

THE DECLINE OF THE BRAZILIAN NATION

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This is the irony of history: Brazil arose in the 16th century as a province of colonialism and enters the 21st century as a province of globalism. After a long and erratic history, traversing mercantilism, colonialism and imperialism, the country joins globalism as a modest subsystem of the global economy. Notwithstanding outbreaks of nationalism and some purely national accomplishments, especially during times of populism, i.e., of projects and endeavors of national capitalism, Brazil enters the 21st century as a mere province of global capitalism – a textbook case of consummate dependence.

But let us proceed piecemeal. This issue has great practical and theoretical significance. It might be worth our while to reflect critically about what is happening in Brazil as we witness capitalism's new spurt of globalization.

What characterizes Brazil's juncture in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century is the *abandonment and dismantling of the national project*, with all ensuing political/economic and sociocultural implications, and the *implementation of a project of transnational capitalism*, with all ensuing political/economic and sociocultural implications. We are currently witnessing the *transition of a nation into province*, as the State becomes the mere administrative apparatus of one more province of global capitalism. We are again seeing how the State can become an administrative appendage of the ruling classes – in this case, of ruling classes that act on a worldwide scale and for whom our national rulers are mere employees.

This crossroads emerges as a critical set of circumstances, a collection of impasses, an election of perspectives. It also emerges as a juncture of apprehensions and interrogations rather than of perspectives and convictions, at least as it concerns the conditions and horizons of the various social sectors. For it is here that individuals and communities, social classes and groups, political parties and social movements, labor unions and currents of public opinion join in, move about, become exasperated or formulate viewpoints. It does seem like a strange coincidence: Brazil's crossroads is apparently no different from the crossroads other countries find themselves in. We are all facing the crisis that signals the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. It is actually a historical breaking point of immense proportions, both practical and theoretical, as peoples and nations all over the world are engulfed by capitalism's new spurt of globalization.

It is possible to show that the *model of transnational capitalism* came into place in Brazil in stages. From 1964 to 1985, the military dictatorship, consciously or unconsciously, laid waste all political leaderships and organizations that were committed to the model of national capitalism. From 1985 to 1994, the various governments adopted various economic/financial measures with a neoliberal stance. And since 1994, the government seems to be totally intent on erecting institutions and economic/financial policies to consolidate the project of transnational capitalism in accordance with the theoretical, practical and ideological tenets of neoliberalism.

This is the central issue for those who wish to elucidate the nexus that make up the juncture Brazil faces at the turn of the century: the dismantling of the project of national capitalism and the project of transnational capitalism that is being put in its place. This is the main meaning of the "reform of the State" and it includes the creation of a "minimum State", i.e., a deregulated, privatized and open-market State that facilitates mergers and acquisitions of domestic companies by transnational corporations. Quite symbolically, the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES), created to promote the policy of industrialization to replace imports in accordance with the project of national capitalist, was redirected to patronize transnationalization, that is, to dismantle the project of national capitalism. Meanwhile, the privatization of the educational and health systems is intensified, and labor relations and the workings of social security are redefined in a manner that transforms these "social spheres" into opportunities for profitable in-

vestment of private capital – held predominantly by transnational companies, corporations and conglomerates.

We would do well to examine some practical and theoretical aspects of transnational capitalism, also euphemistically called “emerging market” or “export-oriented industrialization”. This model is being presented to us as a “reform of the State” that would reinsert or insert Brazil more deeply into the globalized economy.

The reform of the State, as it is now being carried out, faithfully following the tenets of the Consensus of Washington, i.e., of neoliberalism, implies a drastic redefinition of the relationships between the State and society – and not only between the State and the economy, if only because society and economy simultaneously and reciprocally nurture each other with their political and cultural ingredients. This is the ongoing process: the dissociation between society and the State. Their relationships are being redefined, altering and shattering the metabolism that had developed between society and the State while the project of national capitalism was in force.

As the project of domestic capitalism is dismantled by the growing compliance of the economy to transnationalization, and as the institutional, economic, social, political and cultural implications of the reform of the State are magnified, the following five processes become more and more pronounced.

First, a growing dissociation between the main initiatives of the State and the prevailing trends in society, leading to the admission that the latter can be seen as a complex of dominant and subaltern social classes and groups – bearing in mind that the overwhelming majority of the people enjoy a subaltern status.

A singular dissociation between the State and society is thus developed and enhanced. In other words, the economic/financial, political and cultural policies prevailing in the realm of the State are becoming increasingly foreign to the economic/financial, political and cultural needs of the civil society at large. The people, as a set of subaltern social classes and groups, are disregarded by the rulers, who are committed to “modernize”, “rationalize” or “dynamize” national institutions so as to promote the “insertion” of our “emerging” economy into the dynamics of world capitalism. The rulers, in conformity with the policies and injunctions of the world’s power structures – namely, transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (IBRD) and the World Trade Organization

(WTO), among others – are committed to “reforming” the State and all national institutions, adjusting and accommodating the “emerging market” to the world market.

One of the most immediate, patent and widespread consequences of the intensive and extensive development of global capitalism is the *increasing weakening or even the manifest dissolution of the social fabric*. Forms of sociability that seemed well-established collapse, lose strength, become anachronistic, or are dissolved. Instead of political parties, labor unions, social movements and currents of public opinion, we have the media rising as a peculiar but pervading, effective and ubiquitous “electronic prince”. Much of what individuals and communities think, feel, imagine or do relates directly or indirectly to the mighty and omnipresent cultural industry developed at the local, national, regional and world level – an organized industry of powerful electronic companies, corporations and conglomerates. Instead of public spaces as privileged political spaces, we have increasingly transnational game shows, mass culture events from around the world, contests and shows.

In many aspects, the shopping mall expresses, symbolizes and is ushered in as the succedaneum of public space. The mall is where individuals and communities are induced to behave as if the *consumption of goods and services were the figuration of citizenship*. A host of evidence points out that the known forms of sociability are being drastically and indiscriminately modified. We are seeing a non-stop expansion of forms of sociability determined by the marketplace, by mass consumption, by the systemic organization of the world power structures, by corporate dynamics, by the logic of capital, by instrumental reason.

Second, as civil society becomes a nebula on the verge of redefinition, the political parties, labor unions, social movements, currents of public opinion, media and churches that comprise it are challenged to maintain a dialogue with a government and a State apparatus whose commitments are exclusively or primarily with economic/financial issues – not to mention the monopoly of violence of their police, military and intelligence organizations, more often than not aloof from, and adverse to the feelings and interests of subaltern social classes and groups. In other words, civil society is being called upon to reestablish itself in other, newer forms – creating or recreating institutions, organizations and demands to express different possibilities of understanding and emancipation.

It is obvious that broad sectors of civil society – precisely the subaltern ones, i.e., those that have no access to the “national” and transnational power structures – are headed for a major shock. And they are bewildered and disaggregated. It is as if, in a very short time, civil society had become acephalous. Instead of the moderately effective metabolism that evolved with the national project, dissociation or discord now have now set in because of the kind of policies arrogated by our rulers – policies that are foreign or even contrary to the pressing needs and claims of civil society.

This is a climate that engenders a particularly problematic situation for the subaltern social sectors, forcing them to restructure themselves according to new patterns, to develop a new awareness of their condition and perspectives, to recreate means and modes of political action – all without knowing if they still have the means to build alternative hegemonies. When the State becomes primarily an administrative apparatus for the world’s ruling classes and groups, or the power blocs; when national institutions are reformed in conformity with the world’s power structures; when the dominant social classes and groups cease to display any commitment with the nation, civil society and the people; when all this happens, what are the chances of building alternative hegemonies?

Third, given the priorities established by neoliberal policies (dictated mainly by the IMF, the IBRD, the WTO and transnational corporations), the State is transformed into an administrative apparatus that is foreign to society, foreign to the predominant trends of the social classes and groups that make up the majority of the people. This is the reality: the Brazilian State is being transformed into a mere administrative apparatus for transnational power blocs. This is the context within which the ruling “elites” emerge as malapropos and merely administrative, and impose themselves upon the majority of the people – a veritable collection of conquerors and colonizers, usually attended to by intellectuals, social scientists and other professionals that possess all the traits of “native Brazilianists”.

Fourth, and this is a more or less obvious consequence: *the Brazilian economy is being transformed into a mere province of world capitalism*. All the major governmental decisions, with grave implications on the day-to-day life of individuals and communities, are now overwhelmingly dictated by the demands of transnationalization. The national society and the State, the culture and the language, the history and the traditions, the saints and the heroes, the monuments and the ruins

– all remain, but modified, displaced, often turned into folklore or emblems of nostalgia. The bulk of the nation-State's soil is being transnationalized, turned into fodder for transnational corporations.

Fifth, still a new and fundamental fact with diverse profound implications on the relationships between the State and civil society: capitalism's new cycle of globalization undermines the economic and political bases of sovereignty, reaching even the social and cultural foundations. Sovereignty, as the nation-State's nuclear legal/political institute, is losing its legitimacy or becoming a figment of political rhetoric or judicial procedures, impotent to define a national project, to draft political/economical and sociocultural policies for the nation, to establish the conditions and possibilities to translate the inquietude and claims of the subaltern social sectors into governmental commitments and policies to be adopted in the realm of the State. So great is the qualitative transformation of the nation-State by the injunctions of globalism that rulers can no longer present themselves as statesmen: they resemble much more docile employees translating into the "native" tongue what is proclaimed in the language of transnational corporations and multilateral organizations – some of them even remind us of extras playing very minor parts in a worldwide puppet show.

This new and profound crisis of hegemony, with multitudinous practical and theoretical implications in various sectors of national society, compromises the very foundations of the nation-State and creates various fundamental problems.

National society is unable to put into practice any national project that depends on the strict enforcement of the legal and political principle of national sovereignty. By adopting the project of transnational capitalism, decision centers become not only transnationalized but also alienated. In spite of the forcefulness of the State's apparatus, of political parties and of labor unions, and notwithstanding the preservation of national signs, symbols and emblems, the nation-State is being turned into another type of entity, one that lacks some essential economic and legal/political foundations – contaminating society as a whole, albeit in varying degrees. The nation-State becomes an administrative apparatus obliged to accommodate the impositions and demands of an increasingly transnationalized economy that requires a sweeping "liberation" of productive forces and forfeits the demands of subaltern social sectors.

The following is an important lesson if we hope to come to grips with the transition from a project of national capitalism to a province of global capitalism: the dominant “elites” (entrepreneurs, the military, intellectuals and high-ranking clergy) display little or no commitment to the nation, the people or society. They organize themselves and move about as “elites” rooted on political/economic power conferred by transnational monopolies, trusts, cartels, corporations and conglomerates – derived from imperialism and deeply impregnated in globalism. Most of the members of these “elites” (or rather, dominant social classes and groups, or power blocs) organize and behave themselves as conquerors, colonizers and ransackers. They are inclined to associate themselves with the monopolies, trusts, cartels, corporations and conglomerates, and to consider countries, national societies and peoples as business assets or territories, as forage for profits and gains.

That this is so can be inferred from their defining the mergers and acquisitions of domestic companies by transnational corporations as “modernization”, “insertion into the world market”, “joining the first world”, remaining oblivious to the increasing social inequality, structural unemployment, pauperization and “lumpenization”. *They forget the patent and trenchant dissolution of the social fabric*, the loss of any and all perspectives by large sectors of the people. *They seem to use the widespread dissemination of violence and fear as techniques for the criminalization of civil society*, contributing to maintain and strengthen the mechanisms for the generalized repression and intimidation of broad social sectors, precisely those committed to building alternative forms of hegemony.

Thus the *difficult and problematic restoration of the great national issue*, namely, the challenge of recreating civil society and the State, or of making civil society “resolutely educate the State”. This issue involves a broad and radical reassessment of the conditions under which the transition from national to transnational capitalism is effected, and acknowledging that capitalism’s current “cycle” of globalization creates other new and difficult conditions for the organization and dynamics of the nation-State – involving the nationalism/regionalism counterpoint in the realm of globalism, and the alliances and actions of subaltern sectors, groups and classes in the transnational realm.

When placed at a crossroads, we must distinguish what pertains to the nation (or nationalism) from what pertains to the world (or globalism). We must also recognize that the dilemmas Brazilian society faces today are similar to those that

other countries are facing, have faced or will face. Overall, however, we are justified in saying that what is happening in Brazil is not only similar to what has happened elsewhere, but is also exemplary, a kind of overriding experiment of all the dilemmas engendered by capitalism's new cycle of globalization on the threshold of the 21st century. An exemplary experiment of consummate dependence.

However, the world political/economic structures and processes (comprising the transnational corporations, the IMF, the IBRD and the WTO, among other power organizations and structures) often trample upon the decision-making capacity of national governments and social sectors. They trample upon national sovereignty. They create serious obstacles for the establishment of alternative hegemonomies. They demonize the social movements and currents of public opinion that propound alternatives to reduce or eliminate the perverse effects of capitalism's globalization.

In view of this truly novel and difficult situation, it is up to the broad national social sectors that were most aggrieved by *top-down globalization* to recognize that they need to mobilize themselves on a global scale from below – from their subaltern social classes and groups. In addition to local, national and regional claims, they must also acknowledge the existence of claims that are common to broad social sectors of different national societies, of the *world civil society* being formed. In the new map of history, in the current scenario of social struggles called “worldlization”, “transnationalization”, “globalization” or even “planetarization”, spaces are being opened to a new and difficult “internationalism”, or more accurately, to a bottom-up globalization that engages individuals and communities, social classes, social groups, political parties and labor unions, social movements and currents of public opinion in expressing other new forms of hegemony.

This is the dilemma: how to globalize the organizations, claims and types of struggle of the subaltern social sectors. Seeing that the organizations and decisions of the dominant social sectors and of the prevailing political/economic power blocs of the world are becoming increasingly globalized, the subaltern sectors have no other alternative but to organize themselves, developing new and different forms of intelligence than those created by the relationships, processes and structures of globalization. In this manner, they will be able to assert new forms of claims and struggles on a world scale. Every local, national and regional claim that remains essential for individuals and communities also has some or many global implications.

Everything that concerns globalism – factories, offices, the media, decision-making centers – is dispersed in various countries, continents, islands and archipelagos all over the new world map. Dispersed but highly organized – and usually highly organized and centralized in global cities. Being so, an adequate knowledge of the processes and structures that comprise and advance global capitalism may be the first step toward a critical awareness of what must be done to block and eventually dismantle the kind of globalization that plagues the greater part of humanity.

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