# Imaginative geographies in the present time: from the Third World to the Global South

Reinaldo Lindolfo Lohn
Santa Catarina State University
Florianópolis – BRAZIL
lattes.cnpq.br/0899990656525100
reilohn@gmail.com
orcid.org/0000-0002-7902-2733

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### Abstract

This article provides a historical interpretation of the political perceptions associated with the notion of Global South, in which Brazilian society has been situated in the present time. To do this, it takes 'Global South' as an imaginative geography in dispute, which both mediates encounters, confrontations, and international connections and influences the contours of political relations in countries such as Brazil. Between a political representation marked by the so-called third worldism and the new transnational configuration, hegemonized by neoliberalism, from the 1970s onwards, social conflicts and political projects in Brazilian society were resized, amidst a contradictory democratization process and limited exercise of human rights.

**Keywords:** Global South; Third World; imaginative geography; politics; democracy.

# Geografias imaginativas no tempo presente: do Terceiro Mundo ao Sul Global

### Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma intepretação de caráter histórico acerca das percepções políticas associadas à noção de Sul Global, na qual a sociedade brasileira vem sendo situada no tempo presente. Para tanto, toma "Sul Global" como uma geografia imaginativa em disputa, que tanto medeia encontros, confrontos e conexões internacionais quanto influencia os contornos das relações políticas em países como o Brasil. Entre uma representação política marcada pelo chamado terceiro mundismo e a nova configuração transnacional, hegemonizada pelo neoliberalismo, a partir da década de 1970, os conflitos sociais e os projetos políticos na sociedade brasileira foram redimensionados, em meio a um contraditório processo de democratização e exercício limitado dos direitos humanos.

**Palavras-chave:** Sul Global; Terceiro Mundo; geografia imaginativa; política; democracia.

## 1. Inverted maps of politics

A quick search on the most popular search engine on the internet using the terms 'Brazil' and 'Global South,' covering a 30-day period between June and July 2024, returned more than 10 thousand possible references. Using the same terms in Portuguese and on Brazilian websites, the results are fewer but still significant: more than 3 thousand. The main references include a variety of news and opinion articles about the leadership role that the Brazilian State may eventually play on the international scene. Frequent topics are also issues related to climate change and what would be the so-called energy transition actions in the world. Therefore, it is easy to notice the wide circulation of the terminology and the possible associations and combinations of topics that link Brazil to the Global South. And discussions about Brazil's potential diplomatic weight in what would be the great chessboard of global disputes are also common. It can be suggested that this popularization of issues involving Brazil's position in the world has been advancing in recent decades, as references to the country's importance have become frequent in forums such as the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), among others, evoking its prominent position in the framework of the international capitalist economy.

Beyond the notorious boastful demonstrations and fleeting euphoria, it is worth recalling that the search for international influence has been historically constant in the framework of the relations that Brazil establishes with other countries, by positioning itself as an 'emerging power' capable of taking a seat in major global conversations. There are many examples to explore: from negotiations for the country's entry into the Second World War, going through the formation of the so-called Independent Foreign Policy, in the 1960s, and what was named Responsible and Ecumenical Pragmatism, in the 1970s. More recently, the so-called active and proud foreign policy, practiced in the 2000s, as well as the demand for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, and the call for a proactive role in the so-called G-20, which brings together the world's largest economies, are examples of this historical pathway.

Exercising a supposed leadership in a still undefined Global South seems to be the latest possibility to position oneself proactively in a world in which

images of a possible collaboration between nations around new consensuses are circulating. An ornamental celebration of cultural diversity, acceptance of differences, and a planet united around environmental causes has gained momentum in the media and even in official speeches, taking shape in a huge global spectacle managed according to a powerful cultural industry. Another opportunity to reconfigure Brazil's international dimension, repositioning its borders, would be on the horizon. The country is now situated in an expanded transnational space, with varied symbolic implications. There are diverse political meanings to be explored herein, beyond diplomatic conversations.

Therefore, this is not a discussion of international relations, at least in their strict sense, nor of diplomacy. This text, written admittedly as an essay, seeks to explore some of the political contours that involve the various associations between Brazil and what would be its positioning within the so-called Global South. The proposed discussion involves two analytical frameworks. The first concerns a view of the Global South as an 'imaginative geography,' in the sense of Edward Said (1990, p. 60). A geography that, at times, takes the form of knowledge making and demarcation of borders between an idealized and model world and territories that appear as exotic places, in this case inhabited by peoples located in a post-colonial space, with failed democracies, corrupt political regimes, and ineffective economies. Since the colonial conquest, from the 15th and 16th centuries onwards, diverse peoples and societies have been situated as a minor and less important element of a representation of history in which this appears as having a single evolutionary direction, moving from underdevelopment to development. Therefore, to a certain extent, it is necessary to ask to what extent we are not reproducing another "Western way of creating the world" (Strathern, 1988, p. 4), yet, since the expression Global South itself corresponds to an intellectual operation stimulated in central countries between the 1970s and 1980s, aiming to contradict what was then named the Third World.

On the other hand, the discussion allows us to highlight some of the contours of the winding political democratization process of Brazilian society since the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and the creation of a

system of guarantees based on values evoked by the ideology of human rights. It is worth considering that, when situated in a certain 'imaginative geography,' societies like Brazil give new meaning to their political relations and social conflicts. On the other hand, this political imaginary is in dispute, allowing for diverse appropriations and creating conditions for unique ways of conceiving and practicing democracy and human rights, going beyond the conceptual and evaluative frameworks established by State players and international institutions. This takes on significant contours in a context in which universal values and democratization practices are challenged by the emergence of new right-wing movements articulated around an authoritarian neoliberalism.

Within the limits of this text, we avoid entering into a thorny conceptual field, which would involve a history of ideas, concepts, and representations surrounding the setting of a capitalist world-system since the colonial conquest, in its economic and political dimensions (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 73). The aim herein is to propose a study project that takes into account approaches that go beyond States and national representations as the founding units of analysis in modern historiography. This also involves a shift in relation to subject boundaries, presupposing the testing of interpretative possibilities.

One of the dimensions of the issues under consideration concerns the adoption of international political spaces and times. There is a geography demarcated by sociopolitical acts that define the meanings assigned to social experiences, whether by military conquests, borders between nations, or economic arrangements pointing out the exploitation of nature as a mere productive resource. On the other hand, there is the temporal element: an organization of historical time that establishes patterns and references of historicity for what is considered relevant in global political processes. According to this spatial and temporal cartography, the experiences of various societies and populations are nothing more than fleeting and curious records in the grand narrative constituted in the centers of capitalist power, as if they were incapable of giving their own meaning to their pathways. This global political space-time is a reference for epistemological constructs that define a normative order for the making of ideas, images, and representations that subordinates and hinders the

ability of the peoples of the 'South' to conceive their own political projects. Among the ideas and values that constitute this vast set of political orientations there are the notions of democracy and human rights.

However, it is possible to point out that the recent pathways of societies such as Brazil, supposedly located in the imaginative geography of the Global South, by appropriating such references, resize the time and space of politics, given that it begins to be set beyond its national borders. In this process, through the social agency of movements and demonstrations that demand democratic practice and the exercise of human rights, they begin to manage the latter based on their own dynamics and contradictions.

So, to be situated in the Global South, in addition to identifying with yet another label in the diplomatic lexicon, can mean both a political and epistemological attitude, with unfoldings still in dispute and undetermined. An incomplete process, which gives rise to an approach to a History of the Present Time conceived in such a way that it focuses on objects whose contours are still undefined and have moving temporal boundaries. A History of the Present Time interested in the intense cultural inflections that govern the meanings of 'historical time.' This is all the more complex the greater the difficulties and dilemmas of societies seeking to equip themselves with their own means to see their profound contradictions.

In societies defined by the imaginary cartography of the Global South, the long colonial and exploratory processes — enslavement, cultural oppression, the creation of the Nation-State, experiments around social models, demonstrations and promises of revolution and democratization that were interrupted or undone, and particularly the failures and frustrations of the vast majority of these experiments — suggest a sense of urgency for presence and the present, which seems to be even more intense than in those that are part of the center of the capitalist world. Seen 'from the South,' the epistemologies and narratives proposed for centuries as tools to extract the answers needed to change the reality of things demonstrate to be incomplete, to say the least.

The possible intersections between the term Global South and a country, a social movement, a political group, or a set of attitudes and cultural traits, set

mental operations that go beyond an interstate system and can express shared political sensibilities. The latter consist in readings of the past and projections of the future that affect the appropriation of ideas, images, and discourses that circulate internationally. Given the significance taken by Brazil's international weight and the issues raised by its presence in what has been named the Global South, it is worth asking whether this has influenced aspects of its political relations.

On the other hand, there is a need to reframe historical narratives about political processes that mark Brazilian society, which redefines the very scope of politics. When crossed by issues that go beyond national borders and configure a broader historical, geographic, and imaginative community, the dimension of politics takes on a new shape and other issues, the complexity of which requires attention to recompositions and resignifications. It is seen that, despite national specificities, some dimensions of the political field have a clear transnational extension. When situated in a space of discussions that is not limited to national borders, relations between individuals, societies, and States undergo inflections, resizing the meanings and appropriations of political ideas and values. This is the case of the ways in which various societies, groups, and social movements have mobilized the notions of democracy and human rights.

Given the importance they have take in Brazil since the military dictatorship, democracy and human rights constitute a truly political domain that is not limited to government agreements and tactics, nor to relations between isolated individuals and States. In this regard, it is useful to pay attention to connections and interactions that, through ideas and worldviews, cross the porosity of national borders and set new spaces (Conrad, 2016, p. 102). We may invoke Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) to suppose the possibility of thinking of the existence of a political sphere that does not conform to institutional standards and involves supralocal connections of ideas and representations. Such connections comprise political sensibilities that traverse the intellectual and political field in a way different from that intended by a certain triumphant globalization.

For at least fifty years, democracy and human rights have become a visible part of international debates and the rather conventional discourses of the so-called 'global leaders,' who use established discourses based on procedures that are intended to be universal and ahistorical. However, seen from the South, the political space set by such values takes on dimensions that are hard to map by hegemonic geographies and temporalities. Needs and daily practices of various social movements, militancy, and activism in many countries do not go through diplomatic corridors or reach major internet portals. In this regard, the geography and temporality that set a Global South, when exercised as ways of creating relationships and interactions that go beyond canonical political idealizations, can draw their own maps, consisting of points of intersection and intertwining of social mobilizations and political players that redefine democracy and human rights. An 'Inverted America': a desire to overturn the continental and world order, as in the famous 1943 drawing by Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García, a cultural and political claim that synthesizes the idea of the South as North (Mastricchio; Fonseca, 2023).

Encounters and connections that take place in Latin America as part of the process of overcoming authoritarian regimes and, to a certain extent, since at least the 1980s, became part of far-reaching political struggles undertaken by popular movements organized around environmental causes, struggles for the memory of victims of dictatorships, social rights, and the very existence of cultures and peoples affected by capitalist development policies. Thus, ideologies that bore the marks of formulations and management from various sources fell on fertile ground. And they flourished. It is known that throughout the historical process that followed the several democratic transitions, institutional structures crystallized forms and mechanisms that, to a large extent, reproduced the ways and practices of the so-called 'Western democracies.' However, this did not prevent social movements and many collective groups from experimenting with and creatively appropriating democratic forms, overcoming the barriers of epistemological customs. When least expected, in the context of the apparent global triumph of the neoliberal order, protest movements such as those that took place in Chiapas, Mexico, in

1994 forced their entry into the field of international political discussions. With other characteristics, in 2001, the organization of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, served as a new node of connections between different ideas, practices, and international political movements. More importantly, these are just exemplary moments of a broad and unfinished process of redefining the political field in the present time.

## 2. Between the Third World and the Global South

In Brazil as in other Latin American countries, demoralizing and defeating military dictatorships meant taking advantage of international spaces for the circulation of reports of human rights violations and exposing the farce embedded in institutional instruments created by authoritarian regimes. In the Brazilian case, a political transition from above was amplified by the exercise of transnational activism that broadened the horizons of political discussion. Such activism, by using democracy and human rights as comprehensive "interpretative frameworks for collective action" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 143), constituted one of the dimensions of political reorganization within the country, comprising a repertoire of social mobilization that referenced disputes over alternatives within the scope of the democratic issue and its possibilities in the national context.

Thus, it is worth emphasizing, in line with what Hermet (2001) points out, that there are major distinctions between the historical process that marked the political transition in Brazil and the struggles surrounding democratization. It may be suggested that the gradual and slow political transition designed by the dictatorship, and accepted by the civilian politicians who set the New Republic, has since been disputed and, at times, but not always, turned into a democratic transition by the action of various interlocutors and players, and that it remains in this way, unfinished. When challenged by struggles that resized the boundaries of politics, the political transition took on other contours and its outcome has been constantly pressured by the presence of notions of democracy and human rights that go beyond institutional boundaries. Seen in this way, democratization processes and struggles for human rights in

countries like Brazil, members of the imaginative space of the so-called Global South, gain their own dimensions, materialized daily, while at the same time being confronted by forces that seek to constrain them.

Democratizations do not occur in a vacuum. Nor does the adoption of rights. Whether in the 1970s or in recent years, the contours of Brazilian democracy involve material and symbolic disputes and the ways in which various classes and social groups notice themselves within relationships that are not limited to the State and the idea of nation. Other imaginary communities and geographies animate and give meaning to social interventions and political agencies. Brazilian democratization is an unfinished and indeterminate process that evokes several disputes in constantly reconfigured political domains. To do this, there is a need to approach the struggles surrounding democratization beyond linearity and liberal teleology.

Thus, the democratization process in Brazilian society that has been underway since the 1970s and 1980s is part of a framework of interactions and connections that involve redefinitions of the political field. Since then, political struggles have put into question and challenged conceptions of democracy and human rights as abstract and institutional idealizations. Social mobilizations around democratic values and the most recent movements around minority rights, for ethnic-racial causes, as well as the right to the city and the democratization of public spaces, among others, by taking up the flag of human rights, force their materialization and reconfigure them as a key part of life. This materialization of democracy and human rights reconstitutes the historical demand for justice and equality. According to David Harvey (2012), "we live in a time when human rights ideals have moved from the center of the scene both politically and ethically," but it is still necessary for them to be capable of challenging "liberal hegemony and neoliberal market logic or the dominant mode of legality and State action." Within an imaginative space in dispute and in constant questioning, understood by the dynamics of the so-called Global South, this contradiction seems to be defining the present time.

Hence, it is worth discussing some of the historical elements that shape the meanings of situating oneself in the imaginative geography of the Global

South. This involves evoking the constitution of a sense of social and political belonging whose layers are dense. To some extent, the imagined borders of the Global South are not recent, as they encompass what until not long ago was widely named the Third World. Although this expression has not yet fallen into total disuse, its academic, political, and institutional application has undergone a considerable decline (Tomlinson, 2003). Therefore, even if superficially, it is useful to explore some of the meanings inscribed in this passage from the Third World to the Global South.

Until the early 1980s, in Latin America and especially in Brazil, representations of the so-called Third World were widely accepted in the intellectual sphere, extrapolating into current political debates. It is known that the proposal for the name Third World was presented in 1952 by Alfred Sauvy (1986) to characterize a group of peoples and spaces distinct from the Cold War polarization, also evoking the image of a social stratification that referred to the French Third Estate of the revolutionary period. It sought to account for a global reality largely consisting of countries that combined various conditions for overcoming colonialism and that were situated at the base of the pyramid of global development. Entire regions subject to the exploitation of their natural resources, such as oil and minerals, as well as to the many social and ecological imbalances that spread food shortages (Davis, 2002).

As Germán Albuquerque (2011) points out, between the 1960s and 1980s, this image of a post-colonial common space stimulated a third-world political and intellectual sensibility that was experienced among various social sectors in different parts of the world, assuming a large dimension in Latin America. The focus lied on notions and practices of international solidarity, with a view to the prospect of a socialist revolution that might have a unique shape in such societies. Over time, these images expanded and diversified to the point of stimulating many expressions of attitudes, forms, contents, and interventions. Third worldism created a common imaginative space for the discussion of issues and perspectives that involved societies that were on the borders of capitalist development.

It is worth noticing that, in the wake of third worldism, varied and broad social and political struggles gained a global dimension, stimulating an internationalist sense that sought various inspirations, whether in Marxism or in nationalist and reformist projects. The idea of national liberation was expanded until it became a transnational movement among political movements that practiced their own sensitivity to local issues based on Third World sensibility. Articulations and approaches favored initiatives of different kinds, including those led by national States that claimed to be part of a group of countries not aligned with the Cold War bipolarity (Pereira; Medeiros, 2015).

However, not to align oneself, was very difficult, especially considering that the national ruling classes had deep-rooted interests in maintaining power structures. Furthermore, the territories demarcated as the Third World were targets of international disputes, thus, at the same time that the colonial empires were dismantled, old forms of domination were renewed. Against the perspective of national liberation revolutions instigated by Third World socialism, the Western conquerors and their accomplices in these reconfigured spaces began to brandish a new ideology: modernization. Various parts of this world then named underdeveloped received the inflections of developmentalist policies based on the so-called modernization theories. The post-colonial dilemmas began to be translated into terms according to which underdevelopment could be overcome through government programs sponsored by international agencies created at the end of the Second World War under the auspices of the United States and its corporate businesses. Modernization became an incessant pursuit of several countries, assuming dimensions and agendas that resembled governments of different ideological hues under the guise of developmentalism. In Latin America, between the 1950s and 1980s, modernization programs, especially in rural areas, opened up opportunities for many interventions that aimed to contain the advance of left-wing political movements under a supposed humanitarian face (Ekbladh, 2010, p. 190-191).

In Brazil, developmentalist projects took on the dimension of a national consensus for the deployment of "a model of industrialization planned and

supported by the State." Celso Furtado and Roberto Simonsen, among others, stood out among the exponents of an "ideological cycle of developmentalism," capable of organizing the field of political discussions under perspectives that situated the country in a broad international scenario (Bielschowsky, 2004, p. 247). Also in the 1950s, a nationalist economic thought was on the rise, which influenced in various aspects the formulation of a developmentalism that opposed North American modernization theories. Whether around the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) or the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros [ISEB]), sociopolitical strategies were formulated that would involve a commitment by the State, urban workers, and an imaginative national bourgeoisie in favor of national industrialization projects to overcome underdevelopment. This would be symbolized by the predominance of the interests of agro-exporting latifundia and subordinate to the centers of imperial power.

Responding to both the enthusiasm generated by the Cuban Revolution and the coups and military dictatorships in Latin America, many critiques of this perspective emerged. New debates on development made it possible to formulate responses that were nourished by third-world political sensibilities or at least by a certain tradition critical of the Eurocentrism implicit in the imaginary of modernization. In dialogue or in opposition to national-reformist ideas, the various strands of dependency theory brought to the center of discussions the existence of a national bourgeoisie favorable to a national project of transformation (Bresser-Pereira, 2010). As an antithetical pair critical of modernization, dependency theories enabled readings that flourished between a contestatory and conflictive third worldism. Their influence was very broad, giving meaning to ways of conceiving the political field and social justice within very broad borders, such as those that would flourish within the scope of Liberation Theology and the so-called New Left. These interpretations refuted developmentalist theses in several areas, rejecting linearity in the process of overcoming underdevelopment. This would be a specific mode of development associated with and dependent on countries subject to a global correlation of forces dominated by the imperialism of capitalist powers and by structures that

imposed a super-exploitation of labor within national borders (Wasserman, 2017, p. 120). Beyond the perspective of a national project, the image of a transnational space of social struggles and political contestation was being formulated.

Unfolded in broad-spectrum political myths and mythologies, associated either with development programs fostered by governments or with diffuse sensibilities surrounding popular culture, the Third World enabled a combination of composite elements in what Arturo Escobar (2007, p. 29) considers a 'geopolitical imagination.' This imagination unfolded into more complex articulations, such as the Group of 77, a coalition formed in 1964 among underdeveloped countries within the framework of the United Nations (Albaret; Devin, 2016). This brought historical processes closer together to such an extent that there were times when even countries situated in the sphere of hegemonic centers of power were influenced by them, an exemplary case being Portugal in the years immediately following the Carnation Revolution (Narra, 2023). Thus, there was third worldism in one of the milestones of what would have been the democratizing wave that marked the late 20th century (Huntington, 1994, p. 14).

An aspect of the imaginative geography construed around the idea of the Third World is that, by metaphorizing a class-based society, this political sensibility referred to the perception of profound inequalities and social conflicts on a global scale. It was a social repertoire of struggles and mobilizations in which the focus lied on the social conflict arising from a social stratification sustained by exploitative mechanisms. For many, this suggested a global scale of class struggles and allowed the arena of social conflicts to be given truly global contours. Contestations and conflicts outlined a global politics when perceived according to a Third World logic.

Nevertheless, between the 1970s and 1980s, various far-reaching historical processes gave rise to new perspectives. After a period of dissemination and huge political and intellectual acceptance, the project and the imaginaries associated with third worldism reduced their influence in the context that followed the vast neoliberal predominance at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. The image of the Third World as an imaginative community lost its ability to foster encounters and connections between various forms of mobilization

and political projects, as a framework of international relations largely resistant to reforms and revolutionary initiatives was imposed. Little by little, new forums for discussion between political agents and international diplomacy, still marked by the perspective of developmentalism, began to notice the dilemmas of underdeveloped countries within a framework of international cooperation strategies. Figures such as the German social democrat Willy Brandt (1981) emerged as voices for North-South cooperation, establishing an imaginary line that divided the world according to gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. This change in perception removed contestation and conflict from the center of political action and proposed the idea of a world that could consist in international partnerships.

This arrangement, on the one hand, maintained the prospect of stimulating multilateral South-South relations in the form of economic blocs such as the Mercosur, but on the other hand, restricted such contacts to State spheres and to the never-fulfilled promise of contributions through global hegemonic financial structures. The imaginative geography of the Third World, deeply politicized, conflictive, cohesive, territorial, divergent, and challenging of the international order, was absorbed by bureaucratic and diplomatic niches and by the salvationist discourses of large corporations, Western leaders, and celebrities. These recycled the old developmentalist sermons in the form of initiatives to foster what came to be named 'entrepreneurship' in local communities. Images of children at risk in various parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have become part of humanitarian marketing by the wealthy and international aristocrats, funders of entities that identify themselves as non-governmental, but are largely supported by gigantic capitalist corporations, as well as by activists who are situated within the scope of a "progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2018).

Little by little, the outlines of this new imaginative cartography positioned the same countries with post-colonial characteristics in a dimension that would be more appropriate to a world that was rather cooperative and interdependent, under the primacy of Western liberalism. Socioeconomic asymmetries were still evident, but the demands for changes in the correlation of forces at the

international level lost much of the contesting character that the third-world political sensibility had inspired. Although they put into question the Cold War bipolarities and were typical of a period of exhaustion of development policies, such initiatives comprised a certain political logic inscribed in the dominant global pattern. In a certain way, much of the triumphalist representations of neoliberalism throughout the 1980s and 1990s, especially the image of an unstoppable globalization, was incorporated into the notion of a deterritorialized and convergent Global South. This, to a certain extent, tended to depoliticize and reduce the scope of discussions raised by third worldism and to change the image of a Global South, at least in the dimension of discourses of world leaders, into yet another strategy of State and corporate power, within a neoliberal context (Visentini, 2015). The relations between economic blocs thus constituted favored the free circulation of capital, considering the space of a global financial market, but kept restricted the movements of millions of people who began to live in hiding and in the precariousness of international migration flows.

In Latin America, particularly in Brazil, this transition from a historical period in which a Third World sensibility was spreading to the emergence of new cooperation strategies in the context of a crisis in national development policies, corresponded to the context of struggles against military dictatorships and political transitions. Thus, when various processes of democratization were deepened in these societies, they occurred at a time when liberal and, more precisely, neoliberal perspectives were triumphant. When a slow and upward political transition was taking place in Brazil, the developmental cycle within which political and social struggles had inspired the appropriation of worldviews such as those raised by third worldism was exhausted.

On the other hand, in addition to the predominance of neoliberal concepts that began to associate democracy and the free market, during the 1980s and 1990s, the perspective of a Third World unified around common projects dissolved. Various worlds began to appear on the international scene, each with its own development agendas, while changes occurred in the global agencies of power. The imposition of liberal capitalist forms reinforced the role assigned to

the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), while the United Nations lost relevance in supporting the interconnections of countries that came to be called emerging.

As Tomlinson (2003) points out, in parallel, the political and materialist cohesion of the imaginative geography built around the idea of the Third World was emptied to the same extent that other intellectual approaches took its place, especially academic literature on postcolonial theory and history. New elements were added to the imaginary composition of what resembled or distinguished the cultures of what was beginning to be named the Global South. Various perspectives began to approach the experiences of these populations based on cultural paradigms such as heterogeneity, deterritorialization, and multiplicity of identities. A world with many borders and varied historical frontiers no longer fit into Third World geography. This meant the appreciation of hybridisms, on the one hand, or strategic essentialisms, on the other, seeking to refer to many types of solidarity between several groups and cultural movements located in different parts of the world, with a view to the 'empowerment' of individuals who would constitute the most diverse minorities.

Thus, it is necessary to connect these various dimensions, highlighting the recent historical process involving the struggles for the democratization of societies like Brazil. In Brazil, social initiatives that undertake the creation of democratic spaces and the exercise of human rights are struggling with the dilemmas of a political transition process that has avoided confronting its profound social and historical contradictions, taking place in a neoliberal context. At the same time, the international scenario has restricted the possibilities of expanding and reconfiguring the political domain, since the transnational activism that mobilized the struggles against authoritarian regimes has lost consistency in favor of conformist and depoliticized attitudes. It is possible to suggest that the Brazilian transition involved confrontations with a political rationality that corresponded to a 'regime of historicity' in which neoliberalism made 'subversive' the demand for the promises of rights and well-being expressed in the social struggles undertaken in the second half of the 20th century (Traverso, 2021).

Social political players situated on the liberal spectrum who turned against the dictatorship in the mid-1970s, by targeting the authoritarian apparatus, especially prior censorship, in fact intended to attack the mechanisms of State intervention in the economy and developmental policies. The mainstream media was the main spokesperson and one of the most relevant spheres of interconnection of the newly converted 'democrats.' The developmental consensus that had been forged since the 1930s, and which took on an authoritarian connotation after 1964, was being broken among the ruling and governing classes. This allowed opposition leaders attentive to the new rationality to gain influence, as well as the exchange of positions between collaborators of the regime. The 'neoliberal turn' was underway and it would undermine the neo-Keynesian initiatives that until then had inspired the developmental policies devised in international forums and agencies of multilateral cooperation. This international articulation, involving States and private corporations, gave rise to expressions of a rationality that dominated the academic and media scene and underpinned the actions of the most powerful national and international financial institutions, especially central banks that are not subject to any popular scrutiny. Neoliberal rationality fosters the "generalization of competition as a code of conduct and of the company as a subjectivation model" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 17).

The 'monetarist counterrevolution' prevailed, triumphing definitively at the end of the Cold War, under the flag of neoclassical liberal principles (Villarreal, 1983). A neoliberal cosmopolitanism began to take the form of what would be a globalization of habits and tastes. Since then, the image of a Global South without a defined political project has been established in these official circles, taking shape in actions to foster the values of a new rationality. In Brazil, the national-developmentalist State entered a long crisis, undermined by the technological changes of the late 20th century, which presupposed new production standards, and by the predominance of financial capital. At the same time, the absence of political projects that could establish new strategies for rallying social forces gave way to an immobility that reduced the scope of the promises of democratization (Nobre, 2013).

The struggles to democratize Brazilian society have been taking place since the end of the dictatorship, thus in a political and cultural context in which international geopolitics was affected not only by the end of the Cold War, but also by the crisis of developmentalism and the neoliberal turn. Within these vertices there was a recomposition of imaginary geographies and political projects. One of the dimensions of this process is perceptible in the conflicts that permeate the attempt to democratically politicize the notion of the Global South, saving it from the abduction that world power players want to impose.

Therefore, it is worth seeing the risks of constituting another imaginative geography that 'orientalizes' peoples and societies under a label that corresponds to a Western epistemological operation, from the perspective of Said (1990). In a certain way, this may correspond to a homogenizing and arbitrary union of extremely diverse realities and conformations, tending to favor logics of hegemonic power intervention on a global scale. On the other hand, it is key to consider that "regimes of representation" (Escobar, 2007, p. 30) marking societies that are not at the center of international power favor a constant conflictive encounter that permeates identities and political resistances. These encounters and connections shape a dimension of politics itself, which does not necessarily fit into imaginary geographies and canonical historical temporalities. A dispute to move across the imaginary maps of politics.

## 3. Recreating politics and materializing the rights

The political sphere gains another dimension and contours when crossed by time and situated in places that give rise to encounters and connections that go beyond geographies and representation regimes restricted to national and subject borders. As Pierre Rosanvallon (2010, p. 72) points out, politics is both a field in which the threads that provide a framework of projects and actions are intertwined, and a work of constant reconstitution of what is imagined as the social or a society. Thus, this is a continuing process of dispute around projections, projects, readings, and interpretations. Connecting "the agora, the city, and the world" and fostering transnational approaches (Sirinelli, 2014, p. 107) involves paying attention to politicization processes in which there are

encounters of mobilization and engagement, renewing internationalist political activism. This is all the more important in a historical context of predominance of a neoliberal 'pax' in which the international spaces of the capitalist market are "insulated from the political interference of national States." These begin to act as necessary barriers for the imposition of a "governmentality regime" in which the control of populations "takes place for and by the market," emptying democracy and preventing any form of imagination for change, under the guise of an authoritarian neoliberalism (Andrade; Côrtes; Almeida, 2021). Given this scenario, it is possible to discuss the political and democratic resources available in the images of a Global South to understand some of the dilemmas of the present time.

The imaginative dimension of the Global South could hardly be traced by using contours that escape a neoliberal logic. However, it is perhaps possible to notice that the new political geographies are constantly being reshaped. Particularly at the present time, social mobilizations are faced with the authoritarian and unprecedented mechanisms of the so-called "surveillance capitalism," which intensifies forms of lawfare and mass social containment. The continuing surveillance made possible by new technological means appropriated by large conglomerates and capitalist corporations imposes the restriction of public and political activity to "economic imperatives that disregard social norms and nullify basic rights associated with individual autonomy" (Zuboff, 2021, p. 27). This is due to unrestricted access to behavioral data that circulates in the internet space and that are a source for controlling imaginaries and hindering the modes of political exercise.

It has become a challenge to reconstruct threads and interconnections between contesting political causes, in this case connecting what has been continually divided and fragmented by both national States, which take new responsibilities, and by controls over the circulation of information, authoritarian modes of exercising economic power, and power asymmetries. It is a matter of taking into account the various possibilities of politicizing social life in an imaginary cartography that materializes in different projects. So, it is a matter of avoiding homogenizing views that hinder social relations in the world space to

diplomatic agreements and fetishizing borders that undo interactions. Politics takes on other contours when seen from the South. And this is an inescapable issue of the present time.

Politically materializing the imaginative geography of the Global South also means highlighting affiliations, networks, and relationships, in an attempt to find signs and signals that are localized and territorialized, that is, which are not abstractions with universal theoretical ambitions. It is worth seeing social places as full of times, whether in the form of generations or political traditions of struggle, or even in parties, movements, associations, or spaces of sociability, in permanent transition and conflict.

*Politics* has undergone shifts due to changes in analytical perspectives, which are no longer limited to the State and its apparatuses of domination and legitimation. The political field begins to involve a historical construct referring to both discursive spaces and practices and experiences in multiple social interactions, which go beyond established structures, such as parties and representation mechanisms. Social needs no longer fit into the canonical forms of exercising institutional power. Politics then appears as an interconnection in 'historical nodes' or 'temporal nodes.' A nodal point between experiences of time and temporalities. Various political practices appear in transits and passages, in projects and struggles not situated in ultimate institutional forms, involving new approaches.

Variation in the scales of approach to this political field, resized from a critical paradigm, can make it possible to notice new forms of politicization and the emergence of other political subjects. In the case of societies in the so-called Global South, this presupposes a temporality in which the colonial past, the so-called imperialism, and power asymmetries are indelible permanences. Thus, as previously pointed out, not everything is new in the Global South. Conflicts and forces go beyond national spheres, reorganizing social divisions and fractures, which concern the permanence of structures of domination, as well as influencing the creation of political projects for changing power.

Capitalist economic relations set in motion since at least the 1970s have imposed ruptures within territories delimited by national states. This has led to

new delineations of what is seen as the sphere of politics and its subjects, as well as their fields of action. Social mechanisms inherent to neoliberal rationality have expanded the privatization of public spaces and spheres of collective discussion, which have come under the control of large companies, especially capable of dominating new information technologies. Not only are previously public services now under private control, going beyond any mechanism of state concession, but the very delimitation of what has been conventionally considered the public sphere of discussion has become subordinate to the flows of big capital, without any mechanism of social regulation. The limits of private property have been expanded to virtually all social spheres, dramatically including natural resources and everything that involves life itself. Political relations are past-presents of dynamic conflicts, which are traversed by mechanisms in which neoliberalism takes the form of accumulation by plunder, with a continuing primitive accumulation of capital and precariousness of life, now in the form of digital platforms, outsourcing, and the flexibilization of production relations (Harvey, 2006). On a larger scale, this is noticeable in the proliferation of armed conflicts and in the oil wars and their massive bombings.

The repoliticization of an imaginative space for social struggles at a transnational level is still challenged by the context of the rise of right-wing extremism. In this regard, involving national political spheres in a comprehensive interpretative framework means reassessing the democratization processes of recent decades. Latin American societies, such as Brazil, have been undergoing social processes in which there has been an exhaustion of political forms and definitions of democratic procedures established in the post-dictatorship period. Recompositions and fraying of the institutional political system favor conservative discourses, thus the political right-wing imposes itself at the center of public debate. Figures and public expressions of this conservative advance have appeared as if they were novelties capable of promoting the changes that the hollowed-out democratic mechanisms are incapable of proposing. A battlefield has been drawn up in the cultural industry, on the internet, in schools, and universities.

With the effective adoption of new digital communication tools, the right-wing culture wars have rapidly changed the political scenario (Hunter, 2009). Public debate has been reduced to reactionary discourses against what would be the predominance of agendas favorable to the rights of so-called minorities. This also implies the defense of harsher criminal laws and police violence, partners in the crime business that undermines mechanisms of democratic social protection for impoverished populations. Neoliberal dystopias are publicly advocated in the mainstream media, becoming a new moral and cultural standard.

Long before this scenario became a reality, Antônio Flávio Pierucci pointed out that restricting the space for political making to identities and differences could be a "trap" (Pierucci, 1999, p. 55). In its cultural war, the right-wing bets on the essentialization of differences, rejecting those who are different, those who are clandestine, those who are divergent, and rejecting the prospect of social equality. In contrast, democracy and human rights gain material consistency when they take the form of political projects that have as their horizon the fight for social equality and the affirmation of universal rights. It is in the opposite direction to this type of political contestation that we see the movement of fundamentalist forms of the neoliberal market in conjunction with the religious right-wing and the new mechanisms of surveillance and social containment.

For many analysts positioned at the center of the discussions handled by the mainstream media and conventional political structures, this is a global neoconservative wave, a reversal of the democratizing wave that began in the 1970s (Huntington, 1994). However, we might ask: given the pathway of societies in the Global South, would the meanings of such a process be the same as those seen in countries in the capitalist center? Despite its transnational aspect and transhistorical dimension, the challenge of these 'post-fascist' right-wing movements (Traverso, 2021) in the face of democratizing social processes involves diverse connections in countries like Brazil. Obviously, this is a far-reaching issue for which there are no possible assertive answers. However, it is worth highlighting them when discussing politics from the perspective of

historical processes that escape the procedures and rules of the established 'democratic game.'

As dimensions that go beyond national borders and have influenced political relations in Brazil since at least the late 1970s, the notions of democracy and human rights, as previously mentioned, are frequently repositioned within dominant political discourses. Recently, due to the administration of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) and the extent to which it represented an expression of the rise of the far right, the country has once again been mentioned in discussions about its democratic system and the guarantee of rights. Efforts to contain the advance of the far right have given rise to interpretations that seek to position countries like Brazil as another chapter in a neoconservative wave that is undermining democracy at an international level. Analyses produced in conventional international circles have become a constant part of debates in the conventional media. A generalization of the same ideas and representations is taken as the canonical response to the dilemmas of the Brazilian democratization process. The mere delayed reproduction of social processes framed by 'Western democracies' is expected. In contrast, it is necessary to consider to what extent the so-called 'crisis of democracy,' as it is trumpeted by various media outlets, takes on its own forms and, in particular, has a unique pathway in countries like Brazil (Ballestrin, 2022).

The context of the rise of far-right movements constitutes a process that may be situated within the framework of what has been named 'dedemocratization,' comprising the social emptying of democratic practices, restricting forms of popular consultation and limiting the achievement of rights and the promotion of equality (Tilly, 2007, p. 59). However, the international debate on issues arising from this, guided by institutional relations and subject to the agenda-setting power of large media structures, continues to conform to a more or less conventional logic around leadership and possible interstate strategies. It is understood herein that a historiography of the present time can provide a view from the South, given that the social dynamics that affect its societies comprise their own spatialities and temporalities. The constraints that liberal political systems impose on the deepening of democratization processes

and the dedemocratizing characteristics of liberalism itself include events and objects that take part in political struggles in countries like Brazil under conditions that are to a certain extent unrelated to and even predate the recent global concern with the crisis of democratic regimes (Miguel, 2022).

In the present time of these societies, political action is an unfinished, provisional possibility, in constant dispute over ideas and values whose meanings and senses change as a result of conflicts and correlations of forces. These are tensions in which past and future meet, not as progress and linearity, but as a confrontation of asymmetries of class, gender, or ethnic-racial experiences, which involves the transit of ideas, characters, and groups that force their presence beyond the political representation as practiced for centuries in Western modernity. In this regard, there are elements of a redefinition of politics at a transnational level.

The so-called crisis of representative democracy, as depicted by the mainstream media, is not just another political crisis, resolved by rearranging the correlation of forces. It is something more intense, since it involves the historical change or transition to forms of political exercise that put into question the problematic connection between democracy and representation (Pitkin, 2004). For populations affected by daily plundering, however, the procedures of representative democracy often appeared as codes used by powerful people to prevent the change of power. In this way, social movements in the first decades of this century have undertaken struggles that involve the transition from representation to presence, involving a democracy that is substantive, without losing sight of the mechanisms of institutional legitimacy, which rearranges politics and redefines what we take to be political. Thus, representative democracy as we know it becomes an insufficient abstraction in light of new demands and struggles. So, politics itself, the political field, and the temporality of politics are at stake.

It is an issue for the present time to see the extent of such demands, setting the need for a political history of the presence and the mechanisms used by those in political power to tame and prevent it, whether through repressive and exploitative means or through control of information and the

social media. This is particularly important because in societies that imagine themselves as part of the Global South, the political mobilizations of subalternized social groups involve their connections with different parts of the world, which necessarily resort to the internet.

This other Global South is built through struggles in the form of a political ecology that involves a diverse range of spaces and historical temporalities, through which various democratic experiences and the expansion of human rights gain their own dimensions. In the Brazilian case, the winding democratization process and the demands of historically marginalized groups have deepened socioeconomic and cultural divides, especially between generations and social classes, as well as the fissures that separate experiences and expectations, which can no longer be filled by appeasing narratives.

Such narratives describe consensus around formal democratic procedures in which the demands of the working classes appear as threatening and causing instability. Movements challenging the authoritarian regime were channeled into the campaign for direct elections, which was constrained by agreements within the National Congress. The drafting of the new constitution was controlled by the conservative parliamentary group known as the 'Centrão,' ensuring that the Armed Forces were protected from any democratic intervention (Perlatto, 2019). These are political actions that restrict possible futures and limit the potential for social change, preventing possibilities and alternatives. Before any democratic crisis, the social sectors that dominated the political transition process in Brazil tried to reduce the potential range of transitions, knots, and passages that did not fit into the boundaries defined by projects and approaches unrelated to popular struggles. The transition was experienced less as a transit and an indeterminate and conflictual passage and more as an institutionalization of agreements, leaving behind a low-intensity democracy, a late transitional justice system, and the maintenance of crystallized power structures. These forces, both civilian and military, once again joined to depose Dilma Rousseff, as well as to make Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his party unviable, and this resulted in the political conditions that allowed the rise of the far right and Bolsonaro.

Thus, the frequent narratives about the 'crisis of democracy' produced and disseminated in conventional and hegemonic media outlets are not capable of accounting for societies in which the processes of democratization and dedemocratization are confused. In this regard, a history of the present time that takes the Global South into account can consider politics beyond its eventual return to historiographic making, as described in recent decades. Politics comprises connected social practices and repertoires, and this does not exactly involve their return, but rather their recreation. So, instead of separating them, we can think of noticing connections and interactions, for instance in the way how democracy and human rights have gained other meanings in anti-colonial struggles and in the reinvention of imagined transnational communities, from initiatives such as those that began with the Bandung Conference to the most recent popular uprisings, whose repertoires continue to be updated.

The notion of human rights appears among the central elements of the recreation of a political domain that goes beyond the framework of neoliberalism. This is one of the strong concepts that emerged in societies such as Brazil at the end of the military dictatorship and in the following decades. Human rights were mobilized and re-updated throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the last of the internationalist utopias (Moyin, 2010).

Nevertheless, under the neoliberal wave, in the context of international relations sponsored by the United States, there was an association between human rights and the free market. Among the results of this formula, the enjoyment of human rights began to be restricted to an abstract notion of individual freedom. In the context of the political transition in Brazil and Latin America, this issue remained open, now restricting the scope of struggles for the achievement of rights and then appearing as a flag of struggle for the exercise of social justice. The democratic freedoms demanded by popular movements did not fit into the transitional arrangements negotiated by political leaders.

But history is not over. The prevailing and 'self-evident' notion of an imaginative space of Western humanism that we have today, and which is supported by various international capitalist agencies and agents, has been disputed since at least the 1970s and 1980s, when different political activisms

claimed solidarity and collective rights as the basis for human rights. It is worth bearing in mind that, historically, a political space has been created that involves disputes between 'competing notions of rights.' Once again, it is worth mentioning that many of these disputes initially took place within the framework of a third worldism that was still flourishing, having a special significance in the resistance to the racist regime in South Africa, conducted not in the name of a liberal abstraction, but as an anti-colonial struggle with socialist contours (Hoffmann, 2019). At stake there was the materialization of rights and the promotion of social justice, which concerns policies formulated within the scope of States and territories and not by global markets. Hence, these were much more comprehensive and collective struggles than the iconic images of pop culture seek to crystallize, often triggered in the multicultural cacophony existing in huge musical spectacles and sports competitions that celebrate a new type of global philanthropy.

In this dimension, the political contours of the processes of democratization and human rights are materialized in the intersections between various ideologies, solidarities, and repertoires of social mobilization. Disputes have been frequent between the many ways of conceiving the exercise of human rights as a materially achievable utopia, expanding the limits imposed by power structures embedded in the State and the capitalist market. Struggles and conflicts led by different popular movements for the expansion of rights, which are not seen as abstractions or liberal formalisms.

Different popular movements have taken up the flag of human rights to confront concrete issues in life, especially the search for access to basic goods of modernity, challenging neoliberal hegemony. In Brazil, this involves a pathway that links the 'new' social movements of the struggles for democratization in the 1970s and 1980s to the 'brand new' mobilizations of groups and collectives around reparatory policies (Gohn, 2008), as well as grasping the meanings of being situated in the Global South, without disregarding the pathways of Third World struggles. In these cases, instead of relativizing human rights, their universality is expanded by having their territorialization as a basis, going beyond the boundaries of the imaginative geographies of liberal utopias and resuming

the long history of struggle for their materialization. It is the prospect of material social equality and the broad and concrete enjoyment of rights what most puts pressure on politics at the present time. The fight for democratic and universal values, when these point towards social justice, materializes in the contestation of daily plundering and in the search for the decommodification of nature, as well as for regaining the dignity of those who undergo a continuing devaluation of their work and their history.

Rather than living in the utopia of others, political mobilizations seen in this way demand a history of the present time that is attentive to the temporal experience and to the repertoires and itineraries of democratic practices and struggles for rights in post-colonial societies. This means addressing objects, spatialities, and temporalities from the perspective that borders, walls, and (Gaza) strips can indicate thresholds to put into question national isolations, which are generally State-centric and imperial. In the continuities or in the simple passages, it is possible to notice the connections that have been disconnected by canonical representations, as well as by the great linear narratives and comprehensive classifications of historical time. The object of a historiography seen in this way is the time of life and of what is experienced, in its materiality, which presupposes asking about the depoliticization of the meaning of social struggles. By seeking processes in movement and unfinished pathways, history of the present time faces the challenge of identifying the political projects of the South that do not fit into hegemonic imaginative geographies.

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