

THE WORLD TODAY AND THE CHALLENGES FACING BRAZIL

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In the past, theoreticians studying the process of development of the modern nation-state spoke of three intertwined problems that must be faced and solved: the problem of identity, that of authority and that of equality. The problem of identity, which pertains to the peculiarly “national” dimension of the triad “modern-nation-state”, has to do with sociopsychological or cultural aspects that largely condition and define the personal identity of individuals by means of their sense of belonging to a national collectivity, which may thus hope to count on the loyalty of each of them. The problem of authority is the problem of establishing the state’s managerial and symbolic apparatus to foster its presence and ability to act effectively upon society. In turn, the problem of equality, which can be seen as the more specifically “modern” face of the overall issue, refers to the challenge of fully incorporating, both politically and socially, a country’s people, and particularly its poorer strata, and involves the “constitutional” accommodation (in a dense sociological meaning of the word, though including legal aspects) of the coexistence of social classes.

The latter aspect unfolds into the delicate issue of the relationship between democracy and capitalism in the process taking place in each country. The great question involved in the problem of equality, such as dealt with by the theoreticians of development, is whether the incorporation of the population is something that may be appropriately achieved without the capitalism-induced mobilization

of the traditional social structures disembodying into a revolutionary disposition that would threaten the survival of capitalism itself. Until recently, the historical alternatives for a stable and successful solution of the problem thus set forth seemed to comprise two kinds of experience: that of advanced capitalist countries, where, in sharp contrast with the Marxist assumption of ever-growing contradictions and an eventual revolutionary rupture, the very maturation of capitalism paves the way for institutional mechanisms of political democracy and social incorporation (through diverse forms of organization, but most clearly in the social democratic model); and that of countries which underwent socialist revolutions, where accommodation was sought by suppressing the capitalist foundation of a society divided into classes.

The collapse of socialism (and, with it, of the politically authoritarian mien that socialist experiences bore) clearly evinced that we must never count on real stability in the absence of democracy, even if repression may assure the long permanence of authoritarian forms of organization. The fall of socialism also suggests that, historically speaking, the only stable solution for the constitutional problem lies in the combination of prosperity and democracy made possible by advanced capitalism. Together with the direct effects of a globalization dynamics in force worldwide, the socialist debacle gave rise to a dominant ethos that has not only celebrated the “end of history” and the ultimate triumph of capitalism, but also proclaimed a liberal prescription minimizing the role of the state and calling into question the social democratic model itself.

There are, however, some important political overtones that must be pondered over. The solution given to the problem of authority in the social democratic world, namely, the Keynesian welfare state, implied giving attention both to problems of “systemic integration” and to problems of “social integration”, to use terms David Lockwood employed years ago. Systemic integration refers to the economic and market dynamics per se, with the blind and automatic causality that characterizes it at the aggregate level and the negative results that may ensue for society. The recent crises in the world economy and the uncertainties they bring about give rise to important revisions both in the optimistic expectations and in the reservations with regard to economic action by the state that pertain to the above-mentioned ethos. As to social integration, which refers to the conflict or cohesion among groups and classes and has to do with the problem of equality and its insti-

tutional or constitutional accommodation, the post-socialist era happens to coincide with the moment in which the dynamics of globalization begins to distinctly show its socially perverse face. Thus, with the crisis of Keynesianism and of the welfare state, the growth of unemployment and of informal and precarious forms of labor, and increasing inequality (making up a process some have called the “Brazilianization” of advanced capitalism) we have important signs that the constitutional problem threatens to reopen even in capitalist countries with ingrained traditions of democratic stability – though this threat occurs under circumstances in which the very logic of the mechanisms at play weakens the protagonists of the previous social and political compromise (namely, certain sociopolitical organizations and the state itself) and thwarts the immediate perspectives that they may react in any effective way at all to the new conditions.

In any case, the world that the current dynamics of globalization places before our eyes effects a peculiar disjunction between the problems of identity, authority and equality of our starting point. On the one hand, the national state continues to provide the decisive focus on matters of identity. In spite of the existence of ethnic irredentisms (whose aim, however, is precisely to build autonomous state organizations), reference to the sociopsychological and cultural elements of nationality continues to be the main conditioning factor of the personal sense of identity. Furthermore, there is, at the transnational level, nothing equivalent to the feeling of belonging to a *community* that we find at the national level. Yet, on the other hand, the way in which the problems of authority and equality express themselves are dramatically affected by globalization. The new vigor of the market mechanisms now in operation on a transnational and virtually planetary scale not only undermines the national state’s power to manage the economy and intervene in society, but also makes the social democratic response to the problem of equality look like an onerous archaism. And a solidarity-based concept of citizenship, which guarantees the enjoyment of social rights besides civil and political rights, is replaced by the invitation for all to deal with the hardships of the marketplace as best they can.

During the greater part of the 20th century, before the mechanisms related to globalization were intensified and prior to the surprising events that resulted in the overthrow of socialism, things seemed quite clear-cut with regard to Brazil. We faced the same constitutional problem that national states had classically faced throughout the modern age. In our case, however, as in that of many other coun-

tries in the periphery of world capitalism, it remained an *unresolved* or poorly resolved problem. In a game where one often resorted to a certain nationalist exacerbation in identifying oneself with the country and with the material and symbolic instruments of state authority, the ongoing presence of revolutionary threats (subjectively felt as such, whatever the errors in assessing the “objective conditions”) hovered over the turbulence of day-to-day life and helped to mold a picture of praetorian instability – characterized by an oscillation between overt authoritarianism under military control and attempts to institutionally build a real democracy.

From the point of view of the desideratum of actually building up democracy in Brazil, the collapse of world socialism had the clear effect of neutralizing the role of the threats of a socialist revolution in the political process, by preempting any eventual international support to initiatives that might march in that direction and, in large measure, exhausting the idea itself of socialism as an attractive and ultimately feasible option. The great question is: what meaning should we attribute to the new situation from the the point of view of the perspectives of democracy and institutional stability? Does the removal of the revolutionary threat, in the way in which it was present in Brazilian political life for several decades, allow us to infer that democracy is now assured?

Alas, if even with regard to advanced capitalist countries with a long democratic tradition it is possible to talk of the risks of reopening the constitutional problem, then quite clearly an optimistic presumption is hardly justifiable in the case of Brazil. After all, the perverse consequences of the insertion into the dynamics of globalization tend to superimpose themselves upon traditional factors of inequality the country inherited from its protracted experience with slavery. Add to this the institutional frailty that has long manifested itself in the praetorian vicissitudes of our republican history, and it is easy to see that circumstances most certainly recommend sobriety when wagering on our visible future. Is it proper, however, to continue speaking of “praetorianism” to refer to the conditions that will probably prevail, given the allusion this expression contains to the leading role played by the military in circumstances of institutional frailty?

The political debate in Brazil after the end of the regime that rose to power in the 1964 coup has emphasized the issue of “governability”. This debate is laden with improprieties and confusions, beginning with semantic improprieties by which

the expression is taken to indicate a characteristic of the state apparatus (its efficiency or ability to govern, ultimately identified with mere Congressional support for the government), omitting the fact that the attribute of being more or less governable pertains to the entity that is governed, namely, to society. The semantic confusion is related to a substantive postulate according to which the problem of democracy has already been solved. As the rhetoric and actions of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration have made clear, the problem to be faced is seen to be, above all, the *aggiornamento* of the country and of the Brazilian state in terms of efficiency and international competitiveness. And achieving "governability" would be a prerequisite for that.

But the desideratum of "governability", understood as efficiency or ability to govern, involves only the "technical" and somewhat banal problem of adequately handling available resources to achieve ends that are assumed as a given. From the point of view of democracy, which supposes multiple ends of numerous players whose conciliation it is difficult to assure, the ability to govern is important only inasmuch as it relates to the challenge of establishing governability in the proper sense of the word, that is, in the sense of creating a *society* that is governable for good reasons – a society in which the various interests and currents of opinion acknowledge that the state, to a significant degree, is the legitimate agent of everyone. At this level we face substantive and properly political problems, which may be brought to focus if we consider different forms of ungovernability where the issue of equality and its articulation with the state apparatus is central.

One of these forms (which, in effect, alludes to the context whereby the issue of ungovernability was introduced in contemporary discussions by Samuel Huntington and others) is what we might call "ungovernability by overload". It occurs within the framework of fiscal crises and of increasing demands addressed to the state. The point to be stressed is that it amounts to a condition in which we have the distemper ("the democratic distemper", as Huntington calls it) of the social democratic model of a state distinguished by being open and sensitive to a multiplicity of interests. Seen from this angle, ungovernability by overload is in striking contrast with the second form that may be pointed out, the case of "praetorian ungovernability". The latter corresponds to the unsolved constitutional problem mentioned above and involves the direct confrontation of the various interests within a context of frail political institutions and of precarious institutional ca-

capacity to handle such confrontation, with the resulting tendency to a prominent role to be played by the military. Though this second form of ungovernability is familiar to Brazilians, the new world conditions, coupled with the exasperation of certain traits that have long accompanied our social deficiencies, leave us dangerously prone to another one, which might be called “Hobbesian ungovernability”. It involves a diffuse deterioration of the social fabric, increased crime rates and urban violence, the emergence of spaces where the state is unable to effectively enforce its authority – and thus the corrosion of the state’s ability to assure the maintenance of public order and collective security themselves. In truth, it is possible to say that this corrosion gives rise to the constitutional problem in its simplest and most basic meaning: the problem, with which Hobbes concerned himself, of establishing or preserving an authority capable of assuring the people’s fundamental yearning for security and order. A further aspect that deserves mentioning is the role played by the drug economy in the framework of Hobbesian deterioration. Being deeply ingrained in certain neighboring Latin American countries, drugs surely and increasingly affect Brazil, where slaughters have become trifling daily phenomena in the lower-class periphery of urban centers.

The main question emerging from an assessment of Brazil’s democratic prospects is, perhaps, what relationships are likely to be established among these different forms of ungovernability. Thus, even considering the precariousness of the Brazilian welfare state, it makes sense to speak of an overload problem in face of the enormous and neglected social demands, particularly in circumstances of serious fiscal crisis. But the crucial point here are the relationships between Hobbesianism and praetorianism: to what extent may we expect Hobbesian deterioration to engender a new praetorianism of the more conventional sort, that of military prominence? It is easy to imagine a situation where worsening insecurity results in people anxiously yearning for the assertion of some type of dictatorial power – something that, as many surveys have ascertained, is already supported by the dispositions of large numbers of Brazilians. But we may find ourselves face to face with even more tortuous and unheard-of ways of conjoining both phenomena. This is suggested, in particular, by the current example of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, whose personal history of politico-military adventures turned out to become a valuable resource in providing him with massive popular support and smoothing the way for the Caesarist experience of obvious risks that we now witness.

It is perhaps fitting to end these notes by briefly stressing certain facets the problem of identity acquires in the crossroads of the year 2000 and of 500 years of Brazilian history. The decisive question is how to achieve an appropriate coexistence between the sociopsychological aspects, related to the links between personal identity and collective identity, and the objective aspects related to the economy and the social-economic actions of the state. “Classic” Brazilian nationalism, whose intellectual elaboration was undertaken by the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB) in the 1950s, attempted to fuse these two aspects. Countering the naiveté of traditional patriotism, the best way to assert our collective identity would be to accomplish the material tasks of economic development and create the conditions for national autonomy, in accordance with a model of “autonomous power” clearly inspired by the United States. The state would undoubtedly have an important role in this endeavor, by contrast to the curious schizophrenia to be found nowadays in certain opinion groups – who simultaneously sustain the rhetoric of a “minimal state” and the need for “political will” to develop and implement a “national project”, which certainly requires an active and complex state.

There is, to be sure, a sense in which reference to the state continues to impose itself as part of an inescapable reference to the nation. The national state apparatus persists as an indispensable instrument and a crucial object of dispute for the different sectoral interests. If current processes undermine it, so much the worse: we will have to face the challenge of empowering the state (concomitantly with the new challenge of creating its functional equivalent on the transnational scale where market mechanisms assert themselves). Nevertheless, the fusion propounded by the ISEB between identity and economy clearly becomes problematic, and the obstacles created by the transnational dynamics of globalization to any autarchic or even autonomous intent invite us to attempt to solve the problem of collective and personal identity in terms that dissociate it from the vicissitudes of any eventual process of material development. Why not, then, strive for an expeditious and adroit insertion into the transnational economic dynamics, while restricting problems of identity to the cultural realm, to which they properly belong? From this perspective, whatever the impositions of such an insertion, the question that remains is how to preserve the values associated with our own peculiar cultural characteristics: Brazilian Portuguese (whose disappearance supposedly competent prophets already anticipate) or, on a more folksy note, the samba or the *modinha de*

viola (popular songs accompanied by guitar), our sly way of playing football, our swaying and jiggly body language...

But this is complexly related to the social problem. Our “national question” is strongly identified with the “social question” or the problem of equality. Let us put aside some murkier aspects, in which the “folklorization” of certain themes dissimulates, for instance, the persistence of delicate problems in the realm of racial relationships and their impact on the national identity. In any case, it would make no sense to defend the amiable cultural values just mentioned above at the cost of a solution to Brazil’s social problem – it would be absurd to seek the preservation of our shantytowns in order to preserve the authentic samba. And it is certainly better to be a prosperous and egalitarian Canada, even if economically dependent and with a somewhat colorless national identity, than a Brazil with a perhaps striking national identity, but weighed down by gross inequality and injustice. Nevertheless, in face of all the social perversities arising from the spontaneous trends of global economic and technological processes and the unfeasibility of an international Keynesianism in the foreseeable future, counting on effective social action by the state must suppose national solidarity. And some sort of nationalism will necessarily have to assert itself, albeit inexorably imbued with a critical spirit.

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