discourse of the three national elites compared here. Realistically, they know that advances in public health have considerably reduced the danger of epidemic diseases. They also know that under the present political circumstances revolutionary upheavals are very unlikely.

However, as observed in Brazil and South Africa, elites in many countries today do fear private violence and are likely to invest in personal safety. What will make them opt for collective instead of individual alternatives against violence and criminality? The search for answers to such a question is paramount today if one's objective is to arrive at effective social policies. What improves the chances that elites will consider it worthwhile, for whatever reasons, to improve the lot of the poor? What raises their stakes in anti-poverty measures?

Is this quest for interest motivation a denial of the relevance of cultural values and attitudes? Not at all. I believe that instead of positing values and interests as mutually exclusive ways of understanding motives for action and/or inaction, it is more productive to see them both as interests. That is to say, ideals or values as well as material concerns constitute powerful motivational components that lead

people to act. Therefore, we avoid the trap of posing ideals and norms, on the one hand, and rational interests, on the other, as alternative explanations for human behaviour (Weber 1967; Bendix 1962).

Looking at the interplay of pragmatic concerns and ideals improves our ability to understand why certain policy initiatives find support while others do not, or why some succeed and others fail. As with any other policies, measures to combat poverty have to be both efficient and legitimate if they are to be successful. And legitimacy is always built on values, norms, and other components of social perceptions.

Discussing the views of elites in Bangladesh, Brazil, and South Africa, there is no doubt that the concrete environment they experience does affect their respective images of poverty and inequality. But that does not necessarily lead to the mechanical conclusion that their values and beliefs are mere reflections of the structures they live with. Nor is one forced to accept the opposite orthodoxy, meaning that culture and ideology create reality, when acknowledging that the different perceptions of poverty expressed by distinct national elites derive to some extent from much deeper differences in their world views.

The fact that, for example, one could work with the hypothesis that the greater personal responsibility for the poor observed in Bangladesh, relative to Brazil and South Africa, is rooted in basic values of Muslim civilisation does not rule out the fact that the weak degree of stateness there leaves room for a preference for voluntary anti-poverty action. In the same sense, to state that the Brazilian elites prefer authority initiatives to solidarity measures to counteract poverty reveals Latin cultural values as much as it reveals the reality of concrete market interests.

As De Swaan (1988) observed, historically the rise of welfare policies in Western Europe can be interpreted as the combined result of decisions made by rationally oriented elites to protect themselves against 'public evils', plus the active engagement of morally committed ideologists. It would certainly constitute a significant advance if we could identify equivalent combinations of ideological and pragmatic concerns that would maximise the chances of success in reducing poverty in contemporary societies.

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