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Odaci Luiz Coradini

## The divergences between Bourdieu's and Coleman's notions of social capital and their epistemological limits

*Abstract.* With the ongoing expansion of the uses of the concept of social capital, the literature critical on these uses has also grown. The principal references in the literature on social capital are Coleman's and Bourdieu's conceptual definitions, with a strong quantitative prominence of the former. Bourdieu's definition of social capital is generally taken as a positive counterpoint, but it is merely allusive and does not go deeply into the theoretical and analytical implications. The principal objective of the present article is to demonstrate that one of the main problems in these criticisms revolving around the notion of social capital stems from its non-contextualized use, irrespective of its theoretical and epistemological bases. Such eclecticism can be very common in the social sciences, but in this specific case it is aggravated by the nominal coincidence of the notions originating in the work of Coleman and Bourdieu, which have different meanings.

*Keywords.* Bourdieu – Coleman – Educational qualifications – Social capital – Sociological theory

*Résumé.* En même temps que le recours au concept de capital social est de plus en plus fréquent, la littérature critique sur le sujet croît elle aussi. Les références principales pour la littérature sur le capital social sont les définitions conceptuelles de Coleman et de Bourdieu, avec une forte prééminence quantitative pour le premier. La définition du capital social chez Bourdieu sert généralement de contrepoint positif à celle de Coleman, mais il n'y est souvent fait référence que de manière allusive, sans en approfondir les implications théoriques et analytiques. Le but principal de cet article est de montrer que l'un des principaux problèmes dans la critique concernant la notion de capital social découle de ce que ce concept est utilisé hors contexte, coupé de ses bases théoriques et épistémologiques. Un tel éclectisme est courant en

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*sciences sociales, mais dans ce cas précis, il est amplifié par la coïncidence des dénominations utilisées dans l'œuvre de Coleman et de Bourdieu, qui recouvrent des significations différentes.*

**Mots-clés.** *Bourdieu – Capital social – Coleman – Formation/qualification – Théorie sociologique*

The uses of the concept of social capital have undergone enormous growth and expansion in the last few years. More recently, literature critical of or questioning these uses has also arisen. One of the principal axes of these criticisms is the use of the notion of social capital for political-ideological reasons and, more specifically, its transformation into an instrument of struggle in the service of certain social and political forces. A second axis of these criticisms focuses on problems of conceptual and operational definitions of social capital. The conceptual definitions of Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1980a) are the principal references in the literature on social capital, with a strong quantitative prominence of the former. Bourdieu's definition of social capital is generally taken as a positive counterpoint in this literature, since his definition of social capital is more accurate and not committed to political interests and prevailing ideologies. But this reference to Bourdieu's social capital is merely allusive, and does not discuss its theoretical and analytical implications in depth.

The main objective of the present article is to demonstrate that one of the principal problems in these confrontations and criticisms revolving around the notion of social capital stems from its decontextualized use, irrespective of its theoretical and epistemological bases. Such eclecticism can be very common in the social sciences, although in this particular case it is aggravated by the nominal coincidence of the notions originating in the work of Coleman and Bourdieu, which have different meanings.

The apprehension of these meanings thus requires that their respective notions of social capital are related to the conceptual framework and the epistemological basis in which they were formulated. This article does not present an exegesis of the work of these authors, because there are many of these available, but instead indicates that, for both Bourdieu and Coleman, the notion of social capital has a specific meaning. Second, it highlights some examples which present, on the one hand, positions critical of Coleman's concept of social capital and his followers in general, and, on the other, positive references to Bourdieu's notion. The following section summarizes this discussion more focused on the relations between social capital, schooling and the recruitment of the 'elite'.

## **Bourdieu's and Coleman's notions of social capital and their respective foundations**

When discussing Bourdieu's notion of social capital, it is necessary to take into account the very understanding of social sciences before considering insertion of the notion into his conceptual framework. One of its foundations is the differentiation of rationalities and means of action. Given the normativism which is at the base of Coleman's sociology, as explained below, it is necessary to highlight that Bourdieu conceives social sciences as having a rationality of their own, whose fundamental condition is their relative autonomy. Even without detailing the connections of those foundations to the legacy of M. Weber,<sup>1</sup> it is necessary to emphasize, firstly, the requirement of a rationality specific to social sciences based on 'applied rationalism', and thus a rupture with 'practical logics'. From this relative autonomy of sociology, or social sciences in general, follows the possibility of taking the struggles for legitimate classifications and the formulation and imposition of *universals* as the subject of analysis, which implies a distancing from any primordial adhesion to any social order (Bourdieu, 1991: 376; 1982, 1995).

Although it is elementary, in view of the resistance to the multidimensionality intended by this approach, the relationship of the different types of social capital with the processes of objectification and social legitimation must be underscored as well. The very structure of social space consists of force relations between both the amount and the different types of capital and the respective principles of legitimation and domination. Social position thus results from the amount and composition of the capital possessed. The emergence of a multidimensional social space implies the existence of a plurality of fields possessing more or less relative autonomy (Bourdieu, 1979: 109–85; 1989: 373–83). That is, if Western modernity is characterized by the rising relative autonomization of different spheres or fields, alternatively, these fields of action consist of the social and historical objectification of certain resources and the respective principles of legitimation with a greater or lesser degree of autonomy or heteronomy. These resources and principles of legitimation are of different orders, and display varying degrees of autonomy, contradiction between themselves and convertibility of constituent resources. These resources can be socially objectified and institutionalized and, consequently, converted into *titles*, whose value transcends the individual transience of the respective holder, considering that it is directly associated with the respective resource or capital and socially objectified principle of legitimation and hierarchization.

In short, Bourdieu's capital as accumulated labour is divided into two forms of social objectivation. The first is obtained by materialization and the second by individual 'incorporation'. These two forms of capital's objectivation depend on the time required for accumulation. The 'structure of the distribution of different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world'. Since 'depending on the field in which it functions, and the cost of the more or less extensive transformation ... capital can present itself in three fundamental guises': as economic capital, as cultural capital and as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 16–17). These different forms of capital and the multidimensionality of the underlying social structure are the starting point for his primary criticism of economics and particularly of human-capital theory. In general terms, the 'real logic of the functioning of capital, the conversions from one type to another ... cannot be understood unless two opposing but equally partial views are superseded': economism, which reduces capital to economic capital and ignores the specific efficacy of other forms of capital, and semiologism, which 'reduces social exchanges to phenomena of communication' (1986: 24).

In this perspective, it is precisely in the social objectification and institutionalization of social resources and principles of legitimation that one of the principal specificities of social capital is located. Unlike other types of capital, which constitute certain resources supported by their respective principles of legitimation together with their specific rules which refer to a space with a greater or lesser degree of social objectification, social capital is 'irreducible'. In other words, social capital is not objectifiable in any field, since it does not undergo any institutionalization or formalization process and, consequently, it is transformed into a *universal*. Its existence and utilization imply the presence of relationship networks originally formed for other ends (such as kinship, friendship, educational or professional fellowship) in spaces or fields and respective institutions. It should be noted that, as shown below, for Coleman, social capital is also 'particularistic, but in a completely different sense, that is, because it opposes *positions* that structure formal organizations, it is morally and socially positive and defensible. In Bourdieu's original definition, it is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable *network* of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. It is also the 'principle of social effects which, although they can be clearly seen at the level of singular agents ... cannot be reduced to the set of properties individually possessed by a given agent' (Bourdieu, 1980a: 2; original emphasis). Therefore, at least in the respective fields which constitute the spheres of professional activities in Western capitalistic societies,

social capital is never legitimate as such, since it contradicts the principle of legitimation of the respective objectified and instituted field, be it economic, from erudite culture, scholarly, educational, political or any other.

Therefore, the relationships of social capital with other types of capital depend on the historical conditions of social structures – to put it briefly, on conditions such as those of the *kabile* where, in the absence of historically constituted objective fields, domination is based on the accumulation and manipulation of symbolic capital, and personal relationships lie at one pole. Modern societies sit at the opposite extreme, in which social capital constitutes a negated resource in domination through structures legitimized by *universals*,<sup>2</sup> such as educational meritocracy. Under these conditions, the importance of social capital increases insofar as the situations and spheres closer to the ‘elite’ or to ‘politics’ are focused, and where all other resources and principles of legitimation have greater difficulty imposing themselves in an exclusive manner.

In short, what is at stake in the relationship between social capital and other types of capital is the problem of the social objectification of domination and the means of action, as well as the principles of legitimation supporting them. With the social objectification of the mechanisms of domination through the formation of fields, institutions and specialized agents, the importance of resources dependent on personal efforts for their maintenance diminishes. In their place are ‘strictly established and legally guaranteed relations between recognized positions, defined by their *rank* in a relatively autonomous space distinct from and independent of their actual and potential occupants, themselves defined by *entitlements* which, like titles of nobility, property titles or educational qualifications (*titres*), *authorize* them to occupy these positions’. Consequently, in opposition to personal authority:

the title, as a *measure of rank or order*, that is, as a formal instrument of evaluation of the agents’ positions in a *distribution*, makes it possible to set up quasi-perfect relations of commensurability (or equivalency) among agents defined as aspiring to the appropriation of a particular class of goods – real estate, precedence, office, privileges – and these goods are themselves classified. Thus the relations among agents can be durably settled as regards their legitimate order of access to these goods and to the groups defined by exclusive ownership of these goods. (Bourdieu, 1980b: 227; original emphasis)

But this does not imply an evolutionary process of global and total replacement of one mode of domination by another (as some parts of ‘modernization theory’ might suggest), with the contradictory coexistence of resources and distinct principles of legitimation, including those based on networks of personal relationships. As has been already mentioned, this definition is also the basis for the criticism of the theory of human capital and its unidimensionality, because it does not consider the distinct returns from educational

investments, given that these returns are dependent on cultural capital and social capital of origin and on the structure of its heritage (Bourdieu, 1986: 26; 1989: 391–2).

The effects of the affinities between lifestyles and the age of the group are increased, specifically in relation to the ‘elite’, contrary to a purely economic logic (Bourdieu, 1989: 453–4). Similarly, ‘the weight of social capital inherited from the family is felt in all sectors of the field of economic power. The successive operations of *cooption* that determine the selection of top executives (and, to a lesser degree, the careers of ordinary managers) are armed with criteria that are never completely reducible to academic qualifications, and still less, to what the latter are supposed to officially measure.’ Consequently, ‘it is from the past, in history, and from the age of the acquired rights that this managerial “elite” that claims to be future minded, finds the true principles of its selection, as well as the practical justifications for its privileges’ (1989: 439, 477; our translations). Moreover, as ‘social capital is so totally governed by the logic of knowledge and acknowledgment’, it ‘always functions as symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 28).

As social capital is not legitimate as such, relative to a certain field, its importance increases insofar as the ‘connections’ are more numerous and intense, but also *more hidden*. Much of its efficacy stems from the fact that these remain ‘unknown or even clandestine’, such as in the case of relatively distant family relations.<sup>3</sup> In summary:

if *social capital* is relatively difficult to reduce to other forms of capital and particularly to economic capital and cultural capital ..., without for all that being completely independent of them, however, because the capital held individually by an individual agent is increased by capital possessed *by proxy* that depends on the amount of capital held by each member of the groups to which they belong, and on the degree of integration of these groups, families, corporations, etc. .... (Bourdieu, 1989: 418)

Just as for Bourdieu, Coleman’s notion of social capital should be understood as being grounded in the respective conception of social science, its epistemological base and conceptual framework. Regarding the conception of social science or, more specifically, the sociology or the social science in general of Coleman, the differences with Bourdieu are at the very root and encompass the *raison d’être*, the conception of rationality, the relations between sociology, morality and practical actions, in general, and the other social sciences and particularly economics and, clearly, their conceptual frameworks. As previously mentioned, in Bourdieu there is the presupposition of social sciences’ own rationality, where a distance with respect to the ‘practical reasons’ of the world and social struggles is a necessary condition. For Coleman, social science or sociology are a form of social engineering at the service of a moral undertaking, whose principal problem to be addressed

and *raison d'être* is social integration and control. The epistemological foundations of this conception of sociology derive from two main sources: neoclassical economics, particularly Becker and Schultz's theory of human capital and the theory of rational choice. This is a position based on the 'theory of purposive action' and 'acceptance of a form of methodological individualism' (Coleman, 1986: 1310). Coleman himself highlights a series of reflections and demarcations concerning what he regards as excessive and atomistic individualism. Thus, he suggests simultaneously 'taking rational action as a starting point but rejecting the extreme individualistic premises that often accompany it'. As is further detailed below, this is the objective of introducing the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1988: 95, 97).

The introduction of notions such as social capital, primordial relationships or social system, in short, those seen as non-economic, can differentiate Coleman's approach in some aspects but cannot exclude it from neoclassical economics schemes and from the theory of rational choice. The presupposed rationality of action in these relations is also circumscribed in what is considered as purposive, disregarding not only any *sociologie des dispositions* but also everything beyond utilitarianism. Therefore, this expansion of the neoclassical economics schemes, particularly Becker's theory of human capital and rational choice, is based on a conception of rationality that some commentators criticize for being restricted to 'instrumental rationality' (Steiner, 2003: 214), but which would be better defined as merely utilitarian. This is, from Bourdieu's perspective (1980b: 84), a kind of anthropological construction or conception of human nature as *Homo economicus*, because in Bourdieu's perspective, 'different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question' (Bourdieu, 1986: 24). The inclusion of these non-economic relations in Coleman's approach constitutes a form of extension of the neoclassical economics schemes, and particularly Becker's theory of human capital, given that it inscribes all logic of action in that which is utilitarian. Furthermore, authors and works taken as the foundations of sociology lose importance, and the references to Durkheim, in general, include him more as a precursor of the preoccupation with the problems of social integration than as a source of analytical instruments.

In respect of the social sciences, Coleman's conceptions are based on social engineering as well as being a result of his subscription to the schemes of neoclassical economics and theory of rational choice. The social sciences at the service of a moral undertaking to address the problem of social integration and control would therefore not have a rationality of their own. Thus, the social sciences share the same rationality as the



protagonists in the social world, despite differences regarding the means of producing knowledge, a position similar to that of applied economics. For Coleman, with the erosion of primordial relationships and institutions and voluntary organizations, as a result of the growth of formal organizations, sociology itself would have acquired a 'reflexive position' (Coleman, 1986: 1319). However, this is something completely different from the reflexivity of the social sciences according to Bourdieu (2001: 167–84; 1995), whereby their reflexivity consists of the examination of their own objectification and that of social conditionings as well as the search for greater autonomy as social science. For Coleman, reflexivity means greater efficacy as an instrument of moral undertaking in view of its role as a 'guide', as an 'organizational designer'. The *raison d'être* of the social sciences is to provide the 'positive link between social theory and normative social philosophy' (Coleman, 1986: 1310, 1319).

In addition to the expansion of neoclassical economics and the theory of rational choice through the inclusion of non-economic relations in the same rationality, a second basis for Coleman's approach that should be highlighted in order to better apprehend his notion of social capital is the underlying moral undertaking, which is related to the very conception of the social sciences. Although Putnam may have gained more publicity as a disseminator of a particular civic virtue based on the defence of social capital, much of Coleman's<sup>4</sup> publications can be viewed as diagnostic and prescriptive programs for facing what is seen as the 'great transformation' and social problem of the modern world. This is the previously mentioned 'erosion' of the so-called primordial relationships and organizations and, consequently, of social capital, and their replacement by formal organizations or 'purposively constructed organizations'. These processes would have also provoked changes in social theory and research (Coleman, 1993: 1). With this erosion of primordial and informal relationships and institutions, and the growth of formal organizations, as well as the recognition of the impossibility of somehow returning to the past, the set of propositions defined as 'organizational design', which would be borne by sociology, consists of a series of measures having in common the introduction of and incentive for informal relationships in formal organizations. In general, these measures point to some form of 'managerial capitalism' as opposed to 'command capitalism'.

It is in this extension of the schemes of neoclassical economics and the theory of rational choice, and in the moral undertaking which addresses the problem of social integration and control, that Coleman's concept of social capital is inscribed. In nominal terms, the inscription of this concept is similar to Bourdieu's, given that it can be found in the opposition between

primordial relationships, which are particularistic for Coleman, and formal organizations. In other words, social capital is grounded in the 'primordial organizations', which have recently been represented mainly by the family; its structure consists of people and their relationships, while in a 'purposely constructed corporate actor', the structure is formed by 'positions and offices', where people are merely temporary occupants of positions (1993: 1). In this sense, social capital is particularistic, being based on primordial organizations and therefore being diffuse, ascriptive and affectively expressive (Coleman, 1991: 2). Unlike Bourdieu's sense of 'particularistic', for Coleman, it is precisely this particularism that makes these primordial relationships, or more specifically social capital, morally positive and socially efficient, since it stands in opposition to formal organizations structured by *positions*.

Since social capital is a type of expansion of other forms of capital, for Coleman it is similar to 'financial capital, physical capital and human capital'; however, since it is 'embodied in relations among persons' (Coleman, 1988: 118), it has some characteristics of its own. This capital constitutes 'a particular kind of resource available to an actor', being identified by its functions, with two elements in common: it consists of some aspects of social structures and it facilitates certain actions of the actors within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, and therefore generates both economic and non-economic results, including human capital, primarily, because it operates through 'changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action'. Although social capital is partially convertible, it is less tangible than physical and human capital, since it 'exists in the relations among persons'; but like physical and human capital, social capital 'facilitates productive activity' (1988: 98, 100–1). In any case, there are a 'variety of resources' that may constitute social capital, and one of the most general forms is the trustworthiness of the social environment and 'the actual extent of the obligation held' (p. 102). Another important form of social capital is composed of 'information that inheres in social relations', given that it 'is important in providing a basis for action'. Still another form of social capital is constituted by norms and effective sanctions, because when 'a norm exists and is effective, it constitutes a powerful' form of social capital, contributing to social integration and control (p. 104). But beyond these forms of social capital, there is one that is regarded as more important and whose effect is the creation of human capital in the next generation. This is the social capital contained in 'family background', which depends on the financial capital and human capital of its components. 'Both social capital in the family and social capital in the community play roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation' (p. 109).

It appears evident then that this is not a conceptually and operationally more delimited definition of social capital, given that it includes a large number of components and ambivalences. Operationally, it results in problems for the selection and definition of social capital's indicators, many being indirectly associated with some type of social integration (see Coleman, 1988, for example). Another axis of problems arising from this conceptual definition is linked to the difficulties in excluding 'circular effects'. For example, the observation of a positive association between an indicator of social or familial integration and school performance can be taken as a causal relationship, but it may also be the effect of other social or economic resources on this performance. Similarly, on the one hand, a positive effect of social capital on civic engagement is presupposed, while, on the other, this civic engagement is defined according to the civic virtue in vogue, usually associated with the so-called pluralistic model. In any case, the present article is not the place to discuss this type of operational problem; suffice it to highlight that this notion of social capital, despite the nominal coincidence with that of Bourdieu, is aimed at other problems and research subjects.

### **Criticisms of the definitions and uses of the notion of social capital and their limits**

As mentioned above, after the strong expansion of the uses of the concept of social capital, particularly that originating in the work of Coleman, and the consequences for applications in studies of increasingly diversified themes and problems, critical evaluations of such uses have also begun to intensify. The general hypothesis of the present article is that the principal limitations of these criticisms stem from the fact that they are focused on Coleman, Bourdieu or other authors' respective notions of social capital and on technical problems in its measurement, which usually do not include the epistemological and theoretical bases of these notions.

It would not be possible to present in detail here this expansion and the developments of the controversies concerning the concept of social capital. Therefore, only a few examples, taken from political sociology, 'developmentalism' and the so-called new economic sociology, will be given, including, in the following section, some works related to the study of schooling.

Both in chronological terms and in scope, Portes' criticisms of the use of the concept of social capital are among the first. In general, these criticisms are focused on two aspects. First, the conceptual and epistemological problems involved in the notion of social capital, particularly regarding Coleman's, are highlighted and, second, their political and ideological uses

are discussed. In addressing the conceptual problems, Portes highlights the excessive amplitude of the application of the concept in different contexts, particularly on the part of Putnam, from which he derives his definition as something collective and not restricted to an individual nature.<sup>5</sup> As a corollary of this definition, there would be confusion between social capital and the benefits derived from it, resulting from a form of circular reasoning (Portes & Landolt, 1996: 19; Portes, 1998, 2000). When it comes to the political and ideological uses of social capital, it is evident that the foundations of Portes' criticisms are strongly centred on normative principles or, more specifically, on the effort to distinguish the 'good' or 'upside' of social capital as opposed to the 'bad' or 'downside'. For Portes, the same mechanisms appropriable as social capital by individuals or groups may have 'less desirable consequences' for others. The most important point to highlight, according to Portes, is that this 'downside' of social capital should be emphasized in order to avoid the trap of presenting social control and sanctions as 'blessings', and to 'keep the analysis within the bounds of serious sociological analysis' without 'moralism'. Therefore, the very criticism of the 'moralistic' uses of the notion of social capital may contain a prescriptive character. In short, these are the 'positive' and 'negative' social effects, whose criticism basically takes the path of exclusivity and subsequent restriction to other individuals in the relationship or category that has more social capital. Following the example of the majority of criticisms of the uses of the notion of social capital, for Portes as well, Bourdieu's notion of social capital is stressed positively, as opposed to those originating from or used by Coleman, Putnam and their followers. However, in this case as well, Bourdieu's notion of social capital is isolated from the respective conceptual framework in which it was formulated, being directly confronted by competing definitions. Thereby, these references do not present major analytical consequences. Nonetheless, this formulation would be 'more theoretically refined', consisting of something instrumental and individual in addition to the convertibility of different forms of capital, including social capital.

Closer to the problematic of and the polemics around what is known as 'developmentalism', the work of another of the principal critics of the uses of the notion of social capital, Harris (2002), presents something a little different as the principal subject of the criticism. The primary point of his criticism is the transformation of the notion of social capital, which is understood as Coleman's definition, into a component of the arsenal of ideologies of 'development', together with correlated categories, such as 'participation', 'civil society', 'trust', 'non-governmental organizations' and other categories of this genre, supported by a series of interests and institutions, among which are those linked to the World Bank (2002: 2). In this case as

well, in conceptual and analytical terms, the principal criticisms target (a) the uses of Coleman's and Putnam's notion of social capital as something universal and not 'specific and contextual'; (b) the 'metaphorical notion of social capital which emerges from Putnam's works' and the subsequent confusion between interpersonal trust and the legitimacy of institutions; and (c) the exclusion of the role of state institutions, substituted by ideas such as 'civic engagement', in association with that of 'civil society', among other criticisms in the same line.

In summary, the trend on development began to be referred to as the idea of 'good governance', in association with those of 'civil society', 'decentralization', 'participation', 'empowerment', among others, and, through this, 'depoliticization' of the 'problems' (Harris, 2002: 41–3). As in practically all those criticisms of the uses of the notion of social capital, and in this case as well, Bourdieu's notion is positively highlighted. However, these references are merely allusive and do not take into consideration the analytical scheme in which this notion lies; they are therefore without major consequences for the analysis. But the positive references to Bourdieu's notion of social capital do not prevent a more general conclusion that 'Bourdieu's concept of capital is rather chaotic' (2002: 20). It is precisely the premise of social differentiation and multi-dimensionality, which is the definition base of any type of capital for Bourdieu, that becomes an obstacle for the apprehension of any concept of capital, except social capital, which is directly confronted by competing notions but dissociated from its theoretical foundations.

The work of Callahan (2005) on political corruption in Thailand should be highlighted as exemplary of this line of criticisms of competing notions of social capital, in association with the polemics revolving around so-called developmentalism. In an essay which claims to 'offer a critical view of the social capital thesis', the following aspects are more explicit: the utilization of a normative evaluation scheme, with a 'positive' and a 'negative' pole of social capital and, simultaneously, the generally allusive and always positive mentions of the notion of social capital formulated by Bourdieu. As such, rather than presupposing any coherence of social capital, Callahan's essay sets out to demonstrate that a positive and a negative pole of social capital should be distinguished. The negative pole consists of phenomena such as 'corruption' and 'organized crime' (2005: 495). Thus, social capital could appear both through positive or 'civic' actions as well as negative or 'non-civic' actions (corruption and clientelism). With this in mind, Callahan intends to use Bourdieu's concept of social capital 'to expand the theoretical focus' in the study of the relationships between the population, the state and society (p. 497). This amplification of the scope of the problems covered,

however, does not diminish the centrality of the relations between civic and non-civic social capital and correlated categories, such as 'civil society' and corruption which are contrary to the conception of social science based on its very autonomy and rationality as defended by Bourdieu.

The work of Fine (2001) relative to social capital from an explicitly economist position is one of the broadest, but also one of the most polemic. The principal point of discord with Bourdieu is in the definition of capital itself and, by extension, social capital. This central discord relates to the multiplicity of forms of capital proposed by Bourdieu and the lack of specification, since it is not restricted to capitalism; this clashes with Bourdieu's theoretical formulation in which capitals are socially and historically contextualized and constructed (2001: 53–4, 170). What is most important for Bourdieu, in his definition of capital, including social capital, is its capacity to capture the multidimensionality of structures and social practices. Fine, on the other hand, presents a much more scathing diagnosis regarding the difficulties of expanding the use of Bourdieu's notion of social capital than Coleman and his followers. Among the reasons for the reduced use of Bourdieu's notion are the 'heavy abstraction that is traditionally characteristic of French social theory' and the fact that Bourdieu 'is heavily engaged in issues associated with culture', which causes the 'reading of his work to be more than demanding, and requires knowledge of the field of cultural studies'. In addition, there would be a confusion provoked by the magnitude of this approach, which 'is perceived to be dogmatic Marxism' and 'associated with the extreme subjectivity of postmodernism' (pp. 53–64). In summary, for Fine, the attraction of the concept of social capital would stem less from its founders than from the intellectual working conditions of the period, particularly in relation to ever more pressure to publish (p. 191).

Finally, in regard to the so-called new economic sociology, it must be emphasized that, first, although originally linked to Coleman's definition of social capital, it has come to constitute an approach in its own right. Social capital is defined as being 'embedded' in social structure and is put into practice through networks (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2008). The second point that should be highlighted is that, if on the one hand social capital is taken as 'embeddedness', it is approximated, though not reducible, to Bourdieu's notion. Then, on the other hand, there is an explicit position of adherence to a certain social order as a basis for a meta-theoretical approach, and a tendency to caricature Bourdieu's approach as being focused on denouncing the existence of a 'ruling class'. For Lin (2008: 25), the primary difference between Bourdieu's and Coleman's notions of social capital would lie in the fact that, for the former, the notion 'represents a process by which individuals in the dominating class reinforce and reproduce a privileged group that

holds various capital'. This theoretical position could thus be characterized as viewing social capital as a class privilege. In terms of genealogy, 'an extension and elaboration of Marx's notion of capital' could be found in Bourdieu, whilst Coleman's scheme of social capital, seen as a public good, would be taken as an extension and elaboration of Durkheim's integrative vision of social relations. The principal justification for overcoming 'classical' theories based on relations between 'classes' would lie in the fact that, currently, social relations between classes have become defocused due to the subsequent modification of the image of social structure and possibility of the rise of 'neo-capitalist theories' (Lin, 2008: 6).

But in this case the confrontations are of a meta-theoretical nature or refer to the issue of primordial adhesion to a determined social order, since this is a more defined and circumscribed approach. Social capital is basically an instrument for the analysis and apprehension of 'residues' or 'imperfections' of the market, which is both the central subject of the approach and an implied value. Thus, social capital consists of non-economic relationships and resources in the market put into practice through networks (2008: 12). In Burt's version (2008: 34–5), the choice of the best market exchange requires information on available goods, and social capital is a function of brokerage opportunities through the mediation of individuals in different positions (structural holes).<sup>6</sup> The expansion of this approach focused on the analysis of networks and regarding social capital as something positive, generally with the use of intense mathematical modelling, resulted in a relatively extensive quantity of empirical works. Besides the problem of the greater efficacy of 'strong' or 'weak' ties, most of these studies present empirical evidence of the effects and limits of social capital in different labour markets (see, among others, Forsé, 1997; Flap & Boxman, 2008; Marsden, 2008) and, as in the case of Erickson (2008: 128), include the 'role that social capital plays in exploitation and inequality', in line with the argument already highlighted in Portes & Landolt (1996).

### **Relations with schooling in the formulations of the notion of social capital and its divergences**

At the same time as the analysis of the effects of schooling is directly present in the formulations and uses of both Bourdieu's and Coleman's respective uses of the notions of social capital, it is in the examination of this theme that their meanings and varied appropriations become more evident. For Bourdieu (1984, 1989) use of the notion of social capital in the analysis of schooling is an analytical tool for the apprehension of those resources embedded in networks

of personal, and therefore particularistic, relationships underlying power structures, especially in businesses and bureaucratic organizations whose main *sociodicy* is based on educational meritocracy. This type of tie and resource is opposed to and, at the same time, interacts with the supposed universalism and *sociodicies* associated with educational meritocracy. For Coleman (1988, 1990) social capital in regard to education is a basic resource not only because it is morally positive but because it generates positive effects on educational performance and, subsequently, on human capital. In summary, social capital may signify a resource for educational and social hierarchization or, alternatively, a pedagogical increment that contributes to school performance, human capital and social control and integration.

Therefore, it is not surprising that it is in the uses of different definitions of social capital in studies on schooling that divergences and misunderstandings are particularly strong. In this case as well, due to the impossibility of an exhaustive presentation, a few examples are given. The absolute quantitative preponderance of Coleman's notion of social capital in this type of study, at least for the United States, was found in the review by Dika & Singh (2002). However, more than this observation, it is important to highlight that, for the authors of this review, Bourdieu's approach (i.e. social hierarchization based on capital structure and respective social positions where social capital is included) is reduced to 'social capital as a tool of reproduction for the dominant class'. In contrast, for Coleman social capital is positive social control (Dika & Singh, 2002: 33). This absolute predominance of Coleman's notion of social capital over that of Bourdieu in the collection of works analyzed would stem from the fascination 'with the idea that we are in social decline', which 'leads to the argument that the source of our discontent is found in lack of social control and cohesion versus increasing inequality' (2002: 46).

As an example of a position contrary to this one, and as a good indication of the variety of possible uses of concepts such as social capital in the analysis of the educational universe, the work of Burris (2004) can be highly illustrative. Burris offers an analysis of the effects of social capital in the relations between obtaining a PhD and entering the labour market. It is important, on the one hand, to highlight that this work is inscribed in the scheme of network analysis practiced by new economic sociology. While, on the other hand, breaking with previous works in this vein and focused only on the market, including some studies specifically on the same subject (such as Hanneman, 2001), he introduces Bourdieu's notion of social capital as a central analytical category, as well as Weber's analysis and propositions regarding status groups and social closure. For Burris, academic prestige and hierarchization of institutions in the areas examined (sociology, political science



and history) result from social capital rather than productivity. In this case, however, the exchange network between departments in the training and hiring of PhDs is taken as an empirical unit of social capital (Burris, 2004: 239). That is, the market would play a limited role in the academic universe as opposed to the search for prestige. More recently, following a similar line, Weeber (2006: 59–60), in a study on differentiation and hierarchization of sociology professors in the United States, although not using the same mathematical modelling, arrives at similar conclusions (pp. 59–62).

Finally, taking a last example of the use of the notion of social capital and analysis of networks, this time with an opposite perspective to that of Burris (2004), it is important to mention the work of Godechot & Mariot (2003) on political science in France. In this case, the notions of social capital used also originated in the new economic sociology, but with the explicit aim of analyzing the different types of capital, that is, 'individual' and 'collective'. Furthermore, their work aims to use analysis of networks, not according to the current tendency in the sociology of science but in economic sociology. In other words, the subject of the research is constituted explicitly as a problem for economic sociology. One of the justifications for this approach lies in the fact that in 'France, the sociology of academic life has been strongly influenced by the works of Bourdieu and his collaborators ... If, with the conceptual instruments from the field, the relational dimension is frequently affirmed in statistical analysis, it is reduced to a difference in state or degree of capital possession, etc.' (2003: 7).

It appears evident that one of the principal limitations of the tools of the so-called new economic sociology stems from a reduction of the approach to the relations between social capital and the networks in which it is embedded within the market and social structure. Thus, all other issues and dimensions are excluded, particularly those relative to network relationships which form social capital with power structures (and not with the power embedded in social capital itself within its relationships with networks and the market). Thus, the scope of the subject is limited to relations considered to constitute social capital, excluding the very notion of the market itself. Consequently, all the action logics and resources present in this universe, which includes bureaucracies, collegiate management and scientific authority among others, are reduced to something akin to 'investments in diversified and non-redundant relationships', which 'allows the PhDs to obtain scarce goods (the positions as professors and researchers for the PhDs)' (Godechot & Mariot, 2003: 14).

When confronting this reductionism with Bourdieu's propositions relative to this issue, the first point to highlight is not only the diversity of capitals, where his notion of social capital makes sense, but also the specificity of resources and principles of legitimation. Thus, besides the relations of social

capital with other forms of capital, and their respective degree of social objectification and bases of legitimation in the scientific field itself, different kinds of scientific capital are being confronted. The very objectivity of the university space consists of a plurality of 'competing principles of hierarchization', which have incommensurable values 'associated with antagonistic interests' (Bourdieu, 1984: 23). Among these modalities of scientific capital in the university field and their effects on respective professional trajectories, at one pole, there are those who invest primarily in accumulation and management of academic capital, and, at the opposite pole, there are those who invest more in productivity and, secondarily, in representation, which contributes to the accumulation of symbolic capital with external eminence (1984: 77, 131). In summary, amongst these modalities of academic capital and respective principles and legitimation bases, specific scientific competencies and bureaucratic power over the control of scientific production are most prominent. However, what should be highlighted is that in not one of these cases is social capital legitimate per se.

### Final considerations

As mentioned at the beginning, this article has limited itself to presentation of the analysis of the confrontation between the concepts of social capital originating from Bourdieu and Coleman. Although the analysis of this theme can constitute an invitation to proceed with some hypotheses, in the sense of a more general sociology of the diffusion and use of this type of notion, this is beyond the scope of the present text. For example, in regard to the United States, Fine (2001) presents cultural and consumption demands for social-science products and the institutional pressures arising from the intensification of the competition for the quantity of publications as being primarily responsible for the expansion of the use of Coleman's notion of social capital. In relation to the peripheral conditions and, more specifically, Latin America, Dezalay & Garth (2002) and Dezalay (2004) suggest that, besides the current state of the North/South importation/exportation structures of the new *universals* (human rights, democracy, civil society, etc.), social scientists themselves are part of, and therefore committed to, the schemes of mediation between local power structures and the elite and international centres.

Independently of these broader issues, this article has succinctly presented material which points to other problems. Examination of the bibliographic material, although not exhaustive, demonstrated that the issue encompasses much more than the differences in definitions and uses of concepts such as social capital, in other words: the problem of the conditions

and possibilities for appropriation of a category such as that of social capital without its respective epistemological foundations and the conceptual scheme in which it is inscribed. Since, in general, the confrontations only occur between the respective notions of social capital, and not between the analytical schemes, two complementary phenomena tend to occur. The first is the rapid and diversified expansion of the uses of the concept of social capital. The complementary phenomenon is the increase in the criticism of certain uses of this concept, particularly in regard to so-called developmentalism and the dominant civic virtue, which is usually presented as civic engagement or something of that nature.

However, as this text attempts to demonstrate, virtually all of these criticisms allude to Bourdieu's notion of social capital as the positive pole and are founded on a normative and prescriptive perspective. Thus, the positive mentions of Bourdieu's notion of social capital, rather than having major analytical implications, tend to appear as an instrument of denunciation of something akin to 'social differentiation' or 'class domination'. The analytical scheme which founds this definition is excluded from these confrontations. This criticism is not applicable to the new economic sociology in the same manner, considering that it has its own theoretical and methodological foundations. These, however, as previously mentioned, do not exclude reductionism in making social capital relative only to the market. Furthermore, they do not exclude an explicitly ideological resistant position with respect to Bourdieu's notion of social capital, and they are based on a primordial adhesion to a certain social order. Moreover, new economic sociology, despite being centred solely on the relationships between social capital embedded in networks which permeate the market, has the merit of being the starting point for a series of empirical studies which constitute a good indication of the conditions of existence and the limits of the effects of social capital on different labour markets. The principal negative counterpoints are extrapolations of this approach, which attempt to reduce structures such as space and academic institutions or power in general to the market or the networks in which social capital is embedded.

Everything indicates that the principal conclusion that can be drawn from these confrontations between the formulations and uses of notions such as social capital is that the dispute involves much more than the version of notion or concept. On the one hand, the tendency to confine the confrontation to a certain notion, without covering its epistemological and theoretical base, may be a consequence of viewing social science as an exercise in applying concepts. On the other hand, this tendency may be associated with the very diversity of the concepts and the foundation of the social sciences. Ultimately, this may call into question the very possibility

of the communicability of the meanings contained in each theoretical and epistemological position being confronted. Under these conditions, the tendency to take a single concept, like that of social capital, can seem a practical alternative. The most intriguing aspect is that this kind of ‘distortion’ in the confrontation created by the import/export and international cross-circulation of sociological theories was highlighted by Bourdieu himself (1991: 382), in a text published as the epilogue of a collection whose prologue, written by Coleman (1991), focused on social control in ‘primordial organizations’ and formal or ‘constructed organizations’.

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## Notes

1. See Weber (1978) on the relations between the means of action in different orders and the notions of rationality, legitimacy and modes of domination.

2. For more details in relation to the universalization processes, see especially Bourdieu (1994), and, on the universality of ‘social practices for the recognition of the validity of conducts, which submit to the universal as a principle, even if only apparently’ (see Bourdieu, 1994: 164–7). Regarding the relations of educational capital with universals and the processes of universalization and their associations with officialization and the State magic, see Bourdieu (1984, 1989) and, on professional classifications and their relations with the processes of universalization, see especially Bourdieu (1989: 175).

3. For more details see Bourdieu (1989: 418, 515–16).

4. See particularly Coleman (1991, 1993).

5. For some criticisms specific to Putnam’s work and its political ideological uses, see Skocpol (1996) and Tarrow (1996).

6. For a critique of this view of the market see especially Zelizer (1992), and, on the ‘regulated market’, see Bourdieu & Christin (1990).

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