

POOR ENLIGHTENED ELITES

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“Elites’ democracy” might be the name given to the last form politics of elites takes on as it transits towards democracy. In Brazil, the authoritarian politics of elites have had a long history, while the history of the elites’ democracy has been brief. Throughout the country’s 500 years, we have aspired either for an enlightened monarch or enlightened elites. We never had either, nor have we managed to develop the country and turn it into a true nation. For better for worse, however, Brazilian economy has expanded and its society diversified and pluralized, so much so that today we may conceive the Brazilian democracy as being in a transition towards what I would call the “civil society’s democracy”.

The existing democratic regimes of developed countries may be so characterized. Their democracies have no single dominant classes, nor is it possible to speak of clear-cut, Gramscian class alliances exerting political hegemony. Their political process is much more complex, their public opinion much more active, and their representatives from every class and class fraction have actual, if unequal, representation in determining their nation’s political course. If Brazil is indeed transiting towards this kind of democracy, our progress will no longer depend on enlightened elites or on national projects. Progress will be the dynamic vector of this new civil society and of its ability to define and defend, at each moment, the national interest.

Four social classes and their corresponding elites have succeeded one another in Brazilian history, establishing long-lasting alliances with each other, only to dis-

cord and conflict later on: the *landed, mercantile and patriarchic bourgeoisie*, which was dominant during the entire colonial period; the *patrimonial bureaucracy*, which emerged from the former's decline, became the ruling class after the Independence in 1822 and ripened into a modern bureaucracy in the latter half of the 20th century; the *coffee growers' bourgeoisie*, whose alliance with the *patrimonial bureaucracy* promoted the country's extraordinary development from circa 1850 to 1930, when it began to decline; and the *industrial bourgeoisie*, which attained political power in 1930 and, although also associated with the patrimonial/modern bureaucracy, never achieved actual political hegemony, nor was able to avoid the long period of stagnation the country has been muddled in since 1980.

More recently, the growth of the middle strata within large private bureaucratic organizations and small- and medium-size companies has been so great, and their interpenetration so strong, that class distinctions among the dominant classes began to fuzzi. Just as the technobureaucracy comprised both public and private bureaucracies, we may speak of a technobourgeoisie that includes both the bourgeoisie and the private bureaucracy. A distinction has always been made between a dominant class (bourgeois), a ruling class (mainly bureaucratic), and a working class. Each of the three classes, however, is diversified, internally stratified and has blurry boundaries with the other two. The working class includes a large corps of the disadvantaged, but also encompasses a slowly-growing number of qualified workers and service employees – who, in the economic sphere, will partake of the country's economic surpluses and, in the political sphere, will participate in civil society and obtain political offices through their union leaders and politicians.

As a result of this process of social change, a broad civil society is being formed, diversifying itself at every moment and democratizing itself internally. As we witness the emergence of an authentic civil society, not only the power of the elites is correspondingly reduced but we also become less and less dependent on the enlightened elites and on generic national projects to promote the country's social and economic development.

In this small essay on Brazil, I attempt to discern and synthesize these far-reaching historical movements, taking the relative failure of our elites as my guiding thread. I am well aware that some generalizations are heroic, to say the least, but I believe they are worth their while. We are living at a time in our country's history of great indefiniteness and perplexity. Where are we going to,

after all? Have we any future as a people and as a nation? Will the transition to more democratic politics allow us, at last, to learn from our own mistakes and develop the public policies that best fulfill our national interests? By analyzing the social classes and their elites, who associated with and succeeded one another, I hope to shed some light on these issues.

Politics of the Elites: The Colony

During the Colonial period, Brazil was dominated, externally, by the Portuguese Crown and, internally, by a commercial and patriarchal bourgeoisie whose moment of glory occurred in the mid-18th century, during the so-called Cane Sugar Cycle in the states of Pernambuco and Bahia. The mere fact that the colonial apogee happened 150 years before the end of Portuguese domination gives us an idea of the failure of the colonial and local elites to promote the country's development. Brazil underwent a second expansion cycle that peaked one century later, with the gold and diamonds of Minas Gerais (but this cycle was, by nature, transitory). After roughly 1750, and for another one hundred years, Brazilian economy went into decline, a sign that Portuguese mercantile colonization had been incapable of implementing modern capitalism and a sustained development process in the country. At the time of the Independence, per capita income in Brazil, if properly assayed, was probably already several times lower than that of advanced countries in Europe and of New England. The economic decay, which was also the prolonged decay of the sugar mill and plantation owners, would only cease with the expansion of the coffee plantations, which became a driving force in the mid-19th century.

Caio Prado Jr., Celso Furtado and Ignácio Rangel have analyzed, in their classic works, this failure of Portuguese colonization. Caio Prado Jr., in *História Econômica do Brasil*, stressed that Portugal's colonization was one of mercantile exploitation, not people settlement, as in New England, for instance. It was a step forward as compared with colonization by trading posts, which assumed a local production of spices but didn't lead to the development of specifically capitalist forms of production, in the terms described by Marx. Characterized by large landed estates, monoculture and slave labor, it was incompatible with any process of capitalistic accumulation.

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, in *Raízes do Brasil*, had outlined such criticism, showing that Portuguese colonization derived from an adventurous spirit, a desire for easy profits and a tenacious wish to return to Portugal. But it was Ignácio Rangel, analyzing the essential duality of the Brazilian economy, and Celso Furtado, in his fundamental work, *Formação Econômica do Brasil* – both with additional texts that theorize the historical analyses performed – who definitely demonstrated the intrinsic feebleness of the Brazilian mercantile colonization, which only began to be overcome with the expansion of coffee plantations in western São Paulo and which resulted, in a more contradictory than linear fashion, in the industrialization of Brazil.

The great discordant voice from this interpretation of Colonial Brazil was that of Gilberto Freyre. In *Casa Grande & Senzala*, to assert his courageous and radical thesis of social and racial harmony stemming from the miscegenation of Portuguese settlers who arrived in Brazil without wife or woman, Freyre conceived Portuguese colonization as a great success and the Portuguese settlers as heroes who triumphed where other Europeans had failed. The first modern society established in the tropics was Portuguese. It must be said that Freyre was not an economist and that he insists in his book that he was not making an economic or political, but rather a social analysis of colonization. Indeed, his analysis of Brazilian social life during the Colonial period and all the way up to the Empire is fascinating. Nevertheless, the economic and political implications of his work are undeniable. On one hand, his role in defining the national identity of the Brazilian people by legitimizing their mestizo character cannot be overstressed; on the other, he is also the ideologue of the decadent patriarchal sugar mill/plantation owners' bourgeoisie that was responsible for introducing the mercantile, slave-driven, single-crop latifundium in Brazil.

The Empire and the First Republic: Patrimonialism and Coffee Growers Bourgeoisie

We may divide the Empire in two periods: from Independence to Feijó's regency [1822-1840] and that from the mid-19th century to the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. During the former, as the crisis of the old mercantile and patriarchal bourgeoisie worsened, the country witnessed the political rise of the

patrimonialist bureaucracy. As José Murilo de Carvalho has shown in *A Construção da Ordem*, this bureaucracy was educated in Coimbra and dominated all public offices up to the cabinet level. As Max Weber and, in Brazil, Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque and Raymundo Faoro, we may also speak of a patrimonialist estate. The bureaucracy did not yet include private organizations, nor had it reached critical mass – this would happen in the 20th century – to be considered a social class. However, in spite of its claim of belonging to the rural aristocracy, it was already a bureaucratic estate, since its income did not derive from the land but from salaries and pensions paid by the State.

As Faoro has shown, Brazilian patrimonialism has deep roots in Portugal, although it must not be thought of as a mere transplantation of the Portuguese regime, if only because it would just become dominant in Brazil after the country attained its independence. Nonetheless, as had happened in Portugal, it emerged from the decline of the landed class – in Portugal, from the landed gentry; in Brazil, from the patriarchal mercantile bourgeoisie with aristocratic pretensions. It was formed by civil politicians and military officers from the fledgling Army, and comprised mainly lawyers, physicians and clergymen.

In the first phase of the Empire, the patrimonialist bureaucracy was still allied with the old mercantile patriarchal bourgeoisie, from which it had originated, and with the Rio de Janeiro bourgeoisie of slave merchants; in the second, it allied itself with the bourgeoisie of coffee growers. This alliance still held at the proclamation of the Republic, and persisted until 1930.

It is hard to say whether the patrimonialist bureaucracy failed or not in its efforts to promote development and build a nation. Its colonial heritage was distressing: a declining, slave-driven economy of large monocultural estates in which the main profitable activity was the slave traffic; the substandard level of education and culture of the people, and even of the elites, given Portugal's political militancy against any progress in this area; and Sérgio Buarque so well noted, the *laxness* of our landed mercantile bourgeoisie. This was a disorganized national society, lacking unity, in which hinterland landowners, cattle raisers, chieftains and their hired thugs constituted *States* within the inchoate State. The institution of the monarchy helped to sustain the country's oneness. After 30 years of internal conflicts, by the mid-19th century, great figures such as José Bonifácio and Feijó managed to bring order in the country.

More or less at this time, in western São Paulo, a coffee-growers' bourgeoisie was emerging. In fact, it had erupted earlier, in the Paraíba river valley, but was then still slaveholding and retrograde, very similar to that of the mill owners. Thus, the third great Brazilian elite sprung in western São Paulo. It still shared many of the vices of the mercantile exploiters, but it was no longer possible to speak of dual latifundia, at once enclosed within themselves, internally self-sufficient, and mercantile in their foreign relations, as Rangel and Furtado defined so well. A more modern bourgeoisie arose, no longer resorting to slave labor but to the salaried labor of immigrants, who began to think not only in terms of mercantile speculation but also of capitalist productivity.

Brazil then embarked on a long period of prosperity, which would only end in 1980. Very few countries matched the growth rate of Brazil's GNP during this years. It was a time of crises and transformations, even if first 80 years, from approximately 1850 to 1930, were marked by the alliance between the patrimonialist bureaucracy and the coffee growers' bourgeoisie. The abolition of slavery (1888) and the proclamation of the Republic in the military coup of 1889 did not sway the alliance, but only reinforced it. The industrialization of São Paulo – an outcome of the crisis that was then unleashed, was an initiative of middle class immigrants, not of the coffee growers, even if it availed itself of the capital and markets that coffee had created – did not affect the dominant political alliance.

After 1930: Industrial Bourgeoisie and Bureaucracy

However, even if world depression of the 30s and the 1930 Revolution did not hinder more than momentarily the country's development, they signaled the end of the supremacy of the alliance between the patrimonialist and coffee growers elites. A new dominant alliance was then formed, comprising representatives from sectors interested in the internal market of the mercantile latifundia, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the modern bureaucracy.

An industrial bourgeoisie had begun to emerge in São Paulo since the late 19th century. But it was only in the 1930s, with Vargas' political revolution and the crisis of a coffee-based economy, that Brazil's industrialization actually took off. Industrial entrepreneurs were mainly Italian, Syrian-Lebanese, Germans and their descendants. *Native stock* businesspeople (those with Brazilian-born grandfathers)

represented only 15% of the total. With industrialization arose the strategy of replacing imports and an ideology of national development, whose major analysts were the intellectuals gathered around the Superior Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB), particularly Helio Jaguaribe, Guerreiro Ramos and Ignácio Rangel.

The modern state bureaucracy, in turn, emerged from the gradual transformation of the patrimonialist bureaucracy. Modern bureaucracy ensued formally from the Bureaucratic Reform of 1936-1938 – actually a long and perpetually unfinished process – and never acquired the full-blown characteristics of the classic, Weberian civil service. This was due either to (a) patrimonialist and logrolling forces from the past that continue to operate to this day¹; (b) the early emergence of a managerial bureaucracy in the midst of the State itself, even in the 1930s²; (c) the 1995 Managerial Reform, which I initiated to substitute managerial public administration for a bureaucratic one; or, lastly, (d) the emergence in the private sector, as a result of industrialization, of an increasingly influential private and bureaucratic middle class that often was undistinguishable from the state bureaucracy (both comprising what I called *technobureaucracy* in the 1970s).

The alliance between the industrial bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy, or rather, the technobureaucracy, was successful in promoting industrialization in Brazil between 1930 and 1960. In the 60s, the severe economic crisis led to it being reorganized in authoritarian mold during the military regime (which lasted from 1964 to 1984). The alliance managed to overcome a crisis in the 1960s by means of a classic adjustment process, but in the 1970s it erroneously insisted in retaining the strategy of imports replacement. This strategy could only be accomplished at the cost of huge foreign indebtedness and a fiscal crisis in the State. Finally, with the great economic crisis of the 80s, the bureaucratic/capitalistic alliance – in which the United States played a major role – began to collapse, marked by a crisis in foreign indebtedness and macroeconomic unbalance.

1. The classical analysis of clientelist practices in Brazil was made by Victor Nunes Leal in *Coronelismo, Enxada, e Voto*, São Paulo, Editora Alfa-Omega, 1975, 1949.
2. The analysis of this modern state bureaucracy was made by Luciano Martins (1973). The 1967 administrative reform, in the Castello Branco administration, institutionalized the changes; the 1988 Constitution reverted it.

The democratic transition was consummated in 1984, resulting from the collapse of the alliance between the industrial bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy. This bourgeoisie, confuting my studies on democratic transition, did not become hegemonic after the country's redemocratization, as I had expected. The country has since been living in a power vacuum, a veritable crisis of hegemony, while the Brazilian economy, victimized by the interests and incompetence of its elites, remains unable to overcome macroeconomic unbalance, bogged down in a regime of semi-stagnation³.

Thus, the alliance between industrial bourgeoisie and modern bureaucracy was historically short-lived, ending in a 20-year crisis and developmental paralysis. Our great expectations on Brazil's industrialization, which was to lead us to converge into the development levels of the rich countries, wound up in frustration. Another failure of the Brazilian elites was substantiated. Brazil remained an underdeveloped country, scarred by inequality, injustice and privileges.

The Politics of a Civil Society

Nonetheless, I cannot bring myself to feel pessimistic. Economic development was disappointing, to be sure, but not non-existing. Inequality has never been greater, superseding even that of other Latin American countries, but standards of living have improved moderately for almost everyone, society has diversified itself, and the country's educational level has increased. In the political sphere, great advancements were made: democracy was reestablished in 1985, although disappointing in the economic and legal spheres has never been stronger⁴.

Civil society, as I understand the concept, is the organization of society poised by the political power of its participants. This power derives from the capital, political ability and organization, and knowledge held by each member of the society. In a recent essay on "Civil society, its democratization and the reform of the State",

3. In 1985 the growth of per capita GDP in the OECD countries was 0,5 percent.
4. This feeling is particularly evident in the writings of Brazil's leading economist in this century, Celso Furtado. See, for instance, his last essay, *O Longo Amanhecer: Reflexões sobre a Formação do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Paz e Terra, 1999.

I suggested that we are witnessing in this century an inversion of the processes aimed at reforming the State. Before, the dominant classes and their respective elites reformed the State, which in turn regulated society. In such cases as Brazil's, where capitalist development was fostered by the State itself, it was up to the State to *form* society. What we have now is a much broader and more diversified civil society beginning to take the initiative of reforming the State, leaving the bourgeois and bureaucratic elites in the background.

Civil society and public opinion – mingled, to be sure, with the elites, but increasingly capable of conditioning and even determining actions – endeavor to reform the State and its institutions by means of parliaments. The overall goal is to strive towards a good State (democratic) and a good government (competent and effective). We have undoubtedly a very long way to go, especially when we compare the Brazilian State and government with those of developed countries. Such a goal is not always attained. Both the anti-national forces of the bourgeois neoliberalism, under the sway of the ideology of globalization⁵, and the retrograde forces of bureaucratic state-supervised corporations, with their intense patrimonialist stench, still manage to assert their views and interests. But there is a growing discontent with this, an inquietude with very real political consequences. We are less and less dependent on our poor enlightened elites and more and more dependent on the dynamics of civil society itself. To be sure, leaders are obliged to respect economic restrictions; in other words, they must guarantee macroeconomic stability and the accumulation of capital. But they must also have a reasonably broad range of options. And the choices they make, from this range of options, increasingly depend on public opinion.

Elected governments – as those that have led the Brazilian State for some time now – cannot be seen as mere executive committees of the dominant class. One further step is being taken nowadays. Governments are no longer being defined as representatives of a hegemonic *historical bloc*, to use Gramsci's term. Its decisions

5. In fact, I oppose globalization to "globalism". Globalization is a real phenomenon to be analyzed and lived with, while globalism is just a mistaken ideology – which asserts that with globalization national-states lost autonomy, and, consequently, that the states and governments lost relevance – and is based in half-truths.

do not correspond to a national project defined in general terms, but to a set of variables that, although attempting to define at each instance what is the national interest or the overall interest at stake, reflect a much larger and more contradictory constellation of interests. Economic constraints and the interests of the powerful (which we must not mistake for those constraints) are still in force, but in addition to the leaders' competence in making the right decisions, the sometimes unclear will of civil society is becoming increasingly important.

In modern democracies, competent decision-making has become more strategic inasmuch as the power of officials from the Executive branch to make decisions has increased, given the number of decisions that parliaments, having no other alternative, must delegate to regulatory and executive agencies. These agencies' decisions, however, are countervailed by the much greater influence of civil society – which, by means of various forms of manifestations, no longer limits itself to control the agencies through its representatives in parliaments. Furthermore, it is increasingly organizing itself under the aegis of non-state public organizations of control or social advocacy (the NGOs)⁶.

This change is an ongoing historical process. The Gramscian concepts of hegemony and historical bloc were important to understand Italian politics in the 1920s and 30s; they helped us, Brazilians, to analyze our country's policies in the 1960s and 70s. But today these concepts, which refer to a politics of the elites, and more specifically to a elites' democracy, are less useful. The crisis that overtook Brazil in the 1980s was a crisis of the State, with serious economic consequences. We might say, using Gramsci's terms, that it was and still is a crisis of hegemony, because the old classes and their elites were unsuccessful in imposing their project or worldview, and the new class fractions that are emerging appear as politically undefined. When I say it was a *crisis of hegemony*, I'm still using the concept of the great Italian political thinker; however, I believe this is the *final* crisis of hegemony, because it marks a transition in Brazil, always late vis-à-vis the developed countries, from the elites' democracy to a civil society's democracy.

6. Brazilian NGOs emerge informally in the 1960s, and have as a kind of "founding act" a meeting in a Rio de Janeiro, in 1972. This history is related by Leilah Landim "Experiência Militante: Histórias das Assim Chamadas ONGs". In Leilah Landim (ed.) *Ações em Sociedade*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Nau e ISER, 1998.

This transition process is accomplished as society and politics diversify and fragment, as they disorganize and reorganize, while the old elites and the new social and political players face enormous difficulties to define their own interests and in articulating them coherently so that they might make sense from a broader perspective⁷. Many see these changes as negative. I believe they are wrong. These transformations are an expression of the advancement and increasing complexity of civil society in Brazil. Just as the market, civil society is not *rational*, nor does it follow a course or obey a specific logic. It is comprised of agents that seek to rationally identify their own interests with collective interests, but whose success in this endeavor is always precarious.

Hence, one must not place excessive hopes on democracy. Democracy is not the most perfect, but the least imperfect political regime, being nowadays the only legitimate one because, in addition to assuring civil and political rights, it best assures political stability and order⁸. In a pre-capitalist framework, where all surpluses were appropriated by the dominant classes, basically by the use of force (making the dominance of the State a matter of life or death for these classes), the regimes were authoritarian and the best political thinkers could hope for was that the monarch be enlightened. In such conditions, democracy was intrinsically unstable. When it became possible for the dominant classes to appropriate surpluses through the marketplace, making the use of force secondary, they ceased to defray the imperative of domination. This was the opportunity for the demands for freedom and political participation, which were always present, to finally come to light. Thus, democratic regimes acquired legitimacy and stability, and democracy became dominant in those economies that had already achieved a primitive accumulation and were ready to be coordinated mainly by the marketplace.

Democracy, however, does not produce miracles. It's risky to expect too much from a democracy in the process of consolidation – to wish that it were a social

7. For further discussion, see Sérgio H. Abranches, “Do Possível ao Desejável: Lógicas de Ação Coletiva e Modelos de Desenvolvimento”. In João Paulo Reis Velloso (ed.) *Brasil: A Superação da Crise*, São Paulo, Editora Nobel, 1993, p. 24.
8. On democracy's legitimacy, see Marcus André Melo (1995) “Ingovernabilidade: Desagregando o Argumento”. In Lícia Valadares and Magda Coelho, *Governabilidade e Pobreza no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1995, p. 45.

democracy, for instance, distributing income more equitably. This is something that will occur in the democratic process, even if not with the urgency and clarity we would like, and does not mean democracy will collapse⁹.

The advances of civil society in Brazil over the last 50 years have been immense. The Brazilian electorate comprised 11 million voters in 1950 (21% of the population); in the 1998 presidential election, 106 million voters cast ballots, corresponding to two-thirds of the population. The illiteracy rate fell from 40% to 10% of the population. The urbanization rate, in the same period, rose from approximately 50% to 80%. In the 1980s, Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos demonstrated the impressive growth of every kind of association by means of which civil society organizes itself and strives to change the State, and influence and control governments¹⁰. Since his analysis, the number and influence of corporate entities, representing various interests, and of non-state public organizations – either in the service or social control sector (NGOs)¹¹ – have not stopped increasing.

Such changes have not made Brazil a more equitable society, but they are undoubtedly transforming the country into a more democratic society. We depend less and less on the elites and have come to rely more and more on civil society¹².

9. Scott Mainwaring's has a good point when he underlines how well have the new democracies resisted to all sorts of economic difficulties, including unpopular market-oriented reforms: "The Surprising Resilience of Elected Governments", *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3) July 1999.
10. Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, "A Pós- 'Revolução' Brasileira". In Hélio Jaguaribe Hélio Jaguaribe *et al.*, *Brasil, Sociedade Democrática*, Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio Editora, 1985.
11. There is a recent tendency in Brazil to give a broader definition of NGOs, encompassing all non-profit organizations. Yet, in a paper with Cunill Grau we clearly distinguished the corporative from the public non-state organizations, and, among the later, between the NGOs *stricto sensu*, that are advocacy organizations, and the social assistance and service organizations. The grassroots associations fall in between the two major groups. See L.C. Bresser-Pereira and Nuria Cunill Grau, "Entre el Mercado y el Estado: Lo Público No-Estatal". In Bresser Pereira and Cunill Grau (eds.), *Lo Público No-Estatal en la Reforma del Estado*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Paidós, 1998.
12. On civil society's role in consolidation of democracy, see Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations'" , *Journal of Democracy*, 11(4) October 2000, p. 39.

However, we do not find in civil society the equality inherent in the concept of *people* (understood as *folk*), whereby every citizen is formally equal to every other. In civil society, citizens are not equal; the power of each one varies and, with it, his or her ability to make good his or her rights or will. But every citizen, including the poorest, has freedom and some manner of transforming this freedom into an effective right – not merely because he or she is a citizen, but because every citizen is inserted in some form of organization.

It is this greater freedom, this advancing albeit still imperfect democracy, that allow us to feel more optimistic – or less pessimistic – in the economic and social spheres. In the economic sphere, because we may expect a more competent economic policy. It will be increasingly difficult, for instance, to repeat (as we did in the 90s) the error of adopting the “growth cum debt” strategy of the 70s. The policy of *confidence building* – i.e., of adopting policies suggested to us by Washington and New York, even if we are not convinced that they will further our interests in terms of obtaining their trust or increasing our credibility – will certainly have to shrivel. In the social sphere, the advance of democracy will probably mean that the poorer strata will become increasingly able to demand and negotiate – to demand and negotiate in realistic terms, with proper economic and legal arguments, and the requisite judicial considerations.

In the politics of civil society, democratic debate is essential, with due respect for the other side’s ideas. The transition from the elites’ democracy to the civil society’s democracy will only be completed when presidential elections cease to be a matter of salvation or damnation. Or, in other words, when the existence of a large middle class (which includes qualified workers) and of an increasingly diversified, democratized and strong civil society implies a stronger political center, making the proposals of each candidate less distant one from another.

Ideologies will always be with us, and so will class interests. Parties and candidates will always be either from the left or the right. But to win the support of voters, they must obey the economic constraints and the consensus or semi-consensus reached in debates promoted within the civil society. The strengthening of civil society and the emergence of a public space at the center of the ideological and political debate require social criticism – which at time will have to be radical, given the radical injustice and privilege system in Brazil. But such criticism need not necessarily be pessimistic, nor forecast chaos at every moment. Above all, it

must not lead to equally radical political proposals that aim to save a world said to be doomed to perdition.

For five centuries the Brazilian elites have failed – or, less harshly, were unsuccessful – in building a nation, promoting its development and establishing a reasonable degree of justice. All they did was done halfheartedly. Now, however, with the transition towards a civil society’s democracy, new opportunities open themselves to Brazil. We will depend less on our elites. They will still be present, but dispersed, and their power will be diluted. Repeated to the point of becoming conventional wisdom, the saying that society in Brazil did not create the State but was created by it, will become more and more conventional and less and less wisdom. Because increasingly it will be civil society that will reform or improve the State, making governments better and institutions more democratic.

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