



AMERICA ASTRAY

Francisco C. Weffort

Working Paper #162 - July 1991

Francisco C. Weffort is Professor of Political Science at the University of São Paulo (Brazil) and Director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary Culture (CEDEC). During the 1990-91 academic year he was Hewlett Residential Fellow of the Kellogg Institute and Visiting Professor of the University of Notre Dame's Department of Sociology.

This paper is a modified and enlarged version of the author's contribution to the collective book in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Institute for Peruvian Studies (IEP).

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relations between the socioeconomic crisis and the democratization process in Latin America during the '80s. The author proposes that this crisis manifests itself in situations of anomie and social fragmentation, in certain cases close to a social apartheid scenario, that evoke doubts about the national feasibility of those countries. Thus the paper argues that the consolidation of political democracy depends on the resumption of economic development and regional integration, which could prepare these countries for a new insertion into the international economic system.

RESUMEN

Este ensaio trata das relações entre a crise socio-económica e o processo de democratização na América Latina, nos anos 80. Considera que a crise se manifesta através de situações de anomia e de fragmentação social que, em alguns casos, se aproximam de um cenário de apartheid social que coloca em questão a própria viabilidade nacional. Este trabalho considera que, assim, a consolidação da democracia depende da capacidade desses países retomarem o desenvolvimento económico e de definirem uma perspectiva de integração regional que os capacite para a sua reinserção no sistema económico internacional.

“America is ungovernable.”

Bolívar

On the one hand, industrial and scientific forces became alive that no other previous time in the history of humanity could even surmise. On the other hand, we are facing symptoms of decadence that overtake by a wide margin the horrors of the last days of the Roman Empire. In our days, everything seems to be filled of its opposite.”

Marx, *Communist Manifesto*

INTRODUCTION

These last years of the twentieth century are witnessing one of the periods of greatest democratic growth and also of greatest social and economic crisis in the history of the Latin American countries. Recent presidential elections in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay are some of the examples of the democratization process in the region. It is true that there remains a dark horizon in Central America with the civil war in El Salvador, which has already been going on for ten years and which unfortunately continues. But, in the greater part of the countries that make it up, Latin America today is linked to a democratization process that is going on in an international sphere and that includes parts of Asia, southern Europe, and the majority of the countries of the socialist camp. Could Latin America's entrance into the democratic club in the 1980s be seen as an indication that we might, in the 1990s, gain the shores of modernity?

It is my purpose in this paper to argue that Latin America faces today one of the major crises of its history: a cultural crisis which reflects itself in a sense of no prospects for the future; a social crisis which seems close to a situation of generalized anomie or social fragmentation in most countries approaching social apartheid; an economic crisis that puts entire regions and countries in a condition of economic marginalization.¹ I will try to suggest that in these conditions of crisis, the consolidation of democracy in Latin America depends on the capacity of the Latin American countries to regain their sense of national viability. And that this, in turn, depends on its capacity to recapture economic development. Besides that, I believe that for the majority of the Latin

American countries, the recapture of economic development depends on regional integration. And this is a condition for the success of a new mode of insertion into the international economy.

I am convinced that the building of democracy, nation, integration, and modernity are the challenges that are presented once again to Latin Americans. Together, they present themselves to Latin America as a matter of survival. They force Latin America to reconquer its capacity to formulate projects; to reconquer its capacity to debate ideas as a way to form a new image of its own future. This paper is my modest contribution to that debate.

A Matter of Survival

In Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, there were the so-called dead cities—those cities abandoned by coffee agriculture in the valley of the Paraíba River, which connects the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. These were cities that fell behind after the predatory and itinerant coffee agriculture completely exhausted the lands of the region and moved on to the west. They were victims of nineteenth-century modernity, a product of the destruction that the agro-exporting economy left in that small part of the world. Together with coffee (which some Brazilians called “the democratic plant” because the development of the coffee plantations was thought to have contributed to the end of the Empire and the beginning of the Republic) came urban growth. But after the coffee plantations moved to another region, some of the cities that they had helped create and that did not have another economic stimulus simply stagnated. After some time they were abandoned, and thus they died.

It should not be difficult to understand why Latin Americans were always ambivalent with respect to modernity and democracy. In the 1980s we watched whole countries stagnate. Is it possible for countries to die? One might think it absurd even to ask that question. But do we not know cases of entire civilizations that disappeared? The link between democracy and modernity was never clear in Latin American history and has been particularly muddled in the last decades. Many Latin Americans are afraid of the “wonderful new world” that is announced for the end of this century. They sense that it is their own identity that is at stake. The truth is that it may be more than that.

The accelerated modernization that we see in the world today (and the more developed the country, the faster seems to be the process) gives us many reasons to be enthusiastic. But those who insist in saying how small the world will be after it has been modified by the advance of the “technological revolution” are perhaps not taking into account the fact that this is an open process which exacts heavy tolls on those who lag behind. At the speed at which things are occurring, the acceleration of modernity (and this is much more than just the “technological

revolution”) can have surprising results. If Latin Americans are not prepared for what is coming, they will see transformed into junk yards not only many of their machines and industries, but also many of their cities, entire regions, and quite possibly even whole countries.

It seems clear, at least looking at the transition from the '80s to the '90s, that modernization and democratization are not moving along at the same pace. We are going in the direction of democracy, and that is what we read in the political events of the '80s. And we hope that the road to democracy remains open in the '90s, which would confirm one of the aspects of the contemporaneous character of Latin America, that is to say, the capacity to link itself in a positive way with the predominant political tendencies of the modern world. But it is also true that, at the same time, the modernization process has stagnated in the social and economic spheres. Worst than that, Latin America entered a quagmire in the '80s—in the form of a social and economic crisis that threatens, in some cases, the very survivability of Latin American societies.

In looking at the Southern Cone, where we find some of the most modern countries of the region, one might be tempted to think that the relationship of Latin America with modernity has been not only difficult but also very frustrating. The evident impoverishment of Uruguay, the “small model country” as Jorge Battle called it at the beginning of this century and also today one of the few American countries with a true democratic culture, can be taken as a sign of the complex process that we have been living in the last decades. President Sanguinetti, like the leaders of all the other transition governments, ends his term without being able to name his successor. It seems that there is a general rule that condemns transition governments to failure—and not even the government of Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega, born of a revolution, could escape it. In Argentina, the failure of Alfonsín’s government in its attempts to regain economic growth leaves the country facing the terror of hyperinflation. And the prolonged erosion of confidence which has plagued the transition to democracy in Brazil since 1982 (particularly since 1985, when Sarney’s government was inaugurated) causes great concern among those who are dedicated to achieving democracy and economic development in the country.

It is important to note that all the new Latin American governments begin under economic recessions and, above all, intense political disillusionment. At the extreme north of Latin America, Mexico recently inaugurated the government of Salinas de Gortari, whose characteristics are very similar to those of Fernando Collor’s in Brazil and Carlos Menem’s in Argentina. Whoever looks at Latin America has no right to be optimistic. In Peru, the government of Alan García, which in the beginning seemed to have the possibility of renovating the prospects of its country and of all of Latin America, ended in absolute failure. The president, Alberto Fujimori, has inherited the worst social and economic crisis in Peru’s history. The situation in Colombia is the same or worse. The only exception that permits some optimism is Chile, where the authoritarian era of Pinochet finally ends with the election of Patricio Aylwin leading a coalition of 16 democratic parties. As regards

the other countries, the atmosphere is one of apprehension. Whoever has doubts about this should recall the tragic events in Caracas right after the inauguration of the social-democratic government of Carlos Andrés Pérez.

There are some recent images that are too strong to be forgotten. As the Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell describes a moment in the life of his country in the last months of Alfonsín's government: "the crisis, beyond its political, social, and economic dimensions, affects the State in some of its principal aspects. For a few days Argentina was a country without a currency... A State without a currency was complemented by a State without any coercive capacity. In order to contain the looting, provincial policemen were summoned. Some of their members displayed their murderous inclinations, shooting to kill the looters; others, just as miserable as the looters, passively watched their neighbors carry home food. Other residents of popular neighborhoods, frightened at the possibility of seeing their homes looted themselves (which actually happened), organized their own 'police.' The Armed Forces 'let it be known that they would not obey orders to intervene' unless the government accepted certain conditions."²

O'Donnell is writing, at the beginning of June, 1989, of violent events that lasted for some weeks. But, as he well knows, he could be speaking of a whole historical era and not only about a single country but about a whole continent. Is democracy in Latin America, to our disgrace, condemned to be the partner not of modernity but of decay? Threatened by hyperinflation and by recession, is democracy condemned here to be not the domain of constitutional guarantees of human dignity but rather the road to chaos?

Latin American economists speak of the '80s as the "lost decade." Someone once said that this phrase contains an ounce of exaggeration and an ounce of imprecision. But no one doubts that Latin Americans ended the decade with a heavy feeling of loss, a feeling that is not limited, as we shall see, to economic matters. The numbers, anyhow, are impressive. "At the end of 1989," writes economist Gert Rosenthal, Executive Secretary of ECLA, "the average national product per person in the region will be almost ten percent lower than that of 1980, the equivalent to that of 1976."³ In most of the countries, old problems such as underemployment, social marginality, unemployment, decreasing salaries, deterioration of the quality of life, destruction of the environment, etc., became worse. "It is estimated roughly that in 1980, some 112 million Latin Americans and Caribbean people (thirty-six percent of the total) lived below the poverty level; those figures climbed to 160 million in 1985 (thirty-eight percent of the total population)."⁴ In Brazil, which had a few years of relative industrial growth, there are some exceptions to the general picture of decay in Latin America. It is a pity that the country is also known as an extreme case of social inequality, which has been increasingly growing during the '80s.

In the region taken as a whole, old problems are mixed with new ones, some of which are even more serious than the old ones. Among those new problems the least serious is emigration. Are we condemned to fulfill the curse invoked by Bolívar in a moment of desperation? "Those who served the revolution plowed the ocean. The only thing that can be done in the Americas is to emigrate."⁵ The most scandalous of the new problems is that of the drug traffic which affects, above all, the Andean countries of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Let us not forget also that drug traffic came to include Panama, by means of General Noriega, former president, former dictator, and former agent of the U.S. government (more specifically of the CIA), who is now accused in an American court of being a common criminal.

This picture of social and economic crisis contrasts with the democratization of the region. With institutional democratization comes an important change in the political culture. In a recent victory over economic determinism, Latin American thought affirms that politics belongs to the sphere of liberty. Contrary to an era in which people thought, in Latin America and in other Western countries, that political liberty would come as a byproduct of economic development, the struggles against dictatorships as well as the recent efforts of institution-building in Latin America showed that it is possible to advance towards democracy even in a period of economic crisis. Stubborn pessimists will say that affirmation of the autonomy of politics is, in itself, an effect of the crisis and a sign of its impact. Is it not typical of chaotic situations to smash each and every determinism, and to believe that when order breaks down anything is possible?

The truth is that it is more than that. In many Latin American countries one witnesses strong tendencies in which public opinion conceives democracy as an end in itself. That means that in the face of national dissolution, many Latin Americans have the tendency to look at democracy not only as a road to organizing the State but as a means of organizing society. In the face of the possibility of national disintegration, the strength of democracy for the Latin American countries is the possibility of hope. It is one of the ways in which these countries may acquire once again their sense of viability.⁶

But for now, we must recognize that the affirmation of the autonomy of politics and of democracy as an end in itself, although important, are not sufficient. Would it be possible to believe that democracy can continue to grow when the economic systems as well as the societies appear to be falling to pieces?⁷ How could it be possible to imagine that a democracy can affirm itself in such a deep economic and social crisis? No matter how auspicious the progress of the democratic political culture may be, we know that the consolidation of democracy will also depend on its efficacy in solving economic and social problems.⁸ Furthermore, whoever admits that the consolidation of democracy is still to come in the future must also accept the fragility of the democratic conquests that have taken place so far and therefore the possibility of crisis and eventually of regressions. And, finally, anyone with a minimum of information about the history of

Latin America knows that here democracy was never conceived as the only way for the construction of societies and States. And he or she also knows that the democratic struggles of the last decades, as important as they might have been, have hardly exorcized all our old authoritarian demons.

Loss of the Future

The challenges that confront us in contemporary Latin America are, for the most part, the same ones that have accompanied the region from the beginning. That is why they force Latin America to question its identity (and, therefore, its sense of survival). But, should we say, because of this, that the crisis that the Latin American countries are experiencing today is the same one as always? A crisis like many others in countries that have never completed their process of development?

In one of the most recent and most interesting essays about the roots of Latin American culture, Richard Morse states that, in more than one instance, Latin American intellectuals believe that they are facing a history shaped by entropy. Let us give an example of what he is trying to say. Although contemporary science says that “the Latin American writers of the end of the colonial period were witnesses of the progressive articulation of their future nations within the international economic system...to them was more evident...a process of disintegration, the collapse of the Iberian ideal of ‘social incorporation’ and the dichotomization of society in ‘people of good sens’ and a mob of increasingly furious and unassimilable people.”⁹

Morse is raising an historical question about our more remote past, without any immediate practical preoccupation. But the way in which he presents the cultural originality of “Ibero-America” appears to me to be pertinent to the more political and practical debate that I hope to present here. The Ibero-American dream was one of unity, incorporation, integration; the reality was division, exclusion, marginality. “A continent with a population of twenty million at the end of the colonial period, where four out of each five persons were slaves, dependent workers, farmers, and shepherds at subsistence level or occupants of precarious interstitial positions, frequently without speaking the language of the conquerors, was a propitious scenario for the realization of the grandiose European plans of participatory integration, whatever might have been its origin or era.”¹⁰

Morse suggests in his *Espelho de Prospero* (Prospero’s Mirror), a warm and friendly evaluation of Latin American culture, that it is characteristic of Latin Americans to feel that some big catastrophe is right around the corner. He speaks of “two versions of Western history,” the first one “evolutionary and Faustian,” the second one “more entropic than evolutionary.” How could we not be surprised, as are many intellectuals (not only from Latin America but from all the West),

by the history of Latin America, so apparently entropic, since we learned to see human history “as a perpetual crescendo”?¹¹ Morse’s suggestion appears to be this: more than just a feeling of reality, the foreboding of the proximity of the catastrophe would be the manifestation of a spiritual perplexity which is surprised by the moment that, instead of “progressing,” “opens up” in an apparent vacuum that would, nevertheless, open up new possibilities.

I interpret Morse’s suggestions as a way of calling our attention to the peculiarities of Latin American history. Are we not imitating today, without wanting to, or even knowing it, the intellectuals of the end of the colonial period when we see an opening to chaos where we should see an opening up of possibilities for a new relationship with modernity?

This warning notwithstanding, nevertheless the question remains: if we can admit that today’s crisis makes us ask questions that point to our historical origins, why does it appear to us to be particularly threatening? That is to say, knowing the peculiarities of Ibero-American history, I ask: what are the peculiarities of this crisis, in this historical moment? Should not all that confronts us in today’s Latin American crisis be taken as merely a reaffirmation of the region’s origins? The clash between civilization and barbarism, the gulf between the integrated and the marginal, the lacework of European institutional forms versus the background of violence and disorder—are we not speaking about the themes of Domingo Sarmiento (*Civilización y Barbárie*) and Euclides da Cunha (*Os Sertões*) or of Oliveira Vianna (*Populações Meridionais do Brasil*), to mention only some of the classics of Latin American thought? Was Latin America always just that which Alain Touraine synthesizes in the beautiful title of his last book, the *word* (of civilization, of politics, of integration), and the *blood* (of marginality, of violence, of exclusion)?¹²

Latin Americans always linked the themes of integration and of marginality to that of the future. They always worried about the marginalization produced by their societies and the marginalization of their own societies in relation to the modern world. To be integrated into the modern world and to be integrated into themselves as societies are challenges that are present in origin of that which we can call the Latin American condition or, in a wider perspective, an American characteristic. “Approximately 130 years ago,” says the Mexican thinker Leopoldo Zea, “a philosopher of history, Hegel, pointed out the marginal character of non-European or non-Western people. Right there, already among those peoples, was our people. If Europe is the center, who could be the others? For the German philosopher, Europe was the only incarnation of the spirit that makes history possible. And what about our Americas?... Under that Hegelian conception of history, our Americas were the future, the possibility.”¹³

Hegel, therefore, was granting us the future. It is no small thing. In the same way, Sarmiento, in Argentina of the first decades of the nineteenth century, or Euclides da Cunha, at the end of that century or, more recently, Oliveira Vianna, in Brazil in the 1940s, spoke of the

backwoods, of marginalization, of falling behind, as a way of affirming their own versions of civilization, of progress, of modernity. In other words, they were expressing hope in the future.

This, perhaps, is the first big difference between what we know of our past crises and of our present crisis: today we are living through a blackout of perspectives. It is difficult to find any other period in which the perception of progress or the Faustian sense of our history has been obscured with so much force. We have a sensation of a loss of the future. Someone might say that this “blackout” (which, incidentally, is most evident in the most modern countries of Latin America, Argentina and Uruguay) paradoxically connects us to the modern condition. Isn’t that just what people talk about in the most modern countries of the world, in the rich countries of Western Europe and, more recently, in the United States? A kind of “end of history,” an idea according to which “the future has already arrived?” This confusion is possible, and we must try to avoid it.

That which apparently connects us to the culture of modernity (or of postmodernity) enters into direct conflict with some ideas that have always been linked with that which I termed “the American condition.” I do not believe in the theories of postmodernity, not even for Europe, and with greater reason I reject them for the Americas, above all for Latin America. Anyway, if Europe is (or was) connected to the idea of the past, the Americas, both North and South, are (have been, at least) linked with the idea of progress. The progress of the Enlightenment, obviously, which is associated with the ideas of individual and political liberty. But also the progress of wealth against poverty. In both variants, the idea of progress is as essential to the development of the culture of modernity as it is to the idea of revolution.¹⁴ The colonization of America—mainly in North America but also in South America—is associated with the discovery that gave life to revolutions all over the world, namely, that poverty was not a natural condition but a social reality that could be modified. Because of this, the Americas are connected through the centuries to the hopes of poor people in Europe.¹⁵ As proof of the importance of those images in history, we may recall the many studies about the immigrants who always found safe haven in the countries of both Americas.

It is evident that Latin America in the ’80s does not fulfill those hopes. An important part of the population of Mexico and of Central America gravitates around the United States. About 800,000 people from El Salvador, from a population of about five million, live in the United States. From Mexican origins, different estimates tell of between 5 and 15 millions living and/or working in the United States. Even we Brazilians have learned with great surprise in the last years that our country, which always proudly received many immigrants, is now exporting people.

The ’60s may have been, in this sense, our last typically “American” period. If the image of the Americas was always linked to the idea of progress, when this failed the alternative was always called revolution. A revolution not only of those who were poor, not only of those who stood on

the left, as we might expect. Since the American Revolution and since the earliest struggles for the independence of Latin America, the word “revolution” was always used in the Americas by any political group and by any social group that proposed to change, by means of violence, the status quo. It always meant a perspective of rupture of the institutional order or a perspective of change in the social and economic situation. In these countries “without a past,” of very fragile traditions, there certainly exists a right wing, even several right wings, some of them very bloody. But there are no conservative groups, at least not in the sense of those that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution, inspired by the past glories of Europe. Here, in most of the countries (an important but recent exception is Argentina), and in most of the political tendencies, the past was always considered poorer than the expected future. Even the harshest rightist group always thought that it should, somehow, change society. It is well known that the recent military dictatorships, besides reacting to the growth of leftist groups, also had their projects of reorganization of the State and of society.¹⁶ That’s why they called their coups d’état “revolutions” and their dictatorial regimes “revolutionary regimes.” Would it be too much to recognize in this malicious play on words the respect of virtue by vice, the fealty to the future (and to change) by those same social and political groups that would have the best reasons to fear it?

At the start of the '60s, one of the principal sponsors of the theory of social marginalization, Roger Vekemans, spoke of the growth of the “poverty belts” of the big Latin American cities, using a metaphor inspired by the crises of ancient history. In the context of a scholarly speech and following the style of very conservative thought, he spoke of ancient Rome threatened by the barbarian invasions. What he saw in the Latin American reality was the poverty in the rural regions producing the great mass of poor people migrating to the cities where “they did not even own the ground upon which they trod.” This very complex process was seen by other people under diverse meanings and metaphors. In the same epoch in which Vekemans spoke of the threat of the barbarians, there circulated throughout Latin America Franz Fanon’s book, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (The Condemned of the Earth), and Régis Debray was attempting to interpret, in *Révolution dans la Révolution* (The Revolution in the Revolution) the direction of the guerrilla movements of that time, speaking about a “great march,” in which the “proletarian” class, stimulated by the guerrilla “foci,” would surround the “bourgeois” city. There were numerous metaphors and always forecasts of catastrophes. But they also heralded great revolutionary change. People spoke of the end of an era but also of a renaissance, of a “new beginning.”¹⁷

I think that the words used by O’Donnell to speak of the recent crisis are important: he speaks about a “strange pre-revolutionary situation without any revolution or revolutionaries.”¹⁸ We cannot see today the collapse of a relatively integrated power system (I mean integrated despite its contradictions and even because of them) nor can we see a situation of direct

confrontation between those who are “on top,” and are no longer capable of domination, and those who are “below” and who can no longer tolerate the domination, as is described in the history of revolutions. What we are seeing looks more like the collapse of a civilization than the heralding of a new era. That is why of all those diverse images, the one of Rome threatened by barbarians should remain. It is true that the comparison should not go further. Rome once united an empire, but the great cities of Latin America never could unite the countries of which they are the capitals. Today, divided against themselves, they cannot even unite their surroundings. But the image of Rome and the barbarians still is better than the others, because it evokes the portrayal of the degeneration of a society. And possibly, the first sign of the long and painful decay of a civilization is this peculiar cultural blindness that prevents us from discerning the shape of the future.

Degenerated Societies?

Jose Medina Echavarria noted, in a 1964 book, that the crisis of legitimacy that had its roots in the power crisis among the old agrarian oligarchies of Latin America could end up in “a complete evaporation of beliefs” and a “moral bankruptcy” so big that it could produce “the general anomie of a complete social body.”¹⁹ Medina was, in his own words, “an old liberal,” a Spanish republican who had to suffer exile all his life because he was opposed to Franco. But the idea of generalized anomie appeared to be very similar to the chaos invoked by many rightists, who wanted their warning to be taken with all the seriousness it deserved.

We are speaking hypothetically; and this hypothesis, like any other, perhaps does not explain everything. Furthermore, error is always possible, especially with such a bold assertion. The biggest mistake, however, would be to reject the hypothesis, since it is raised again today by younger sociologists who speak, apart from the economic crisis, of a crisis of legitimacy, governance, and morals. Sergio Zermeno says something about Mexico that is valid for other countries: the crisis of progress of the '80s in conjunction with the neoliberal actions of the Mexican government have provoked widespread social disorganization, a “dynamic of disorder” in the plans of the family, in labor unions, political parties, associations, the State, etc.²⁰ Here we will attempt to understand this so-called dynamic of disorder.

If the rightists of the '60s spoke of chaos in contrast to the idea of revolution, the leftists perhaps did not pay enough attention to perceive that a situation of “generalized anomie” is contrary to any notion of order, even that order that revolutions assume. Contrary to what is believed, anomie makes changes more difficult rather than more possible. Even a revolutionary transformation must begin with the recognition of the reality of some order, even though it may appear to be contradictory and unjust. It must begin, *de facto*, with some given order and from the

impulse of its contradictions. Revolutions do not begin from a society without rules and they do not pretend to build a society without rules, if any such societies were possible. They imply smashing a specific order which will be replaced by another.

In this sense, a situation of generalized anomie could be as fatal for a government (if it is a democratic one) as for any perspective of change in the society, be it through reform or through revolution. Anomic situations have more affinities with situations of degradation of the social structure, as is the typical case of the lumpen proletariat, than with any social group or class that may create situations of protest and of change, as would be the case of the industrial workers, of ethnic groups suffering discrimination, etc. Anomic situations are always unfavorable to the growth of the organization, especially of those organizations without which change is impossible. Social organizations take social norms for granted; anomic situations, in contrast, are defined as the absence of norms. Therefore, they do not foster organization. They foster only, as Medina put it, "despair and extremism." And historical experience teaches us that in politics, these sentiments almost always give way to violence, despotism, and disaster.

It is necessary to continue with this hypothesis if only because, for sociological reflection, anomie is always treated as an extreme situation, one of those that appear to exist only in the realm of theory. I suppose that when the Marxist Antonio Gramsci spoke of Italy of the Mezzogiorno as a region of "social degeneration," he was including phenomena similar to those that we observe today in some regions of Latin America. Do not the Mafia, the Camorra, and other "Mediterranean inventions" born of misery and violence have something in common with the Colombian cocaine cartels? The difference is that Sicily and Calabria, which Gramsci had in mind in his notes about the "Southern Question," were only parts of a national State that was responding to a shift of the decision centers to the North, to modernity. That which Gramsci examined in southern Italy could be interpreted today as a model in miniature of what is happening today in many Latin American countries on a far wider scale.

It is quite possible that some Italian Mafia chieftain may sometime have stated something similar to a recent declaration by one of the chiefs of Colombian drug trafficking—that we are on the threshold of a "cocaine civilization." It is a sinister, frightful statement. But it does not surprise anyone who knows that the revenue from cocaine holds second place in Colombian exports, and that the drug traffic Mafia, according to some Colombian political leaders, appears to have penetrated profoundly into the State organization, particularly in the police and in the Army, with whom they have collaborated, by means of paramilitary groups, in the common enterprise of repression of guerilla groups. Like the Italian Mafia, the Mafia of the Colombian drug cartel, a sinister product of backward and decadent regions of the world, expanded through transactions with organized crime in the more modern regions, particularly in the United States.

To speak of a “cocaine civilization” is to speak of an absurd but not impossible situation. If Colombian cocaine exports have the importance of which some people speak, they are almost equal to coffee exports. And we know that coffee (like sugar cane and cattle) helped to build up, in an special symbiosis with the industrialized world, important parts of Latin American civilization. Today parts of Colombia, of Bolivia, and of Peru link themselves through means of crime and vice with parts of a modern world in degeneration, which includes parts of the United States and Western Europe. The media recently carried a communiqué sent by the “Extraditables” in which they address themselves to the Colombian State in order to acknowledge their defeat in the cocaine war and to sue for peace. What is most surprising in the communique is not the fact that they consider themselves defeated, but that they propose peace negotiations with the Colombian State as if they were its equal.²¹ The proposal was rejected by President Virgilio Barco.

The phenomenon could have an ominous meaning. A “cocaine civilization” is something that is both perplexing and sinister. It is something that subverts both logic and fundamental human values, just like the fascist shouts of “viva la muerte” (“long live death”). Death is not something that can be experienced while you are alive. Likewise, no matter how liberal and permissive our civilization might be, it cannot be grounded on a sickness. The expansion of the drug routes has to be taken as a signal of the decay of civilization, a sickness that if not controlled will lead to death, without the possibility of rebirth.

The New Middle Ages?

A social crisis of such dimensions cannot but affect the consistency of social thought. On the theoretical level, the existence of phenomena of generalized anomie is so surprising that it can throw into question some perspectives considered sacred in the social sciences. Studying similar phenomena in Europe, Ralf Dahrendorf states, for example, that “the traditional class struggles do not represent any longer the dominant expression of the unsociability of man. On the contrary, what we find are manifestations of more individualized and more spontaneous social aggression. Among them, the predominant occurrences are the violations of law and order by individuals, gangs, and crowds.”²² I myself think that, at least in Latin America, the “traditional” class struggles continue to predominate as expressions of that which Dahrendorf (following Kant) calls “the unsociable sociability of man.” But it must be admitted that “violations of the law,” in the sense he defines, contribute very strongly to anomie. Such “violations of the law,” in the final analysis, promote strongly the violation of social norms.

Let us take a few examples. It appears evident to me that the violence, let us say, of landowners in the Brazilian North and North-East or of conservative groups in Guatemala, should

be understood as “traditional” violence characteristic of the class struggles undertaken by conservative forces in Latin America. But what should be said of the “death squads” that act under the orders of the rightist groups in El Salvador, or of the crime wave attributed to the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru?²³ Besides that, it is obvious that political violence is becoming confused with street crime on a scale never before known in Latin America. Although certain conservative groups exaggerate its magnitude, there is no way to deny that violence is increasing in big cities. The incidence of robbery and armed assault is growing, as well as other physical crimes against individuals, which stimulates the proliferation of private security forces.

In segments of Brazilian society we can witness the degeneration of social behavior, which includes not only poor people but also parts of the middle and upper classes. The growth of white-collar crime is evidence of this. The city of Rio de Janeiro is not the only Brazilian example of all of this, but it is perhaps the most pronounced, because there we can see most visibly the economic decay of the old capital of the Empire (and of the Republic), the increasing poverty of the morros and of the favelas that surround middle-class neighborhoods, with their typical street mixture of workers and middle-class people, more and more of them playing the “animal game” (jogo do bicho, an illegal lottery run by the Mafia), and the prostitution of all genders and styles stimulated by tourism in the beautiful seaside city of Rio.

An interesting example of social degeneration is presented by the case of the bandit known “Meio Quilo” (Half Kilo), of the Morro Dona Marta. Although a well-known drug trafficker, he was also the boyfriend of the daughter of the lieutenant governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, who, according to the media, would often visit him in prison. After he was killed by the police, thousands of mourners from his morro and surrounding neighborhoods went to his funeral and acclaimed him as a hero.²⁴ This lumpen drama is a clear example of how the loss of a sense of social norms can have a general character. There are many other examples of the process of degeneration, which is not limited to poor people but pervades all social classes.

These processes of social degeneration create what Dahrendorf calls “areas of exclusion,” regions of social behavior (or even entire geographic areas) that the State can no longer control.²⁵ As Dahrendorf says, the final proof of the validity of norms is found in the sanctions applied to violators. For many relevant norms, sanctions, in the final analysis, depend on the State. The fact that this phenomenon of the loss of control by the State (the central power) takes place in territories conquered by the guerrillas in El Salvador implies the creation of an “area of exclusion” that aims to be a new State. This shows that not all “areas of exclusion” are a sign of social degeneration. However, if that loss of the capacity of control occurs in certain areas of Medellín or Bogotá or in certain slums of Rio de Janeiro (or in certain neighborhoods of New York City), we have clear examples of social degeneration.

The “areas of exclusion” are a more generalized phenomenon than is commonly believed. Administrative corruption is now a mass phenomenon. The case of Mexico comes quickly to mind, with its infamous “mordida,” the obligatory bribe without which no official document ever moves forward in the bureaucratic process and without which no administrative problem is ever resolved. It is not the only case. In some Latin American countries no taxes are paid at all. Anyhow, in most Latin American countries the rich people do not pay their income taxes. Brazil can be seen as a case in which tax evasion is now a generalized practice. Brazilians often say that the only people who pay income taxes are widows, morons...and people who receive a salary. (Those last ones, incidentally, cannot help but pay the income taxes due because they are withheld by the employers).

It is evident that the phenomenon of the “areas of exclusion” is repeated in what many call an “informal economy” (or “underground economy”), to which some Latin American liberals or neoconservatives attribute powerful virtues. In the enterprising spirit of those who place themselves (or are placed by others) outside the laws of the State would be found the beginning of a process of free-market economics that would be the steppingstone for the consolidation of democracy and the renewal of economic development. The most interesting example of that kind of debate is found in Peru’s Hernando de Soto’s book, *El Otro Sendero* (The Other Path).²⁶ I would not like my ideas to be interpreted as a justification for what Hernando de Soto calls “mercantilist” statism, but I insist that there are evident examples in which the stimuli to the “underground economy” are little more than an ideological smoke screen for the exercise of illegal and illegitimate practices which come close to anomic situations. In Brazil some newspapers stimulate so openly the practice of tax evasion that they clearly come close to promoting a criminal activity under the pretext of criticizing tax laws. Some colorful events should be recalled. In São Paulo, an important industrial leader, Mario Amato, president of the Federation of Industries (FIESP), so strongly preached “civil disobedience” against the tax authorities that, ironically, he was called by the media “the Brazilian Bakunin.” Of course, it was a case of the disobedience against tax laws by businessmen and not, let us say, of the disobedience against strike laws by workers. But the question remains: where is the dividing line between processes of social degeneration and processes of social change?

Phenomena of social disorganization and degeneration are not the exclusive domain of backward countries, and thus they allow a diversity of interpretations. Some authors call attention to some effects of the acceleration of the technological transformation that would also lead very modern societies to phenomena very similar to those that we can describe with the idea of “generalized anomie.” I think that it useful to dedicate some time to those reflections. Although they are shaped in a context that is very different from ours, they seem to lead to similar results.

In an essay with the interesting title of “The New Middle Ages,” Umberto Eco interprets the phenomenon that he calls “the degradation of large systems,” saying that even in a big corporation there already exists an “absolute decentralization and the crisis of the central power (or powers) reduced to fiction.”²⁷ Typical of the “degradation of large systems” would be a loss of the functions of general power and a rupture of the social consensus. It is evident that both the corporation and the State, as well as the Empire, belong to the same category of “large systems,” with their tendency toward degeneration.²⁸ Eco presents an impressive view of the degeneration process using an essay written by Furio Colombo that raises for our consideration the issue of technological change. “Technological advances sapped institutions of their power and shifted that power from the centers of the social fabric to a zone which is free from general duties and responsibilities, showing clearly the adventitious character of institutions.”²⁹ In a radical and suggestive reasoning, Colombo speaks of the “Vietnamization of territories” (mercenaries, internal police, etc.) in modern society.

Along the same lines, Giuseppe Sacco, also mentioned by Eco, brings us back to Latin America when he suggests that certain modern societies are characterized by “a picture of permanent civil war, dominated by a clash of opposing minorities, and lacking a center.” In that image, “cities will increasingly be prepared to become that which we can already find in some Latin locales accustomed to guerrilla warfare, where the fragmentation of the social fabric is well symbolized by the fact of finding the doormen of large apartment buildings habitually armed with machine guns. In those same cities the public buildings appear to be fortresses, like the presidential palaces, and are surrounded by a kind of barrier that protects them from bazooka attacks.”³⁰

I don’t know to which Latin American cities the above-mentioned text refers. But with small differences of detail, it will not be difficult to recognize, in that description, any large Latin American city. In São Paulo, in many apartment buildings, although the doorman is not armed with a machine gun, he is usually accompanied by an armed private security guard. This can also be observed in many private upper-class houses. In the so-called “closed condominiums,” which are middle-class residential areas that have recently spread in suburban neighborhoods in large Brazilian cities, the gates are guarded by groups of security men armed with guns and rifles. It is obvious that, no matter how much they may grow, the “closed condominiums” are no more than small middle-class islands in an ocean of poverty and misery.

Loss of a Place in the World

Both the hypothesis of “anomie” and that of social fragmentation (in the style of a “new Middle Ages”) cover aspects of Latin American reality. It is not necessary to point out that they are

only partial hypotheses, timid approximations of contemporary processes that, to a large extent, lie beyond our present capacities of analysis. In the same sense, it would be good to present another hypothesis, perhaps one a little more “specifically Latin American.”

I want to refer to that sense of loss of a place in the world that can be found in so many of the analyses that economists and scholars of international relations have made about Latin America, particularly South America. Since the 1930s, when it ceased to be the economic complement of “central” countries in an international economic organization in which it exported raw materials and imported manufactured goods, and since the process of import-substitution industrialization (a policy that tried to make Latin American countries look inward for their economic development and that was more successful in some countries than others) came to an end in the 1960s, Latin America seems not to have found a place in the new international system that has been taking shape since the seventies, based upon the acceleration of the “technological revolution.” When we recall the critiques that Latin Americans have made of the dependent position that the world always assigned to them, that feeling of “loss” of a place in the world requires some explanation.

Since the mid-seventies, the circulation of wealth is increasingly limited to the countries of the northern hemisphere. Instead of being an exceptional conjuncture, the circulation of wealth restricted to a particular part of the world indicates the creation of a new web of relatively integrated economic regions. In a recent paper, Marcílio Marques Moreira, Brazil’s Ambassador to the United States, analyzed the phenomena of the creation of blocs: first, the United States (including Canada and perhaps Mexico); second, Europe in a unification process that will be concluded in 1992; third, Japan and the “new industrialized countries” of Asia; fourth, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries searching, via perestroika and glasnost, for the path to democracy and modernization.³¹ Ambassador Rubens Ricúpero, chief of Brazil’s mission to the United Nations in Geneva, indicates some of the consequences of that reorganization of markets (and power) in the world: “the temptation to divide the system into closed blocs makes people fear the devastating effects that may eventually come in 1992 upon the definitive adoption of the European Common Market, as well as the Free Trade Agreement between USA and Canada and the plan to extend it to Mexico to make up a free trade zone of all of North America. People fear also the possibility of an agreement between Japan and the new industrialized countries of Asia or even a free trade agreement between the United States and Japan.” Considering that Africa and the Caribbean are linked to the European Common Market, Ricúpero concludes that the projects of blocs “cover practically all the main regions of the globe, with the exception of South America.”³²

Celso Lafer states that “the region as a whole, from the ’50s to the ’80s, lost its rank in the economic field. The average per capita income of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador,

Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela is today at least a third or more less than that of Japan and of the European countries of average income, half than that of Mediterranean Europe and lower than that of the Asian NICS and that of Turkey.”³³ In contrast also to the 1950s and the 1960s, the 1980s show, according to Lafer, a decline in the political importance of Latin America as a regional power bloc. That loss is showed in the crisis of the Organization of American States, which after the Second World War had great importance in global multilateral diplomacy. Following some of the analyses of Peter Drucker, Lafer examines those economic and political changes in the context of the technological transformations that “are eroding the classic historical comparative advantages that, for better or for worse, gave the region a world economic role since the era of European expansion in the sixteenth century.”³⁴

The development of agricultural technologies and biotechnology “diminished the strategic importance of the exportation and importation of raw materials,” allowing food self-sufficiency in a growing number of countries. The new technologies also reduced the importance of raw materials for industrial uses, having an adverse effect on the producers of tin, petroleum, copper, bauxite, iron, etc. Add to that the reduction of the importance of labor, through automation and computers, as a factor of international competition. “To sum up, the Latin American picture in this decade is really one of crisis of identity and of stagnation... There was a deterioration in the position of Latin American countries on the international scene—a deterioration that affected its identity, reduced its capability for external action and its internal capacity to modernize and develop itself.”³⁵

It is evident that the project of blocs, as far as Latin American is concerned, is still in the future. Also for the future are the policies of Latin American integration, up to now only incipient or complete failures. In any case, it is important to note the exceptions. To the south can be found the exception, brilliant though nascent, of the protocols of commercial cooperation between Brazil and Argentina, probably the most important initiative of the governments of Sarney and of Alfonsín in favor of the economic integration of the two countries.³⁶ However tentative, the Brazil-Argentina protocols point to possibilities that gain strength in the current democratization process that is going on in the two countries and in the rest of Latin America. As Rosenthal had already pointed out, the return in the '80s to “more pluralistic and participatory regimes established a community of interests that certainly facilitated greatly communication and mutual confidence between the governments participating in the subregional integration processes.” But, as is noted by the Executive Secretary of ECLA, the truth is that integration, instead of serving in the '80s to attenuate “the recessive effects deriving from the external sector...became another victim of the crisis.” As a consequence of the foreign exchange instability, lack of hard currencies, and reduction in the income level, regional commerce fell from

fifteen point four percent of the total of Latin American exports in 1980 to eleven point one in 1985, climbing again to its previous level in the final years of the decade.”³⁷

The exceptions that can be verified in the area of the integration policies cannot, at least for the time being, serve to invalidate the following statement: In a world that is in a process of reorganization, the Latin American countries are not becoming integrated into any existing region. To the north of the region, the only exception appears to be Mexico. Abraham Lowenthal says that “the ‘silent integration’ of Mexico’s economy with the United States had a rapid advance, especially in the border states, where the maquiladora industries expanded dramatically in the last few years, frequently with Japanese investments. Notwithstanding the tensions of the last few years, never in Mexico’s postrevolutionary history have there been more favorable conditions than the present ones for important advances in the direction of bilateral cooperation with the United States.”³⁸ The other Latin American countries, at least for the time being, are neither becoming integrated with other regions or blocs, nor are they forming a regional economic unit. In the politics of blocs, they only serve as part of that Third World that is in all classifications only “the rest of the world,” a collection of backward countries, which are stagnant and marginal to the dynamic centers of the international economic system.

Maybe that is the fundamental root of all the present problems of Latin America. Latin American countries are disintegrating both in their internal structure and in their links with the outside world. In the 1980s those countries that were already poor turned into marginal countries. They departed (or are departing) from the main economic circuits of the modern world. This economic dislocation, obviously, did not prevent Latin American countries from becoming even poorer. Anyhow, the truth is that if Latin America in the '80s continues to be a region of peripheral countries, it is no longer a region of “developing countries,” as it was known in the 1960s. It is a region whose growth has inched to a halt. And, as Ricúpero suggests, “no country will can guarantee its survival if it cannot follow the changes” taking place on the international political and economic scenes.³⁹

According to statistics of the World Bank, in Peru total investments fell by seventeen percent each year in 1980-85, affecting even the economic infrastructure of the country especially in the area of energy. The same thing is going on in Bolivia and in Argentina. In Argentina investments have fallen fourteen percent each year since 1980. In Brazil in the last decades the percentage of investments dropped from twenty percent to sixteen percent and investments declined by about five point five percent each year; in Mexico they fell nine percent each year and in Chile thirteen percent. According to ECLA statistics, comparing the years of 1980 and 1987, the difference in per capita GNP is -14.7 for Argentina, -7.3 for Ecuador, -9.1 for Mexico, and -3.8 for Brazil.⁴⁰

Latin America in the 1980s was saved by democratization. In the economic and social spheres everything went beyond the patterns that we Latin Americans consider normal. Latin America's strongest link with the modern world was the external debt, the most perverse link that backward countries can have with modernity. As Alain Touraine notes, the external debt transformed Latin America from "a strong capital importing region to a capital exporting region."⁴¹ Gert Rosenthal adds: "in 1970, eighteen point eight percent of the direct investments that American companies had outside the U.S. were found in Latin America and in the Caribbean; that proportion had dropped to thirteen point two percent in 1986. On the other hand, of the 17 countries with the highest debts in the developing world, 12 are now found in the region." In the 1980s the deterioration of the level of foreign exchange and the payment of the foreign debt, which are usually accompanied by the diminution of the net amount of external capital that comes into the country, reduced considerably the availability of the net amount of resources ready for investments. In that way the percentage of net investments for the region fell from twenty-two point seven percent in 1980 to sixteen point five percent in 1988. "This phenomenon," according to Rosenthal, "had adverse effects in the majority of the countries, among them the increasing obsolescence of the productive infrastructure and an alarming deterioration of the physical infrastructure."⁴²

The principal beneficiary of that perverse process that has been called "a Marshall Plan in reverse" is the United States, which has absorbed capital from Latin America and from the entire Third World. Countries whose GNP has not grown for years have been forced to cut into their own flesh in order to "honor" the interest payments of a debt whose principal they cannot pay. It is true that since 1989 some countries, including Brazil and Argentina, have been practicing a de facto moratorium. But that seems not to have affected economic policies, which along with the debt crisis, turn their back on the internal market and orient the countries toward exports.

There are clear signs that point to the marginal condition of Latin America in today's world, something that has been hastened by the technological revolution and by the acceleration of the modernization processes. But the feeling of "loss" of a place in the world that goes along with those signs point out to Latin America's penchant for modernity. By the way, only exceptionally in history has Latin American nationalism taken on a conservative or reactionary character. With a few minor deviations, Latin American critiques of imperialism have rarely been identified as having a regressive, autarchic content. In the majority of cases they have been inspired by some idea of modernization. They have wanted Latin American countries to be autonomous so that they could be dynamic. As Morse says, "Ibero-America was always seen by its classic thinkers not as autochthonous but simply as obsolete."⁴³ Backwardness was always the great challenge. Morse points to Mariátegui's well-thought words: "Europe showed me to what point I was a member of a chaotic and primitive world and, at the same time, illuminated and laid upon me a genuine

American duty.”⁴⁴ Isn't it true that Haya de la Torre also saw in the phenomenon of imperialism a clash between modernity, represented by the United States and Europe, and Indo-America?

Considered from many standpoints, the fact remains that the preoccupation with economic development, with economic dynamism, has always been for Latin Americans at least as strong as the preoccupation with the idea of the nation, with the idea of autonomy. That makes us understand why in today's Latin America, which has no capital and whose economic growth has stopped, all (or almost all) the groups want some foreign capital to enter the country at least to galvanize economic growth. The truth is that for Latin Americans abandonment is a fate worse than dependency. Abandonment is understood as a terrible situation which always scared them and towards which they seem to be moving.

Apartheid-Democracy

All of this suggests that we are in not only a deep economic and social crisis, but also an extraordinary crisis of power. The impotence of governments in the face of the debt crisis can be taken as a sign, obviously not the only one, of the present political crisis. Gone are the days that began in the 1930s, the beginning of industrialization. Today the obligations of debt service have caused industries to die in many countries. Gone are also the days of increasing social integration—between the city and the countryside, between the city and the “hills,” between industry and agriculture, etc. Instead, there is today an ongoing process of disintegration. All this means that if since the 1930s Latin America was moving towards the construction of national States, today it is on the way to destroying them.

The “blackout” of future perspectives, signs of a “generalized anomie,” “medieval” fragmentation, the economic slump, the loss of a place in the world—all these point to a situation of regression. Although one must always applaud the progress made in the democratization of political culture and in the institutional field, the power structures of many Latin American countries could be regressing to regimes that Robert Dahl, in his classic book, *Polyarchy*, termed “competitive oligarchies.”⁴⁵ Considering this possibility, we would find ourselves in a situation in which a democratic institutional arrangement could coexist with the burdens of privatismo and a corporative mentality, which are forms of behavior compatible with “medievalization” and “anomie.” The “competitive oligarchical regime,” of which Dahl gives as examples ancient Athens and the U.S. South prior to the 1960s, combines the participation of some and the exclusion of others: the participation of the aristocrats and the exclusion of the slaves, the participation of whites and the exclusion of blacks, etc. While those who participate can use the mechanisms of a polyarchy, those who are excluded are subject to a regime of coercion and terror.

This hypothesis concurs with a recent interpretation made by Alain Touraine: "The Latin American continent is the theater of a clash between two regimes: first, that which gives expression to the great movement of modernization, social integration, and access to political influence, which disturbs the continent in the twentieth century...and creates a political and cultural system for the masses. Second, that which corresponds to a dependent continent, of limited industrialization and of permanent exclusion of the masses." In that way, continues the author, "democracy's future" depends "on the relative influence of each one of the two complementary and opposite aspects of the Latin American reality."⁴⁶

It is evident that "dual systems" can assume very different forms. South Africa, for example, with its regime of racial apartheid, appears as an extremely rigid case. In the Latin American case we would have to create a typology that could account for the quite different situations that can be found in such cases as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, countries that began their modernization drive earlier, and the cases of Brazil and Mexico that industrialized at a later time. The typology would also have to account for the countries that are going through a "traditional" revolutionary (or prerevolutionary) situation, as in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as for the Andean countries such as Bolivia and Peru, and for those immersed in violence, as in the case of Colombia. Many more situations could be identified in the complex Latin American scene, but they go beyond the limited scope of this paper.

We should, nevertheless, try to point out here in what way the present Latin American apartheid is different from the dualisms of the past. Although Latin America has always been characterized by regimes of exclusion, the old oligarchic regimes at least claimed to serve as the basis for the construction of relatively integrated national States. They maintained the "Iberian ideal" of "social incorporation," which gave impulse to a drive (unfortunately, undertaken more through authoritarian than through democratic means) to build up a national economic and political system and to construct a society that would, somehow, integrate the "unfortunate ones." In oligarchic pre-1930 Brazil, where the state of São Paulo was the region that represented both power and modernity, the paulista oligarchy invented the saying: "São Paulo is the locomotive that pulls the other wagons of the federation." This image of the powerful coffee oligarchy was, with all its arrogance, a way of linking backwardness and modernity and thus assuming leadership. In the apartheid regimes it is precisely hegemony, of this kind or any other, that is thrown into doubt.

In the case of some of the Latin American countries, perhaps we should speak of a social apartheid (instead of a racial apartheid, which also exists in some countries) or of a process that is moving in that direction. The roots of that should be sought both in the economic crisis as well as in the political response to it. The responses of the governments to the crisis make it clear that in those countries even the modern dominant groups seem incapable of combining their individual

interests with those others that, together, make up the nations to which they belong. They appear to lack a general vision of the nation. When they have some sense of the nation, that idea is limited, in reality, to a small part of the real nation. In some cases, it is the most modern one, the one most linked to the international economic circuits, but which is generally unconnected to the "other wagons of the federation." They limit their view of the nation to such limited criteria, as defined by the international system that, in the end, their view of the nation can be completely discarded. At this point, the more modern dominant groups no longer see themselves as part of the nation but as part of the world or of an international "bloc." An example of this is capital which, in its dramatic flight northward, actively excludes itself from the nation.

Although the aspects that have to do with exclusion are the most dramatic, it is necessary to go to the other side of the fence and look at democratization too. "Dual" regimes cannot be kept alive without a minimum participation. Brazil is an example, among others, of an extraordinary growth in the organizational capacity of social groups and in their capacity to generate pressure towards more participation or, at least, some participation. Since the mid-1960s, the number of rural and urban associations of workers, middle-class associations (journalists, physicians, professors, etc.), entrepreneurs' and employers' associations, cultural institutions, etc., has increased exponentially. This experience in the growth of the associations of diverse social groups is also well known in countries like Chile and Mexico, whose policies of incorporation into the international economic system have perhaps advanced faster than in Brazil. In those countries one can witness in the midst of the crisis a rearrangement of social relations. But even with substantial economic growth, Brazil's consumer market is limited to 1/3 of the population.⁴⁷ The situation of countries like Mexico and Chile is not much different.

As I pointed out earlier, this growth in the capacity of political participation and of the organizational capacity of different social groups implies a solid foundation for democracy in Latin America, and an impulse to the modernization of the countries of the region. But it also means an intensification of the "corporative" mentality in which each segment of society holds firmly to its particular interests in detriment to the general interests of society. In a society in crisis, full of debt, and whose economic growth has stopped, we can witness an increase in violent antisocial behavior by which each individual tries to survive as best as he or she can without any concern for the well-being of others. The capacity that social groups have to organize themselves and to participate coincides with their ability to defend their interests, which is, in many cases, a matter of survival.

The development of democracy depends to a great extent on how these opposing tendencies—growth in the foundation of democracy and intensification of the corporative mentality—can be reconciled. If it is true that each group's capacity for organization and participation is a measure of its capacity for survival in society, then it should not be any different

for the entire society's capacity for survival in the international system to which it belongs. In an international economic system that is in the process of reorganization, and in the circumstances created by the crisis, those countries that are capable of organizing and participating will have a greater chance for survival. This last chance belongs to democracy.

Democracy, Economic Development, and Integration

Of the present days we might say something similar to what Norbert Wiener says about machines (and about the universe). "We are immersed in a life in which the world, as a whole, obeys the second law of thermodynamics: confusion increases and order diminishes." If we suppose that this is true, the question remains: what to do? In his cybernetics, a strange word that has also been used to mean "government" and "political science," Wiener says that "thanks to their capacity to make decisions, machines can produce around them an organized zone in a world whose general tendency is toward deterioration."⁴⁸ Transferred to society, this reasoning produces the following: chaos is fought against by making decisions, by creating organizations and institutions. To fight against anomie is to create a new legitimate order, a new consensus, to create norms and to apply them.

Just as we recently relived the general origins of democracy in some of the American countries that fought against authoritarian regimes, today we are reliving the origins of society itself in a fight against a crisis that takes us to the limits of chaos and anomie. I prefer to believe that we are in a new period of the development of the national State, as important as the century of independence that first shaped our States. But if we are in a new period of an "evolving" process, this era does not present itself as such, but rather as the chaos that announces the end of a State that has historically failed. In face of this chaos, the researcher feels like the first thinkers who wrote about the modern State, recommending the principles of what would come to be modern political theory, advising women and men how to overcome the uncertainties of the "state of nature." Likewise, we could say (and this would certainly be Marx's point of view) that the present crisis in Latin America has to be understood as a stage of the process of development of capitalist society in this part of the world. This viewpoint is probably correct, but it does not take into account that in many countries the crisis is so profound that it makes us question the existence of such societies, at least in the sense of national societies. That is why for many Latin Americans the development of political democracy is viewed as a way of rebuilding not only the State but also national societies.

In that perspective, the relations between democracy and modernity become decisive matters. The different versions of the idea of Latin America's integration with the modern world do not compete against each other. On the contrary, they can complement each other. In that

sense, social integration, the overcoming of the division between “the integrated” and the “excluded,” can complement regional (or subregional) integration, which tries to overcome obsolete divisions among national States and to create conditions for economic cooperation on a greater scale among Latin American countries. Both social and regional integration can also complement the international integration of Latin America into the dynamic currents of the modern world.

It is very important to point out that just as modernity is not guaranteed to any of our countries, democracy is obviously not the only possibility in these historical times of crisis. Just as economic stagnation drives many parts of Latin America to fragmentation and degeneration, there also exist possibilities of regression to authoritarianism, perhaps on a scale worse than that experienced in the past. It would be naïve to think that democracy is guaranteed in Latin America as a kind of ineluctable law of history. But, even though there may be other ways to put Latin America back on the road of economic development, I do not doubt for a moment that political democracy is the only way by which Latin America can achieve modernity.

All this may appear to be, and is, a very general discussion of the problems facing Latin America today. But it is necessary to begin in this way the debates over the relations between democracy and modernity in the context of the present crisis. Latin America astray is Latin America divided, fragmented into obsolete national States. It is a dualistic Latin America which practices exclusionism and which is marginal to itself and to the modern world.

Is there any hope for the future? I think that there is, indeed. I think that the “evolutionary and Faustian” aspects of Latin America history will prove stronger than its entropic aspects. Latin Americans have a very radical difference in their attitudes toward modernity in comparison with men who hold on to the past as something sacred. In this sense I recall a very striking passage from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *Il Gattopardo*. Speaking with a northern bureaucrat, Aimone Chevalley di Monterzuelo, from Piedmont, who was lecturing him on the necessity of modernizing Sicily, the old prince Fabrizio Salina (representing southern traditions) responded that Sicily was invaded many times in its two-thousand-year history and that nobody was able to make it change its ways. “Do you know why?” asks the prince. He himself answers: it is because Sicilians do not want to change. “Sicilians never wanted to change for the simple reason that they believe that they are perfect. Their vanity is stronger than their misery. Any interference disturbs the ecstasy of their state of perfection, bothers them in their self-indulgent waiting for nothingness. They reject outside interference because it comes from foreigners. They despise the advice of other Sicilians because it hurts them in their fierce independence of spirit. Trampled by a dozen different nations, they think that they have an imperial past that entitles them to sumptuous funerals. Do you really think, Chevalley, that you are the first to try to put Sicily on the track of world history?”

I think that, fortunately, there are not many Latin Americans who have the beliefs that prince Fabrizio ascribes to his fellow Sicilians. The majority of Latin Americans want to belong to a modern democratic civilization. This is why I think that they can face the fact that America is astray, that it has taken the wrong path. They know that Latin America must change.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Those who are familiar with Brazilian political essays will note that the Brazilian title of this paper (“America Errada”) is inspired by Martins de Almeida’s *Brazil Errado: Ensaio Político sobre os Erros do Brasil como País*, published in 1932, in Rio de Janeiro, by Schmidt Editores.
- 2 O’Donnell, Guillermo, “Argentina, de novo,” *Revista Novos Estudos*, No. 24, July 1989, São Paulo, Brazil.
- 3 Rosenthal, Gert, “El desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe en los años ochenta y sus perspectivas,” *Revista de la CEPAL*, No. 39, Santiago, December 1989.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The references to Bolívar are taken out of Moacir Werneck de Castro’s *O Libertador—A Vida de Simon Bolívar*, Editora Rocco, Rio de Janeiro, 1988, p. 213.
- 6 By the way, many of the Latin American countries were considered long ago “not viable.” That controversial expression is found in Helio Jaguaribe’s *Economic & Political Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968. Jaguaribe classifies the Latin American countries with relation to their viability, in three categories: those which have relative individual viability—in this case we find Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil; those which have a collective viability—the countries of the Andes, Paraguay, and Uruguay; and those which have almost no viability—Central America, Cuba, and the Caribbean. See also Jaguaribe, Helio, “A America Latina no Sistema Internacional,” in the collective book *A Crise da Ordem Mundial*, edited by Henrique Rattner, Editora Símbolo, São Paulo, 1978, page 99.
- 7 This essay was already finished when I read *As Americas em 1989: Um Consenso para a Ação*, published by the Interamerican Dialogue, 1989, which gives a very precise warning: “The economic crisis of the ’80s could unleash a political crisis in the ’90s. Economic adversity is already eroding the foundations of democratic governments in some countries. The public institutions find themselves discredited and weakened... In each country the hopes raised by new leaders gave way to frustration to the extent that austerity became a permanent state” (p. 1).
- 8 There are some concrete initiatives in this sense in the governments of Alfonsín and Sarney which will be considered later in this essay.
- 9 Morse, Richard, *O Espelho de Prospero*, Companhia das Letras, 1988, São Paulo, p. 77.
- 10 Ibid., p. 6.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 26 and 28.
- 12 Touraine, Alan, *Palavra e Sangue*, Editora Trajetória Cultural, 1989, São Paulo.
- 13 Zea, Leopoldo, *América Latina y el Mundo*, EUDEBA, Buenos Aires, 1965, p. 75.
- 14 Arendt, Hannah, *On Revolution*, The Viking Press, New York, 1963, ch. 2.

15 See, concerning European images, Buarque de Holanda, Sergio, *Visão do Paraíso*, Companhia Editora Nacional, São Paulo, 1969.

16 Garretón, Manuel Antonio, "The Political Evolution of the Chilean Military Regime and Problems in the Transition to Democracy," chapter of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule—Latin America*, edited by G. O'Donnell, P. Schmitter and L. Whitehead, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986.

17 There is something of that hope in Hernando de Soto's book, *Economia Subterranea—Uma Análise da Realidade Peruana*, Editora Globo, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, when he speaks about the new role of the masses of migrants in Lima.

18 O'Donnell, G., "Argentina, de novo," op.cit.

19 Jose Medina Echavarría, *Consideraciones sociológicas sobre el desarrollo económico de América Latina*, Editora Solar/Hachette, 1964.

20 Zermeño, Sergio, "México: O Retorno do Líder—Crise, Neo-liberalismo e Desordem," *Revista Lua Nova*, No.18, August, 1989, CEDEC, São Paulo. "The general hypothesis mentioned here can also be interpreted in the conceptual evolution of social sciences in Latin America in the past twenty years: from the growth of imperialism in the world that gave the West as a model, to the sociology of pessimism, decadence, stagnation, and increasing exclusion, which also views the person as defeated, and which is today called post-modernism in Latin America," p. 170.

21 Here are some excerpts from the document: "1. We acknowledge the patriotic invitation included in the document signed by Monsignor Mario Revollo Bravo, in the distinguished company of former presidents Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, Julio Cesar Turbay, and Misael Pastrana and of the president of the Union Patriótica, Diego Montana Cuellar. 2. To respond to those worthy designs, we reiterate our well-known desire for peace... 3. We fully share the criteria stated by them concerning the survival of the State and of the democratically elected government in the face of outlawed people and organizations such as ours. 5. We accept the victory of the State... We will lay down our arms... 6. We accept to stop the shipments of drugs and to hand over our arms and explosives the moment that we are given full legal and constitutional guaranties..." From the newspaper "O Estado de São Paulo", January 18, 1990.

22 Dahrendorf, Paul, *A Lei e a Ordem*, Instituto Tancredo Neves-Fundação Friedrich Naumann, São Paulo, 1987.

23 An estimate of the effects of war in Central America made by the Inter-American Dialogue: "Almost two hundred thousand persons were assassinated in the internal conflicts of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua; more than two million were dislodged from their homes. The majority of the region's physical infrastructure is in ruins or is dilapidated. Hurricanes, droughts, and earthquakes caused terrible losses, but the worst destruction was brought about by war." *As Americas em 1989*, p.19.

- 24 An analysis of the case can be found in Muylaert, Eduardo, "Reflexões sobre a Batalha do Morro Dona Marta", *OAB-Revista da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil*, São Paulo, 1988, No. 43-48.
- 25 Dahrendorf, *A Lei e a Ordem*, p. 39.
- 26 De Soto, Hernando, *Economia Subterranea*.
- 27 Eco, Umberto, *Viagem na Irrealidade Cotidiana*, Editora Nova Fronteira, third edition, Rio de Janeiro, 1983, p. 81.
- 28 The Italian inspiration of these reflections comes from Roberto Vacca, author of an strange book, first published in 1971, *Il Medioevo Prossimo Venturo*, Mondadori Editore, 1987 (third edition). "One of my theses is that the proliferation of the big systems until they achieve critical, unstable, and anti-economical dimensions, will be followed by a degradation as quick as the preceding expansion, which will be accompanied by catastrophic events. Consequently, there will be two principal characteristics that will be symptoms of the coming of the new Middle Ages: the first one will be a sudden diminution of the population...the second one will be a disintegration of the big systems and their transformation into a big number of small independent sub-systems," pp. 19-20.
- 29 Eco, p. 82.
- 30 Eco, p. 85.
- 31 Marcílio Marques Moreira, "O Brasil no Contexto Internacional do Fim do Seculo XX," *Revista Lua Nova*, CEDEC, No. 18, August 1989.
- 32 "O Brasil e o Futuro do Comercio Internacional," chapter of the collective book *Nova Era da Economia Mundial*, edited by Norman Gall and Werner Loewenberg, Livraria Pioneira Editora, São Paulo, 1989, p. 94.
- 33 Lafer, Celso, "Dilemas da America Latina num Mundo em Transformação," *Revista Lua Nova*, No. 18, August, 1989, p. 34.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 For a description of integration policies, see Ricardo Seitenfus, "A Cooperação Argentino-Brasileira: Significado e Perspectivas," *Revista Lua Nova*, No.18, August 1989. For a specific appraisal of the policies of Argentine-Brazilian integration, see also Daniel Chudnovsky and Fernando Porta, "En torno a la integración económica argentino-brasileña," *Revista de la CEPAL*, Santiago de Chile, December 1989, No. 39.
- 37 Rosenthal, "El desarrollo de América Latina."
- 38 Lowenthal, Abraham, "Os Estados Unidos e a America Latina: Alem da Era Reagan," *Revista Lua Nova*, August 1989, No. 18. Peter Drucker agrees: "Integration is already an accomplished fact to a large extent. Mexico's most efficient and best-paying industries—the maquiladora plants

along the U.S. border and some plants in the interior owned by American giants such as Ford and IBM—produce mainly (or entirely) for the U.S. market.” Drucker, Peter, *The New Realities*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1989, p. 40.

³⁹ Ricúpero, “O Brasil e o Futuro,” p. 107.

⁴⁰ Gall, Norman, “Nova Era da Economia Mundial,” in Gall and Loewenberg, *Nova Era*, p. 10 and following pages.

⁴¹ Alain Touraine, *Palavra e Sangue*, p. 457.

⁴² See Rosenthal, “El desarrollo de América Latina.” A similar analysis is found in *As Americas em 1989*: “The Latin American economic expansion of the '60s and '70s was led by a continuous flow of foreign capital. During the '80s, that flow was inverted dramatically. Between 1972 and 1981, Latin America received an average of 10 billion dollars more per year in new loans than it paid in interest and principal. In the last years, the regional debt repayment exceeded new loans in around 25 billion dollars per year. That difference of 35 billion dollars per year, the equivalent to almost 200 billion dollars for an economy of the size of the United States, is an intolerable and unsustainable drain in economic resources,” p. 3.

⁴³ Morse, *O Espelho de Prospero*, p. 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Dahl, Robert, *Polyarchy—Participation and Opposition*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1971, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Touraine, *Palavra e Sangue*, p. 512.

⁴⁷ See Jaguaribe, Helio et al., *Brasil 2.000*, Editora Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro, third edition.

⁴⁸ Wiener, Norbert, *Sociedade e Cibernética*, Editora Cultrix, Rio de Janeiro, 1985, p. 39.

