

Security and Surveillance in Times of Globalization: An Appraisal of Milton Santos' Theory

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ABSTRACT

*Brazilian geographer Milton Santos is among the most influential theorists in Brazil and in the rest of Latin America yet his work has not until now been popularized in Anglo-American scholarship. Santos created a solid theoretical framework composed by a set of articulated concepts, some of which are discussed in this paper: technical-scientific and informational milieu, technical unicity, convergence of moments, enlargement of contexts, knowability of the planet, contemporary acceleration, psycho-sphere, techno-sphere and counter-rationalities. This article also presents Santos' conception of globalization as fable, perversity and possibility. Through a review of the author's main works, particularly the book *Toward an Other Globalization*, and through the application of some of his concepts to the analysis of contemporary events, this article intends to offer an introduction to Santos to the Anglo world and to demonstrate how his conceptual framework can contribute to the literature on surveillance and urban security.*

Keywords: Globalization, Milton Santos, Security, Surveillance, Technical-Scientific and Informational Milieu

INTRODUCTION

Between April 8 and 13, 2013, two similar academic conferences took place: the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in Los Angeles, US, and the Encounter of Geographers from Latin America (EGAL) in Lima, Peru. Both meetings united around seven thousand scholars interested in geographic studies. I attended the North American conference, where I gave a talk about the theories of the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos. Searching through the abstracts for the event I realized that out of the 5411 submitted

articles only two academics, including myself, made any reference to this author. Meanwhile, at the South American event, Milton Santos was not only one of the most quoted authors, but the namesake for a prize awarded to a Latin American scholar making notable contributions to the field. How can one explain such a discrepancy? How can one explain why the same author is considered one of the main contemporary theoretical references in social sciences in one portion of the globe, for which he received the prestigious Vautrin Lud International Geography Prize in 1994, and is still largely unknown in another? Part of the

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explanation is that almost none of Santos' work has been translated into English. So far only one of his books, *The Shared Space: The Two Circuits of the Urban Economy in Underdeveloped Countries*, has been available in English. Originally published in 1975, a translation by Chris Gerry was created in 1979. Since then, however, none of the books produced during Santos' most prolific phase have been translated. Recently Tim Clarke and I translated *Toward an Other Globalization: From the Single Thought to Universal Conscience*, one of his most known and accessible books, and we have been trying to convince English-speaking publishers to print it. Unfortunately, however, there does not seem to be much enthusiasm from the so-called "North" to learn about genuine theory being produced in the "South".

Milton Santos was born in Brotas de Macaúbas, Bahia, Brazil in 1926. Still young, he moved to Salvador where he pursued his studies. He majored in law, but his passion had always been geography, a subject which he taught for some years as a secondary teacher. In the 1950s, Santos left Brazil to study in France, where he received his PhD in Geography. Upon returning to Salvador he soon became a prestigious scholar. During that period he also excelled as a respected journalist and a governmental official. In 1964, Santos was impelled to leave Brazil due to the tense climate that emerged after the military coup d'état. During his exile, he worked in different countries in Europe, America and Africa, which explains the cosmopolitan approach of his theories. In 1977, Santos returned to Brazil and from 1983 until his death he was affiliated with the University of São Paulo. This is when he produced his most important texts. Santos published more than 30 books, some of them translated into Spanish and French. He passed away in 2001 at the age of 75, leaving behind a powerful theory still yet to be largely used, applied and translated.

The objective of this article is, therefore, to bridge this gap by translating and engaging with a selection of concepts and insights from Milton Santos' theory. It is important to stress that Santos was not a specialist in security and

surveillance studies; he only mentioned such topics a few times in his lectures and writings, and normally under the generic term "violence". It is also equally imprecise to label him as a specialist in globalization, urban studies, economic development or Latin America, although he published considerably on these topics. Santos was in fact a specialist in theory, geographical theory to be more exact. He created a set of articulated, coherent concepts that together form a solid and fruitful body of work.

The theoretical framework created by Santos has inspired many authors, particularly in the Portuguese and the Spanish speaking scholarship. After his death, a series of conferences has been organized, particularly in Brazil, to discuss his work. Books with contributions from authors who use Santos' theories have been edited (Brandão, 2004; Leite, 2007). Special issues of journals like *Scripta Nova* ("El Ciudadano, la Globalización y la Geografía", 2002) have been prepared in tribute to the author. Santos' ideas have been used in a wide range of subjects that include economy, politics, cultural studies, transportation, rural and environmental studies, urban and regional planning, among many other subjects. I believe Santos theory can also bring important new insights to the discussion about urban security and surveillance. The facts that many of his writings dealt with the analyses of the techniques¹ of information and that he considered Geography as being a "philosophy of the techniques" (Santos, 2002) support this notion.

In this article I focus on how Santos' ideas about globalization and his concept of technical-scientific and information milieu can assist in understanding surveillance and security in the contemporary context. The text begins by presenting a periodization suggested by Santos that takes into account the different technical stages of humanity. Then, the concept of technical-scientific and informational milieu is depicted through the presentation of some of its main characteristics. Following that, the concept of technical-scientific and informational milieu is associated with the concept of globalization, the latter of which is described simultaneously

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