THE CITY AND THE OTHERS, QUITO 1860–1940: HYGIENISM, ORNAMENTATION AND POLICY.

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“The city and the others” when one makes a between-the-lines reading of the theme brings a subjacent reflection on the theoretical choices and postures adopted vis-à-vis the continuous challenge of constructing a historical narrative in the light of primary sources and historiographical discussions. This is why Quito at the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century is dealt with by looking at it from a plurality of documental sources and under a perspective of multiple factors (economic, social, cultural and urbanistic ones) which lead to the continuous relationship of the city with the others being revealed. Who are the others? This is the challenge taken up by the historian Eduardo Kingman Garcés who by working exhaustively on first-class historical documentation, brings to the fore aspects of hygienism, ornamentation and policy as urban regulations which have been prepared by others - “unknown”, the fruit of an urban society in growth which protagonized the blurring of the colonial apparatus – during a transition phase (1860 – 1940) to modernity.

This is a modernity which is not part of a theoretical category highlighted by authors examined in a book such as that of Luis Alberto Romero (1997) and others, but of a historical notion constructed at a certain time and in a certain space. Such a notion is revealed to its foundations by means of investigating the documental sources of the age, although without ignoring the theoretical discussions and the drawing up of concepts imbued with the reflections of Marx, Weber, Elias, Habermas, Goffman, De Certeau, Bourdieu, and Sennet. Therefore, the author affirms that various modernities existed which came into play with diverse cultural processes, as in the historical context of the city of Quito between the period 1860-1940. The temporal section, according to Kingman, looms imprecisely as it sets the limits on a moment when colonial tradition moved on to modernity or “peripheral modernity” (Sarlo 1999), thus making it difficult to attempt to make linear time-periods due, mainly, to the types of sources used in the investigation.

There follows the plural investigation of the historical sources focused on the regulations related to hygiene (a notion which was being consolidated through social medicine, introduced by the environmental health or hygiene experts of the age), ornamentation (the aesthetic and hierarchical criteria for ornamenting the city) and policy (the institution, in the widest sense of safeguarding, which was committed to the wheels of power and social institutions). Kingman (2006: 342) works with the sources guided by the polyphony put forward by Baktin (1988), and points out the possibility of interpreting different voices who come forward from different angles in the historical narrative, ranging from an indigenous member of a guild to a member of the highest layer or an intellectual. Among the sources, it is possible to highlight official correspondence and requests, regulation and codes for policy, newspapers, photographs, maps and plans of the city, poems and even the record of oral testimony. An immense and rich documental diversity,
revealing the sensibility and skill of the investigator in handling and dealing with the sources.

In the whirl of tackling documental sources on the urbe referred to and specific and general concepts in debates, the idea arises of the “seigneurial city” and is stressed by the author. This definition is shaped in the first and, more emphatically, in the second part of the book, not as a typology, but as a mode of analysis which measures the outgrowth and limits of modernity in Quito. This measurement is sign-posted on the horizon of everyday relations (Certeau 1995) the traditional and the new inserted into a “field of forces” as defined by Foucault (1980), conditioned by regulations and the apparatus of power and by the relations between the classes. The thermometer of Kingman’s work is these relationships and it traces in an evident way what is determining for him – the social and the forms in which it is represented.

The social and the forms in which it is represented are immersed in the midst of aspects of different fields of analysis undertaken during the investigation: urban history and that of medicine. These fields of investigation are present in the author’s work to the extent that they form a dialogue in the ambit of the theoretical and methodological dimensions of social history (Thompson 1979) and of power relations (Foucault 1980). The author himself subscribes to the field of “urban social history and its imaginaries” (Kingman 2006: 270-271), and manages to do so by means of the amalgam of central concepts of social history (moral economics), of anthropology (economics of symbolic exchanges), urban history (morphology, architecture and urban space) and of power relations (microphysics of power). Eduardo Kingman makes a critique of many papers inspired by Foucault, to the extent that these renounce the undertaking of creative work, based on reading and criticism of documental sources.

The twin function of documenting and interpreting is one of the features which most strongly characterizes Kingman’s work. In addition, his work endeavours to tackle one of the most neglected fields of historical investigation – the urban. Although the author does not commit himself to the field in question, his study takes the city as the starting point, for the intention is concentrated on interpreting the urban regulations for administering the population (ornamentation, policy and hygienism). These regulations are described as resources for the representation of land organization of the social, in which the city is conceived as a metaphor (Sennet 1997). Aspects of urban history like morphology, are interpreted as the result of the expressions of exchanges in the relations between the classes. These relations were expressed to the extent that the city expanded and diversified by means of cultural policy and of the imaginaries formed at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, conditioned on the functioning of social life. The clash of the new with the old hierarchical order marked the shape of the city by means of the social stratification of the space and of the forms that represented it. Therefore, tradition and modernity in Quito complemented one another historically, reproducing a “traditional modernization”, which was incipient and excluding as the author proves in the third part of the book.

In the fourth and last part of the book, the author deals directly with the regulations referring to the notions of policy, ornamentation, hygienism and urban planning. The relationship of the city with the other is amply fashioned in the practices and representations of the first modern urban policies, showing also the actions of the first hygienists and the policies for organizing urban space by means of new criteria that stood out. The “anti-tuberculosis league” represented one of these criteria and was characterized by the authority that it exerted in the first few decades of the 20th century, when its action targeted the demolition of insalubrious housing. In the same period,
similar actions took place in Brazilian cities such as Recife, Pernambuco – “The league against tuberculosis” followed the same line of criteria.

The new criteria set out in the regulations, which helped to construct the imaginary and the cultural policy for Quito, seemed to draw close to the historical context of Latin America and, to a lesser degree, of European cities. This form of drawing closer together was most obviously expressed in the social relations involved in the imperceptible power games at this moment of transition. This culture which had been in formation since colonial times, arising from the exchanges negotiated by means of favors and personal interests, insists on remaining present in the cultural policies of Quito and Latin American policies right up to today. The negotiations so dear to the formation of the social imaginary, principally the Latin one – historical notions profoundly distorted by Enlightenment thinking and European modernity and adapted to a society marked by the colonial heritage.

A heritage that reproduced a mental structure committed to a traditional, statal and hierarchical society, being juxtaposed with another mental sphere which emerged in the context of urban growth, propelled by technology and by novelty. A work, without any doubt, which draws close to old discussions such as the work of Tulio Halperin Donghi on the “neocolonial regime” set up in Latin America from the mid-19th century, and reaching the early 20th century. At the same time, where are the forces of resistance to this system that will dynamize its transformations, since the author does not make dogmatic use of Foucaultian criteria? It is obvious that the author recognizes that there were possible forms of “counter-powers” which were projected against this power structure sedimented by traditional modernity. Nevertheless, he assures us that the type of historical documentation used does not allows us to make out distinct types of resistance, although he highlights the process of ruralization of society as one of the possibilities of resistance and escape from state controls. It is probable that the *history of the unconscious* has prevailed more in Kingman’s approach when he states that, rather than a system of domination, the urban mechanisms or regulations for administering the population have been seen as a field of imperceptible forces.