

South American roots and the life in the North

Abstract

This paper is an analysis of an interview where I had the pleasure to talk about life and social inequality with my roommate Mita. She is a 24 year old woman, born and raised in Chile and also descend from Bolivian. She has ancestry from both black and native indigenous peoples from Latin America. Also, she identifies herself as a cis woman and bisexual. In this conversation we had - as well as many others that we had over the years - we talked about social and economic differences between here and our countries in Latin America and it's implications, and could see that despite of our different backgrounds our experiences as latinxs students that came to the US have surprisingly more things in common than differences.

Mita pointed out right in the first answer a common struggle that we have here, that contrasts a lot with the regular experience of Americans where both of us start from the common ground that we are living in a country where the Dollar values (in my case) five times more than the currency of my country. And we can see the implications of that in our human relationships: if we take advantage of the capitalist saying once that states that time is money, we that are in a more scarce scenario also learn to find and share time and availability in another scale in our relationships. We have to operate in a microscopic dimension, to find space where the time is not available.

In this perspective, in our relationships inside group of friends in common she said “they have no idea how it is to try to pay my tuition in dollars plus all the costs of living having to count with my savings in Chile...”. Yet, although we have this financial challenge regarding our costs of living, in

our cultural dimension as latinxs we still agree with each other that we are usually the most available in our relationships.

Another consequence of this socioeconomic difference is that people here have access to resources in another scale, they also culturally deal with personal spaces in different scales. Also, the relationships in public spaces are very different, here an direct eye contact usually causes astonishment and in our countries it usually causes smiles. And the same applies to how crowd are the spaces and public transportation and how close the bodies can get, and this proximity/distance dynamics are also present in a directly proportional way in all the relationships here when compared to latin america.

On the other hand, another social facet of that in our experiences here and in South America is that, we both agreed that we feel safer here in public spaces. In this conversation we realized that our experiences with safety were very different in Santiago and in Rio, where Mita said that she had an overall sense of safeness in Chile, which I unfortunately didn't have in Brazil. We also agreed that the experience of violence here is somehow more unpredictable and more individualized, where in our countries, it is more of a social construct. In all the cases we can see the violence sprouting from the ground in its own way from the social oppressions of capitalism.

If there the violence is more visible and sprouts everywhere all the time deepening its roots and creating extremely complex power relationships and territorialities, here in the US the violence has an speedy characteristic, as she saids "Here the violence is more unpredictable, from time to time we hear about some random guy that starts shooting people on a Subway". That way here we see those kind of social phenomena of an individual starting an absolutely unexpected choreography of a mass shooting on a public space which is very rare in our countries, but unfortunately, at least in my country, it is being slowly being imported from the US.

Another sociological and financial aspect of our experience here is the easy to access resources like technology. We both agreed that this is a strong positive point of living here, as in our countries the purchasing power of our currencies are in a much lower scale if compared to the dollar. On top of that, the fact that our countries are globally usually exporting raw materials while importing products makes it a big shocking experience of how much easier it is to have access to things like electronics, equipments and home appliances.

Furthermore about that subject, she also brought in another complex factor that is the relationship between the value of the products and the value of the minimum wage in our countries - therefore the value of our time versus the value of what we need to consume: “the difference between here and there is huge, everything is 2 or 3 times more expensive... but it is not only that, it becomes way worse if you compare how many minimum wages or work hours u would have to spend to get an computer or something like that”

Another social implications of the financial inequality that we discussed was the easiness to access public education and healthcare. We both agreed that our countries share a very similar pattern on that, we have access to public healthcare and universities in our countries, but the best doctors and schools are only available trough private consultations and are extremely expensive. She said, “in the case of the colleges and so on, the only way to get into them is if was in a expensive school.”.

Thus, we concluded that even if our ethnic, gender, race and even class background in Chile and Brazil are very different from each other, the strength of sharing a latinx background surprisingly makes our experiences here share more similarities than differences and made me think how much of a the development of a culture is linked to socioeconomic factors

Reflection

I think despite of our gender and racial differences, the fact of me and Mita's belonging to the Latinx community approximated our experiences here in such a way that looking to the big picture they became more like details - although still important as well.

Those differences between our experiences here were so small that they contributed to value more and more the cultural background that we share in common. But, having said that, in our daily relationship I try to always be aware of the privileges that I usually have and that she might not find them so easy for being an black woman.

I had a really good learning outcome seeing that our living here share a lot of important values, and they commonly contrast a lot from our other interactions here both financially and socially, regarding the whole experience of immigrating to the US to study abroad. I think this was very powerful and enhanced the trust of both of us in our cultural worldview, and we felt supported by each other to see how those things contrast with people from the North American and European backgrounds of living here.

Also, this made me value even more my relationships with other people from Latin America, as I am seeing them as a refuge now, a taste of home. In the same way, I'm learning to value more the opportunities that being living in New York can present to me.