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INTERVIEW HELD ON DECEMBER 09, 2021

Marcelo Tramontano: Thank you very much, Diógenes, for accepting our invitation. The first issue we would like to address with you is the very notion of Global South, which comes from a succession of categories, such as Third World, Developing Countries, and which is also inscribed in the core-periphery relationship. It seems crucial to ask ourselves who formulates these categorizations and to whom they are of interest. In particular, the Global South category brings together countries with totally different histories, cultures, and socio-political-economic profiles and includes China. There is there another question. We also would like to hear from you about the relationship between China and the Global South and its role as a member of this bloc. It is interesting to think about how this country fits into a new world order which is currently taking shape, as a new polarity beyond the United States and the European Union, especially with the New Silk Roads project. What, after all, is the Global South, given this present and new possible futures?

Diógenes Moura Breda: The arrival of the term Global South in academic literature surprised me a little, within a left field of research on Latin America, both Marxist and postcolonial and decolonial. Perhaps belatedly, but I first read that term in the book *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and Capitalism's Final Crisis*, by American Marxist John Smith. This book is circulating a lot, but it still does not have a Portuguese version. It helps to understand imperialism, value transfers, and forms of exploitation of the labor force between the South and North.

Until then, in my field of research, the most used terms to refer to these countries are the categorization between dependent and imperialist countries and the core-periphery polarization, or core, semi-periphery, and peripheries. These are terms also used by authors of the World System theory, such as Giovanni Arrighi and Immanuel Wallerstein, who also do not use the Global South. So I was trying to understand the effectiveness of a new concept like this, of a Global South versus a Global North, and what it mobilizes or what it advances concerning other concepts already being used. I still don't have all the answers. But, as the idea of the Global South emerges with postcolonial studies in the United States, I think that the first precaution we should take about these categorizations that include us – the Latin American periphery – is to examine how they are built and who builds them.

Obviously, the concept of the Global South does not refer to the geographical notions of the South and North, but the place occupied by the various countries in the international division of labor. This concept seems to have the virtue of showing the difference between a developed center – the Global North –, composed mainly of the United States and Western Europe, and also, let's say, by their developed annexations, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, etc., and a Global South, formed by a very heterogeneous set of countries. We have African countries in it, many of them still in a very explicit neocolonial stage, where the development of a nation-state has not even come to fruition, and this is why they still harbor disputes between political groups for internal hegemony. We also have countries that occupy an intermediate position, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. They have followed a path of regression, from the point of view of their insertion in the international division of labor. And we have countries that we could call rising powers, especially China, which, on the one hand, disputes hegemony in many aspects with the United States, but also maintains relations with the other countries of the Global South – from the point of view investments, the search for raw material sources, the search for strategic resources – which resemble the strategies of the countries of the so-called Global North.

I wonder about the validity of establishing such a concept. But anyway, the concept is already established, even among the Marxists themselves, and somehow it has been consolidated. I still prefer the idea of dependent countries combined with the idea of an imperialist core, semi-periphery, and dependent peripheries. Because there is a hierarchy in the international division of labor: within the capitalist mode of production, in globalized capitalism, countries play different roles in the reproduction of capital. This is not a new idea. But, if we want to think of a genealogy of the idea of Latin America as a periphery related to the core, we should at least return to the process of independence in Latin America, with Bolívar, Artigas, and José Martí. This process is, of course, full of contradictions, with the idea of creating a *Pátria Grande* – from the point of view of Artigas – and a *Nuestra América* – from the point of view of Martí. "Nuestra" ["Our"] America referring to the other America, to North America.

Among the theorists of this process of dependence, Martí and the Haitians Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines may have glimpsed the subordinate economic position of a periphery – in this case, Latin America – as well as the impossibility of analyzing this region using knowledge produced in the imperialist centers. We find this understanding in Simón Bolívar as well as in his tutor, Simón Rodrigues, with the idea of "we either invent or we make mistakes". We can also find it in José Martí, who lived in the United States and who wrote, in his last letters, something like "I lived in the bowels of the monster, and I know what they produce there, I know how this knowledge is produced.". Or in Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines, writing on the Haitian revolution, when they state that the motto "liberty, equality, fraternity, built in an enlightened Europe, does not serve us here.". Furthermore, as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon said, the idea of liberty, equality, and fraternity covers slavery justified even by many of the leaders of the French Revolution. This understanding of core and periphery comes from earlier, has a given genealogy, and gains a theoretical body over time.

Argentine author Alcira Argumedo, who died recently, studied this process. She wrote the book *Los silencios y las voces en América Latina: notas sobre el pensamiento nacional y popular*. Alcira was a Sociologist, a prominent researcher at the University of Buenos Aires. She often worked with Argentinian filmmaker Pino Solanas, who recently has also passed away. She has an interesting argument, according to which European thought is legitimated by the fact that it supposedly comes from the most enlightened centers of research, knowledge production, and modern Western philosophy. In Latin America, knowledge about ourselves was forged in struggles but is rejected for not being theoretical enough, considered only political thought, not articulated to the academic point of view. However, for Argumedo, it is from this political and emancipatory matrix of Latin America, readable in various documents such as letters, manifestos, etc., that it would be possible to find a genealogy of Latin American thought. This knowledge will later take shape in universities, but there is a matrix here. After this matrix, let's say, independentist, there is an equally contradictory process of modernization of national states in which a small extract of a nascent bourgeoisie in some countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, is interested in affirming national projects. This process of building nation-states takes place in the post-1929 crisis, vis-a-vis an open international field.

This is the idea of core and periphery proposed by ECLAC, a UN body created in 1948. It is interesting because, at that time, the UN was promoting a theory of economic development in stages, à la Rostow, in which underdevelopment was a stage before development, considered, in turn, as something that could be achieved. ECLAC, however, opposed this idea, arguing that underdevelopment is part of the same process, that it is the other face of development. They do this in terms of a theory still within the traditional frameworks of a heterodox Keynesian establishment. But, even without jumping to anti-systemic thinking, ECLAC manages to perceive that underdevelopment and its internal structures are the counter-face of the internal development of the central countries. This is an essential aspect that the notion of the Global South does not cover. At that time, development was thought of in a very limited way, based on the increase in GDP per capita, industrialization, increased consumption of durable goods, and so on. ECLAC was part of this, but even so, it could see that there was a structure involving the core and the periphery which was not a simple matter of gradation, but of the need for the system to build peripheries and update them at all times.

I will skip now several other elements here to quickly arrive at the Dependence theory, constructed within the scope of Latin America by the exiles and which, in the case of Brazil, had a great tradition. It became increasingly clear that the countries' internal structures were incapable of promoting the progress that ECLAC dreamed of – economic development as in developed capitalism – precisely because the mechanisms of social class accumulation and capital reproduction were constructed according to the interests of imperialist countries, with internal managers. The idea of a managerial estate that Darcy Ribeiro exposes in his fantastic book *Latin America's Dilemma* shows that what was at stake here is the very structure of capitalism. Dependence would be not only the back face of the capitalist system in general but also of the imperialist stage of the system. By the way, we could here take a step back and think about what was happening then outside Latin America: I see the theories of imperialism as a facet of the theory about the Global South before it was called that.

The Dependence Theory is gradually gathering an entire Latin American critical tradition, which, more recently, has been revived. Thus, we already know there were studies on racism here before Americans exported their studies on race and gender. Eric Williams, who was Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, wrote in the 1940s the book *Capitalism and Slavery*, in which he already showed how slavery, and therefore modern racism, is a product of European capitalist expansion, Iberian expansion, and later from Great Britain. The idea of structural racism had already been formulated then, racism present in the structure of the capitalist system, functionalized to create division within the working class and increase the exploitation of this class, which was essential to consolidate the Global North. We could further explore this genealogy, but in conclusion, it seems interesting to mention updates to the theory of Imperialism, which has begun to employ the concept of the Global South. The theories of Imperialism were important in themselves because they showed the contradictions of the capitalist system at its core, that is, the expansion of monopolization, the capital centralization and concentration, the need to search for strategic raw materials for each technological standard, and the need to dump surplus capital to places that yield greater profits.

The idea that the capital needs to make movements to overcome its contradictions or temporarily extend them, belongs to Marx and can be found in Books II and III of *Capital*. The theories of Imperialism, whether with Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, or Nikolai Bukharin, show that this periphery of the world – this Global South – is an outlet for the contradictions of central capitalism. Central countries build this periphery in our image and similarity, but according to their needs. The idea of accumulation by dispossession and plunder is approached by Harvey, and the need to always occupy non-capitalist territories is treated by Rosa Luxemburg, in a nuanced way. Harvey thinks that accumulation by dispossession is currently the fundamental element of imperialist expansion and that the idea of Imperialism has lost some of its function. In Lenin's work, we find the idea of capital exports, meaning it is necessary to export capital to regions with a higher rate of profit and, therefore, build a link between foreign capital and the labor force. Indeed, this idea of nascent financial capital and its export to the periphery of the system is in the Leninist matrix of Imperialism and gives us clues to explain both the debt crisis in Latin America in the 1980s, for example, and the role of debt public debt and the increasing foreignization of Brazil's public debt, the problems of the external debt in Argentina, the issue of the flight of dollars and the imminent default.

Anyway, I tried to briefly explain some concepts and categories that lay behind the idea of the Global South. Perhaps they are a little more powerful and give the idea of a division between North and South more concrete than the concept of the Global South. But I think it is positive that this notion emerges and be discussed, especially after both academia and politics bought the idea of globalization, of a world without cores and peripheries, where everyone would have the possibility of developing according to their "natural potentials", in quotes.

Marcelo Tramontano: In the ideas and concepts you have explained so well, I suggest that we try to situate China, because of its growing importance on the international stage and its affiliation, in principle, with the Global South. Perhaps it is not simple to accommodate this country in Imperialism, semi-periphery, and periphery categorization. There is a debate about whether or not China is an imperialist country, as it does not usually aim for a military presence in other countries, as imperialist countries do, but, on the other hand, adopts particular commercial and extractive strategies, as in the Belt and Road Initiative. How do you see this question?

Diógenes Moura Breda: Well, I am not an expert on China, but in the case of peripheries that change their position in the global system, ascending to the status of a country capable of disputing hegemony, the first important aspect to think about is that in modern history, this ascension has always been a result of revolutions. There are very few countries within capitalism that emerged from the peripheral condition. This is very important because when you think of China, you have to consider the Chinese Revolution of 1949. We could also think of the Russian Revolution, which came to divide the world throughout the 20th century. There is the case of Cuba, in Latin America, a blocked and tiny country compared to other Caribbean countries, that shows a miraculous resistance since it sustains high levels of education and low levels of infant mortality. Cuba only achieved this through a revolution. And in Economics, when studying world examples of transformations in industries and value chains, the case of South Korea frequently emerges as a place of possibility to develop within capitalism. South Korea industrialized after the Korean War – therefore, after the 1950s – financed by the United States, whose interest was to build a pole of resistance in the Far East. It occupies a strategic place on the Korean peninsula, particularly concerning China. The amount of US funds sent to South Korea to develop the country was then gigantic. This process did not result from a revolution, but which was not a process of “endogenous development”, in which the internal productive forces have been advancing autonomously. On the contrary, US support was critical.

What I want to point out is that one cannot think of China's hegemonic rise, or its categorization as imperialist, without recognizing the fact of the Chinese Revolution. The building of contemporary China, which disputes cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, cloud computing, computing large amounts of data, the most modern communication networks such as 5G and 6G... China at the forefront of research on quantum computing and superconductors is not a product of the economic opening of the late 1970s. A current interpretation, which tries to justify the eminently capitalist character of today's China, is that the country only developed from the late 1970s onwards, when it opened its economy to foreign investment in the special economic zones, thus managing to appropriate the technologies of the companies that invested there. Almost as if the Manaus Free Trade Zone or the maquiladoras in Mexico could, for example, produce the same thing. But no, the results are substantially different.

Since 1949, Mao Tse Tung's five-year economic plans had already included planning for the construction of productive and technological capacities in the Chinese heavy industry, the steel industry, and metal mechanics, which now enable the existence of a high-tech sector in the country. You don't create a high-tech sector from scratch. Industrial complexity can only be built in stages, and China began this construction in the first few years after the Chinese Revolution. This process advances to the great turning point, which coincides with the economic opening of the 1970s and the creation of special economic zones, taking a step forward towards an industrial matrix that already existed. So that's the first point: China didn't create its technological potential from the foreign companies that settled there. Two: before qualifying China or understanding China's place, we have to consider that in the revolution China destroyed a dependent, colonial, underdeveloped ruling class, placed the state at the center of the process of planning and capital accumulation, and built its ruling class: a bourgeoisie dependent on the state and subordinate to it. In the recent case of the collapse of the giant Evergrande, the Chinese state decided not to save the company. It is perhaps a paradigmatic case because, in the 2008 crisis, the United States government saved General Motors, the banks, and the construction companies involved. However, all calls of the Chinese government to the owners of large companies in the country, such as Alibaba, Huawei, and others, are eminently distinct from market capitalism.

The Chinese state controls and determines foreign direct investment and Chinese direct investment. The Belt and Road Initiative project, the search for strategic minerals in Latin America, the purchase and installation of solar panels and wind energy in Latin America, for example, are only possible if they get permission and follow the plans of the Chinese state for the construction of the country. It is, then, crucial to realize that we are not facing a capitalist country as we are used to understanding it, like the United States and Western Europe, and much less like dependent countries. There was a revolution, and this revolution makes it possible to do what dependent countries, which have not had a revolution, are structurally unable to do.

On the controversy over whether or not China is imperialist, I would not categorically assert that it is, even though traces of imperialist economic policies do appear in China. It does not militarily invade any country,

even though there are historical territorial disputes with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and others, but the pattern of capital exports and disputes over raw materials and the labor force is a feature of Chinese policy. This is natural because China is part of the world economy. It is a member of the World Trade Organization, operates within a market economy, and it is therefore inevitable that it has to play by the rules of the market game. And according to the rules of a globalized capitalist economy, economic hegemony, which is the basis for political hegemony, is only built from some assumptions.

First: the domain of technologies capable of organizing the economic system as a whole. China's dispute over 5G and 6G, cloud computing, and contemporary robotics has a parallel in the US dispute in the 1970s with Japan and Germany for the dominance of cutting-edge technology sectors, for instance. Let's say, we are currently at a higher stage of this dispute. Why does it matter to dominate the leading industries? It is not only to show that the country is powerful, or that it is able to send someone to the Moon. It is because, within the Marxist tradition, the cutting edge sectors – i. e. those sectors that can be monopolized and are essentially linked nowadays with Science and Technology – allow to obtain extraordinary profits. The hegemony of high-end sectors makes it possible to set prices above the average, determine other dominant technologies to which the entire system has to subordinate itself, and, therefore, force others to acquire them from this country that owns them.

A current example is that no one, nor any economic sector, lives without computers. From delivery services to industrial plants, computing, numerical calculation, and information technology are present. Every industrial plant must have computers, just as every iFood delivery person must have a computer on their cell phone. This technology is the "general technological equivalent", which Mexican researcher Ana Esther Ceceña calls the technologies that organize the economic system as a whole. That is why the current dispute for 5G and 6G for Artificial Intelligence and cloud computing is nothing more than the dispute to dominate the technology that will organize the entire economic system worldwide. Thus, by playing this world game and fighting for this hegemony, China necessarily has to compete in the leading sectors.

Second: the mastery of basic and strategic inputs for expanded production and reproduction is another aspect of hegemony. China has been investing in mining and oil extraction, including disputing the Brazilian pre-salt oil reserve. It invests heavily in Latin America, seeking partnerships with Bolivia and Argentina for lithium production. And what is lithium? It is the main element of batteries and, therefore, crucial in the fight for the energy transition. Whoever masters lithium sources and their processing will have a big advantage. China disputes this domain by investing, and this investment inevitably transfers a part of the wealth – a part of surplus value – to China itself, to the detriment of peripheral countries. This trait is also inevitable. China does not intervene militarily in countries, but neither does it encourage revolutions in them. Even with Bolsonaro in power, it continues to invest in Brazil and will continue to do so, regardless of which party wins the presidential elections in 2022. In the economic field China, therefore, has traces of imperialist politics.

Finally, I think this topic requires further research. We need to verify, in countries that have an autonomous national project of sovereignty, whether they manage to negotiate with China on terms that are not typical of imperialist standards. That is the question, and I have no answer for it. We would have to investigate, for example, what the agreements between China and Bolivia are like concerning lithium and to what extent these agreements differ from traditional forms of foreign investment in the mining area. In the Road and Belt Initiative project, research like this is desirable because China will, for example, provide infrastructure to some African countries. What type of production is this infrastructure intended to transport? Products produced from the reconstruction of these countries, or to the export of soy and oil, which are, to a large extent, the products that interest China?

So I don't believe that China exercises classical Imperialism, but I see traces of imperialist policies, mainly on the economic level. [Brazilian Geographer] Elias Jabbour has just released a book on China, in which he classifies the country as socialist and as an example of a new social-economic formation, say, market socialism. I think that socialism presupposes a path towards the end of commodity-based relations of production and all their elements of fetishization and alienation. As far as I can see, that is not what has been happening in China so far, although it could turn out to be a path. I read last week that one of the Chinese government's current concerns is the high level of westernized consumption by the country's middle classes. Their consumption patterns mirror or come from an American way of life – cell phones, cars, new clothes, computers, apartments, and so on. This seems a bit far from a socialist construction from the perspective of Che Guevara's thinking of a new human being.

Marcelo Tramontano: I would like to steer the conversation towards looking at North-South relations, especially at how the North deals with the South, in two respects. In the production of cutting-edge technologies, which you mentioned, the place of the South remains that of a

supplier of raw materials, such as Bolivian and Argentine lithium, for example. This relationship, which renews the extractive practice between central and peripheral countries, has perhaps its most contemporary face in a technopolitical dimension. That is the bleeding of personal data from citizens of the South, which feeds the huge artificial intelligence bases of the North. This unauthorized use of personal data – in general even unknown or just suspected – contrasts with another aspect of Northern policies towards Southern citizens, which consists in "letting them die", either in the tension of migratory movements for entry into the European Union and the United States or in the unequal distribution of vaccines against COVID-19, in African, Asian and some Latin American countries. These are two distinct questions, but they have roots in the same understanding, still colonial, of the place of the South in the mosaic of interests of the core countries.

Diógenes Moura Breda: During the four years that I lived in Mexico to prepare my master's thesis, I followed the debate about necropolitics and this "letting die". It was about the re-updating of what Aimé Césaire denounced in the discourse on colonialism about considering Latin Americans, peripheral people, and blacks as human beings of inferior category and, therefore, possible to die. This notion is constantly updated and modernized in Latin America since the ideas of modernity and barbarism go hand in hand. The history of western modernity is based on barbarism at the periphery and is constantly updated. In the Mexican case, this scenario was particularly tragic. It became very clear that the more the country opened itself to foreign investment, especially from the United States after the 1994 Free Trade Agreement, and the more the discourse of modernity was presented to society, the more femicide rates increased, the disaster of this intentional tragedy of Central American migration grew, and of course, the entire drug trafficking sector.

We often hear that this means "a breakdown of the social fabric". But it would perhaps be necessary to think that this deterioration of the social fabric is the only possible consequence of the expansion of imperialist interests in the peripheral countries and the opening of these countries to the imperialist interests of the core. There is no other pattern of behavior possible. In Brazil, for example, certain modernity is being presented to society in the slogans "Agro is tech", "Agro is pop". The dissemination of this idea coincides with the moment when the agricultural frontier extends across the Amazon, with the moment when the offensive against indigenous peoples is perhaps more intense than ever, both from a discursive and a real point of view. It is, therefore, always crucial to analyze the connection between modernity and barbarism, between modernity and the inferiorization of what central peoples consider as subordinate and disposable. Whether in the maquiladora industries, on the Mexican border, or Bolivian citizens working in a dark room in the city of São Paulo, it is the same racist idea that "the indigenous people want to be like us", in other words, human. This attitude ignores the humanity that exists in these cultures, including the potential of an "alternative modernity" as formulated by the Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría.

It seems to me that this idea of necropolitics, or the idea that we are expendable – we peoples of the South in general and, in particular, blacks, black women, indigenous, and native peoples – is at the root of our foundation as Latin America. Without using the term morally, the civilizational process that Darcy Ribeiro mentions, and which gave rise to this region of the world, is extremely violent. The idea of letting indigenous and black peoples die crosses our history and is only broken or softened in those periods when alternative projects formulated attempts to leave this dependent peripheral place. These projects – here we are talking about Cuba and Haiti – set a limit, stating that it is no longer acceptable to let die. But apart from these projects, which are under attack, there is a constant process of death and dehumanization, which always reappears in new ways, updating itself as capitalism modernizes itself.

These are not setbacks, as you often hear. Here is an interesting question, which I would like to emphasize: what we are experiencing today, in Brazil and several Latin American countries, is not a setback. For me, it is the adaptation to a new role assigned to Latin America. And what new role is this? It is the reproduction, in modern terms, of that former role of exporter of primary and agro-minerals products. From an economic point of view, we know that no country has developed by exporting iron ore and soy. And it is essential to realize that, since the end of the 1980s, that dream of an industrialized, fair Latin America with income distribution has ended. The arrival of neoliberalism in the 1990s imposed once again on the continent the role of an exporter. This process extends into the 2000s, even within the so-called "progressive" governments, and today we are witnessing its consolidation.

There is very little left of any autonomous industrial capacity or scientific and technological structure capable of updating the region as China updates itself. The drama of the Latin American situation is much more acute than the Chinese one because it implies a much more radical change. Small reforms will no longer be able to restore Brazil and Latin America to their supposedly industrialized and industrializing past. More radical processes will be needed, which, so far, have not taken place, except in a few countries such as Chile. We could discuss how far this process will go, but these ruptures, which always reappear, are a requirement for

any emancipatory project on our continent. They gained some momentum in the attempt to build ALBA¹, CELAG², and the Bank of the South³, all initiatives from sectors of advanced countries that attempted ruptures, such as Venezuela and Bolivia. The so-called progressive countries, or those that least radicalized this process – such as Brazil and Argentina – tried to play within the current rules of the old industrial structure, seeking development. The idea of development that emerged in Brazil and Argentina, in the Lula and Dilma years, was that of financing instruments, such as BNDES [Brazilian Development Bank], the expansion of Brazilian capital abroad, the strengthening of Mercosur – which is currently an export platform for multinationals, mainly for the automotive industry. This was the tone of these progressive governments, unable to understand that we need another pattern of integration.

This other pattern of integration must be built from a large-scale continental project able to build alternative modernity, as formulated by Bolívar Echeverría. But what is alternative modernity? According to Echeverría, it is the idea that it is possible to create and use techniques and produce knowledge to end scarcity, allowing every citizen to eat, go to school, etc. This idea is a slogan of Western modernity because it means the domain of illustration, science, and technical rationality leads scarcity to an end. This idea fails to materialize due to its intimate relationship with capitalism, which is incapable of giving modernity, this modern dream, something other than cynicism. Within capitalism, the ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity turns into cynicism. For Bolívar Echeverría, socialism – this alternative construction, this rupture – could construct alternative modernity. It would not simply mean going back to the time of the Incan, Tupinambá, Mexicas, and Mayan civilizations, but building knowledge allied to modern knowledge, capable of overcoming scarcity.

We talk about modernity, South-South relations, alternative projects, and the crossing of these projects with modern Western science. The latter's techniques disregard the humanity of indigenous and African matrix peoples and, therefore, disregard their techniques, their ways of doing, their ways of life. So how to build projects that incorporate these ways of life and doing, these techniques and worldviews to the current need to produce food, transform the country's urban structures, the demands of urban mobility, the construction of houses for everyone, basic sanitation, etc.? In Latin America, it means building another pattern of integration, of rupture, while building alternative modernity. That is not the modernity of "Agro is tech, Agro is pop", but modernity that incorporates this ancestral knowledge and techniques into the modern way of doing things.

Decolonial and postcolonial studies emphasize the role of Western, Eurocentric knowledge, and rightly so. However, in the book *Technique and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford breaks this practice down by showing that all the modern techniques that produced the Industrial Revolution stem from Chinese and Arab techniques. Our numbering, which is Arabic, and knowledge of thermodynamics, for example, are not European. At some point in history, Europe managed to synthesize this knowledge for several reasons, but from a technical point of view, the matrix of modernity has something that Mumford calls technical syncretism. In other words, there is something which is not just capitalism, but a substratum of the idea of being able to establish a metabolism between human beings and nature, knowing, therefore, the laws and regularities of nature, which is not essentially capitalist. Capitalism calls this, domination: let's dominate nature and build techniques aimed at valuing value, accumulating capital. But Mumford says that, within this modernity, there is a substratum that can be appropriated by other civilizations, by other societies, including non-capitalist ones. Bolívar Echeverría recovers this argument and formulates the idea of alternative modernity. Thus, regardless of whether China is imperialist or not, if Latin America wants to be able to negotiate with it the construction of different standards, it is necessary to build an articulation, a Latin American integration that is not just commercial, financial, or complementary of our productions, but the integration of projects.

Marcelo Tramontano: Something you said saddens me, particularly – and I believe it saddens every researcher from the peripheries of the world – which is this fate of being constantly put back in the role of suppliers of commodities to industrialized countries, forced to give up the right to define the paths of our technical-scientific production. From this point of view, you argued that the institutional and productive dismantling we are experiencing today, in Brazil and throughout the South, would not be a setback but a readjustment to our eternal role as commodity exporters. From this same perspective, I would like you to comment on the place of academic, scientific, and technological research and its dissemination in the current global division of labor.

Diógenes Moura Breda: This topic interests me especially. I think it is relevant to recover some people little known in the field of Science and Technology in Brazil. The Argentine Oscar Varsavsky was a Chemist and Mathematician of Polish origin who worked with [the Brazilian anthropologist and politician] Darcy Ribeiro. And also Darcy Ribeiro himself, in the book *The necessary university*. Varsavsky's book *Science, Politics, and Scientism* is crucial, since, in the international division of labor, there is also an international division of scientific labor and knowledge production.

Now, what we are calling cutting-edge technology allows domination, extraordinary profits, transfers of value, unequal exchanges. In addition, science is today a key productive force since research and development laboratories and universities are where these new technologies come from. Naturally, the North wants to monopolize this knowledge. In the same way, it is natural for central countries to build a globalized scientific system capable of providing them with the knowledge they deem necessary. This is why the production of cutting-edge knowledge remains in these countries. For example, multinational companies never install super refined laboratories in peripheral countries. However, the world scientific structure, organized in journals from central countries, is a drain on knowledge produced in the periphery. Such a phenomenon is particularly true in countries like Brazil, with more robust university systems, despite the current precariousness.

In some very specific sectors, the South has excellent laboratories – such as the Sirius particle accelerator at the State University of Campinas, Brazil –, even with no sovereign scientific project. These centers of excellence end up working as appendices to research centers in core countries. What do I mean by appendices? In the Human Sciences, that process is quite visible, as there is an academic production structure centralized in central countries. In the absence of a national scientific project, the professor from a peripheral country who wants to advance in his career does not rebel against the academic structure but plays the game. He does all his possible to learn a foreign language – German, French, English. Then, he tries to link up with research centers in European and North American countries, sends scholarship students to universities there, is invited to give lectures, and somehow internalizes bibliographies and views from there into his research topics.

This is not good, for several reasons. In general, this dynamic produces very competent researchers but only capable of thinking about themes and problems established abroad. They cannot think about their own problems in Latin America, Brazil, Campinas, São Paulo, São Carlos, etc. And in the case the researcher looks at local issues, a kind of intellectual deformation makes him see this problem with foreign eyes because he will use the bibliographies of the countries of those research centers. They have money for funding, pay scholarships, hold high-impact journals, and so on. This criticism was manifested in the clash between postcolonial and decolonial researchers, who argued that postcolonials use French authors, such as Foucault, to discuss the idea of the periphery, for example. It is a pertinent critique made of postcolonial studies by the Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel. The issue is not just the choice of the study theme, but with what eyes it will be studied.

In the Human Sciences, this issue is extremely important and it will only be possible to reverse it if, to some extent, there is a break with this line that is shaped in the Lattes curriculum model, which corresponds to the structure produced in the central countries. In the Exact or Natural Sciences, the issue is even more dramatic because we export for free knowledge produced in various public research centers, such as Sirius, the result of publicly funded research on Amazonian biodiversity, on new materials, in the scope of the pharmaceutical industry, and so on. The need for internationalization and to obtain good ratings in international rankings encourages these researchers to publish in English. Given the inability of countries such as Brazil to transform this knowledge into technologies and products – not only in the private, capitalist sense, as they could also become public products, such as public institutions and companies –, the result is that companies and the state of the central countries appropriate this knowledge and transform it into exportable products for us.

Perhaps the pharmaceutical industry is the perfect example of this process. All Amazonian biodiversity has been used for a long time to produce anti-depressant, analgesic, anti-inflammatory drugs, which we buy and pay at patent prices. This is interesting because, in the medical area and the biological sciences, Brazil is one of the great academic publishers on the periphery of the system. Despite this fact, we import around 95% of all the pharmaceutical inputs we use. The idea reflects in the health sector, and during the pandemic, it became much clearer with the issue of vaccines. We have the Fiocruz Foundation and the Butantã Institute, but we do not produce our vaccines. We packaged foreign vaccines from AstraZeneca and Sinovac, and we had to pay to use those vaccines at a time of global scarcity in 2020.

We realize, then, that when it comes to transforming this scientific knowledge into products to solve major problems for the population, the university, as an appendix to research centers in central countries, is incapable of acting quickly and effectively. Of course, I don't mean that no local researchers are swimming against the tide, organically linked to producing knowledge for social transformation. They exist, and I would say that they are not few. The point is that the university as an institution works contrary to this. So, the researchers who want to produce knowledge for sovereignty, carry out the social transformation, and solve fundamental problems of Brazilian and Latin American society, must refuse the university. But they have to pay a price. As research institutes outside the university are not numerous, those researchers find themselves at a dead-end. It is extremely difficult to get out of this. It takes a lot of courage and collective bonding, something that academia has been destroying in the process of hyper individualization, which is also functional to this production of alienated knowledge, colonized and exported to research centers abroad.

Marcelo Tramontano: Excellent, Diógenes, thank you. Without wanting to extend this issue too much, we perceive a part of the process you describe and criticize based on one of the sub-systems of the system you mentioned. It is made up of the major international publishers, which created both the evaluation rankings for universities and the rankings for academic journals that these same publishers index. And, of course, one of the main criteria for ranking universities is the number of publications in the journals indexed by them. It is, in the end, an enormous perversity.

Diógenes Moura Breda: Yes, it is such a widespread perversity that it even affects us, the sectors of the left, because every-now-and-then brings a trend, an impulse. The idea of the Global South or the studies on the racial issue highlights authors from the United States and only very recently rescued Clóvis Moura, Lélia Gonzales, Abdias Nascimento, and others who suffered from ostracism in Brazil. It is so perverse that, in the absence of an autonomous editorial structure, which will republish, update, make critical editions of an existing intellectual tradition, such as, for example, the racial issue in Brazil, we end up importing models from abroad. Of course, I will not say that Angela Davis is no good, which would be absurd. But the point is that the determining vector is often from the outside in. There is no recovery of our theorists, these organic intellectuals who were and are here producing knowledge. In studies of value transfer, unequal exchange, Dependence theory, we also often realize that we are only reading two or three authors in English. So it is somehow brutal. An effort to break away from this hegemony of knowledge production is necessary.

Marcelo Tramontano: Diógenes, one last question: after all that we have been talking about here, does the future look promising to you?

Diógenes Moura Breda: Well, my daughter Leonora was just born five weeks ago. So I think I have a compromise to believe that the future will be promising. We have to build that future. I believe this is a question of utopia, of a path, and not giving up. Looking at what is in front of us today, I should sit down and cry. I cannot see why I should complete graduate studies, I wonder why to have children. Everything conspires against what life is, against creation, against building a nation, a country, a people, a socialist Latin America, integrated, sovereign, and fair. Everything conspires against.

Now, what do we do with this? First, we need to understand that history is not written in advance. The future is not given. There is no teleology of history, nor anything that points to a mandatory hecatomb, an end of humanity: there is no such a thing as a given future. But if there is one thing that human beings are condemned to, it is to build their own history. We are condemned to build our way of life. It is not programmed in our genetic material how we are going to produce, exchange, love, and establish collectives. We are open-source beings, and this open-source condemns us to think about the future. So, I believe with the pessimism of reason and the optimism of action, I am forced to consider the future promising and work towards it.

1 Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ALBA>.

2 Latin American Strategic Center for Geopolitics. See <http://ww.celag.org>.

3 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_of_the_South.