

# Chapter 2

## The Production of Globalization

### 2.1 Introduction

Globalization is, in a certain sense, the apex of the internationalization of the capitalist world. In order to understand it, just as any other phase of history, there are two fundamental elements to take into account: the state of techniques and the state of politics.

There is a tendency to separate one thing from the other, which results in many interpretations of history from the perspective of techniques and, on the other hand, interpretations of history from the perspective of politics. In reality, there was never in human history a separation between these two things. Techniques are offered as a system and realized in a combined way, both through labour and the manner by which the moments and places of the use of techniques are chosen. This is how history was produced.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the twentieth century and because of advances in science, a system of techniques was produced presided over by the techniques of information. These techniques began to serve as a link between the others, uniting them and ensuring that the new technical system would be present all across the planet.

But globalization is not only the existence of this new system of techniques. It is also the result of actions that assure the emergence of the so-called global market, which is responsible for the essence of the political processes effective in the present. The factors that contribute to the understanding of the present architecture of globalization are: the unicity of techniques, the convergence of moments, the knowability of the planet, and the existence of a single motor of history, represented by globalized surplus value. A global market utilizing such a system of advanced techniques results in this perverse globalization. However, this situation could be different if the political use of these techniques were other than it is. This is the

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<sup>1</sup>T.N.: There is an ambiguity in this sentence that is impossible to replicate in English. Santos's Portuguese could be interpreted as 'This is what history produced', or as 'This is how history was produced'. We have opted for the latter, which strikes us as being more logically consistent.

central debate, the only one that permits us to have the hope of utilizing the contemporary technical system through other forms of action. We intend here to face this discussion by briefly analyzing some of its most relevant constitutional aspects.

## 2.2 Technical Unicity

The development of history occurs side by side with the development of techniques. Kant said that history is a progress without end; we would add here that it is also an endless progress of techniques. With each technical evolution, a new historical phase becomes possible.

The techniques exist as a sort of family. Nowhere in the history of humankind does a technique appear in isolation; what is installed is a group of techniques, true systems. A trivial example would be the sickle, the hoe, and the rake, which constitute, at a given moment, a family of techniques.

These families of techniques transport a history; each technical system represents an epoch. In our epoch, the arrival of the technique of information through cybernetics, computing, electronics, and so on, is representative of the present technical system. The technique of information will thus permit two important things: firstly, it will allow the various techniques to begin communicating between themselves. This technique assures such an exchange, something that in the past would have been impossible. On the other hand, information has a determinant role in the use of time, permitting everywhere the convergence of moments, assuring the simultaneity of actions and, consequently, accelerating the historical process.

Every time a new family of techniques appears, the others persist. They continue to exist, but the new ensemble of instruments comes to be used by the new hegemonic actors, while the non-hegemonic actors continue to utilize less current and less powerful ensembles. Due to this process, an actor who does not meet the conditions necessary to mobilize those techniques considered to be more advanced becomes an actor of minor importance in the present period.

It is the first time in human history that such an ensemble of techniques involves the planet as a whole and makes its presence felt instantaneously. This, it might be mentioned, contaminates the form of existence of the other less developed techniques. Even if they are present only in a single point of territory, the characteristic techniques of our time have a marked influence over the rest of the country in a way that is quite different from past situations. For example, the first Brazilian railways installed in selected, strategically chosen regions only reached a certain portion of the country and did not have a direct influence over the rest of the territory. No longer. The techniques of information now reach the totality of each country, directly or indirectly. Each place has access to the happenings of the others. The principle of selectivity also exists as a principle of hierarchy, since all places are evaluated and must make reference to those places imbued with hegemonic

techniques. This is a new phenomenon in the history of techniques and in the history of territories. Once, there were hegemonic and non-hegemonic techniques; today, the non-hegemonic techniques are being hegemonized. In reality though, the technique cannot be seen as an absolute given, but as a technique already relativized, in other words, such as used by humanity. The techniques only materialize, becoming history, with the intermediation of politics, that is, the politics of companies and the politics of states, together or separately.

On the other hand, the technical system that is dominant in today's world has another characteristic, that of being invasive. This dominant system does not confine itself to staying where it had been installed, but seeks to spread itself into production and the territory. Such an attempt may result in failure, but this is the vocation of the present technical system, a vocation which also serves as the foundation of the actions of hegemonic actors like the global companies. These companies function in a fragmented way, since a portion of their production can be made in Tunisia, another in Malaysia, and another even in Paraguay, but this is only possible because the aforementioned hegemonic technique is present, or can be present, everywhere. Everything is put together at a later moment and articulated through the 'intelligence' of the company. Otherwise, the existence of multinational enterprises would be impossible. There is, then, a narrow relationship between this aspect of the economy of globalization and the nature of the technical phenomenon correspondent to this technical period. If the production is technically fragmented, there is on the other side a political unity of command. This political unity of command works within firms, but there is no proper unicity of command of the global market. Each company commands the respective operations within its respective topology, which is to say, inside the ensemble of places of its action, while the actions of the state and of the supranational institutions are not enough to impose a global order. Extending this reasoning to an extreme, one could say that the global market does not exist as such.

There is a relationship of cause and effect between the present technical progress and the other typical characteristics of the current historical period. It is through the unicity of techniques, of which the computer is a central aspect, that the possibility for the existence of a universal finance is raised. This sector is the one principally responsible for the imposition of a worldwide surplus value across the entire globe. Without technical unicity, the present unicity of time would also be impossible, the local happening being perceived as a link of the worldwide happening. On the other hand, without globalized surplus value and without this unicity of time, the unicity of techniques would be ineffective.

### **2.3 The Convergence of Moments**

The unicity of time does not merely mean that clock time is the same in several different places. It is not only this. If the hour is the same, the lived moments also converge. There exists a confluence of moments in response to that which would be

called real time from the point of view of physics and, from the perspective of history, the interdependency and solidarity<sup>2</sup> of the happening. Taken as a physical phenomenon, the perception of real time does not only mean that clock time is the same, but also that we can use these multiple clocks in a uniform manner. As a result of the scientific and technical progress which accelerated in the wake of the Second World War, the planet-wide operation of large global companies revolutionized the financial world, allowing its respective market to function in various places 24 h a day. Real time permits the usage of the same moment from multiple places, and all places from only one place, in both instances in a concatenated and effective manner.

With this substantial change in history, we become capable of knowing what is the happening of the other regardless of our location. This possibility of having instantaneous knowledge of the happening of the other in our hands, offered by technique to our generation, has never existed before. This is the great novelty that we are calling the unicity of time, or the convergence of moments. The acceleration of history witnessed by the end of the twentieth century derives largely from this condition of unicity. However, instantaneous and globalized information is still neither generalized nor true, since it is currently intermediated by large information companies.

And who are the actors of real time? All of us? This question is imperative if we are to understand our epoch. The ideology of a single world and of a global village considers real time as a collective patrimony of humankind. Yet we are still far from this ideal, however achievable it may be.

History is guided by the preeminent actors of this real time who are, at the same time, the possessors of velocity and the authors of the ideological discourse. However, all persons are not equal authors of this time. Physically, which is to say, potentially, real time exists for everybody. Effectively, though, that is, socially, it is exclusionary and assures exclusivity, or at least the privileges of its use, to some actors. Since real time is utilized by a reduced number of actors, one must distinguish between the notions of potential fluidity and effective fluidity. If techniques apparently create the possibility of fluidity for all, who is actually fluid? Which people? Who, exactly, utilizes this real time in their own favour? Who really owns the surplus value created from the new possibilities of the utilization of time? Who can and cannot utilize these possibilities? This discussion takes us to another on the present phase of capitalism when we take into account the emergence of a new determinant factor of history, represented here by what we are denoting the single motor.

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<sup>2</sup>T.N.: Santos frequently uses the terms 'solidary' and 'solidarity' in his writings. They do not have the exclusive connotations of help, charity or altruism, but also stand for the connections, agreements, and combinations formed between agents. Thus, depending on the passage in question, these words may have a more neutral connotation than would be commonly understood in English.

## 2.4 The Single Motor

The present period makes use of a system of unified techniques, a system that, installed over an informed planet, permits global actions. Up to what point can one talk about a surplus value on a worldwide scale, acting as a single motor of such actions?

With imperialism there were several motors, each one with its own force and range: the French motor, the English motor, the German motor, the Portuguese motor, the Belgian, the Spanish, and so on, all of which were motors of capitalism, but which pushed machines and humans in different rhythms, different modalities, different combinations. Today there is a single motor, which is precisely the aforementioned universal surplus value.

Universal surplus value has become possible since production, from here on out, is being made on a universal scale. This production is intermediated by global companies which compete between themselves according to an extremely ferocious competition that we have never before witnessed. Those who resist and survive are those who obtain the greater surplus value, which allows them to continue acting and competing.

This single motor has become possible because we find ourselves at a new stage of internationalization, with a true mundialization<sup>3</sup> of products, money, credit, debt, consumption, and information. This ensemble of mundializations, one supporting and dragging along the other, and mutually imposing themselves, is another new fact.

One element of internationalization attracts another, imposes another, contains and is contained by the other. This system of forces can lead one to think that the world is moving toward something like homogenization, an inclination toward a single pattern due, on the one hand, to the mundialization of techniques, and on the other, to the mundialization of surplus value.

All of this is real, but it is also and above all a tendency, because nowhere and in no country was there a complete internationalization. What exists everywhere is an inclination toward the most diverse combination of vectors and forms of mundialization.

There is a wish now that history be moved by this single motor. It is important, then, to ask about the nature of this motor. Is it abstract? What is this surplus value when considered at the global level? It is elusive and escapes from us, but it is not abstract. It exists and imposes itself as something real despite not being precisely measurable, since it is always evolving, changing. Surplus value is 'worldwide' because it is upheld by global companies that count on the scientific and technical

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<sup>3</sup>T.N.: Milton Santos utilizes the Portuguese terms *mundialização*, which derives from the French *mondialisation*, and *globalização*, which derives from English. In order to preserve Santos's style and the subtle distinction between his terms, we have translated *mundialização* with the English neologism 'mundialization', rather than as 'globalization'.

progress available in the world and each day request more scientific and technical progress.

The present competitiveness between companies is a form by which this universal surplus value is exercised, which becomes evasive precisely because we have left the world of competition and entered the world of competitiveness. The exercise of competitiveness makes the fight between companies exponential and leads them to create a diurnal demand for even more science, technology, and organization in order to keep themselves ahead of the pack.

When we are asked every day at the university to work in order to improve productivity as if it were something abstract and individual, we are driven to offer even greater possibilities for the large companies to augment their surplus value. New laboratories are pushed to discover the new techniques, the new materials, the new organizational and political solutions that permit the growth of companies' productivity and profit. With each advance by one company, another in the same field demands innovations to permit it to overtake the former leader. Because of this, such surplus value is always running, that is, escaping ahead of the others. A cut in time is ideally possible, but it is far from expressing the present, cruelly unstable reality. Given the above, it is not possible to measure universal surplus value, yet it exists. Despite seeming abstract, this surplus value in reality imposes itself as an empirical and objective fact when utilized in the process of production and as a result of competitiveness.

## **2.5 The Knowability of the Planet**

The present historical period will permit what no other period has offered to humanity: the possibility of knowing the planet in an extensive and deep manner. This knowability has never before existed and is due precisely to the progress of science and techniques (better still, owing to the progress of techniques due to the progress of science).

This techno-scientific period of history permits humanity to go beyond the simple utilization of what they encounter in nature: new materials have been created in laboratories as a product of humanity's intelligence and they precede the production of objects. Up until our generation, we utilized the materials that were available to us, but from now on we are able to conceive the objects we wish to utilize and then produce the raw materials which are indispensable to their production. Without this, it would have been impossible to create the satellites that take pictures of the planet at regular intervals, permitting a more complete and detailed vision of the Earth. Through the use of satellites, we began to know not only different places, but all places, and to observe other stars. The functioning of the solar system is becoming more perceptible and Earth itself can now be seen in detail. By the fact that satellites repeat their orbits, we are able to capture successive moments, that is, no longer only momentary pictures and isolated photographs of the planet. This does not mean that we are able to capture the historical processes

that move the world, but we are getting closer to identifying the moments of this evolution. Portrayed objects give us geometries, not exactly geographies, since they come to us as objects in themselves but without the society that lives inside them. The meaning of things, that is, their true value, is the foundation of the correct interpretation of everything that exists. Without this, we risk not being able to go beyond a thing-based interpretation of something that is more than a simple thing, such as the objects of history. These objects are constantly changing their meanings with the movement of societies and through the intermediation of continuously renewed human actions.

With globalization and through the empiricization of the universality that globalization made possible, we are getting closer to creating a philosophy of techniques and of correlated actions; a philosophy that is also a way of concretely knowing the world taken as a whole and knowing the particularity of places, which includes physical, natural, and artificial characteristics and political conditions. Yet, companies, in the quest for their desired surplus value, assess locations differently. Not all places are equally interesting to this or that company. Thus, the knowability of the planet constitutes an essential requirement of the operation of companies and of the production of the present historical system.

## 2.6 A Period That Is a Crisis

The history of capitalism can be divided into periods, pieces of time hallmarked by a certain coherence between their distinguished variables. These sections of time evolve differently, but within a system. A period succeeds another period, though we should not forget that periods are also preceded and followed by crises, that is, moments when the established order between variables, mediated by an organization, is compromised. It becomes impossible to harmonize them when one of these variables gains a greater expression and introduces a principle of disorder.

This was, until now, the evolution that is common to every history of capitalism. The present period escapes this characteristic because it is at the same time a period and a crisis, which is to say, the present fraction of historical time constitutes a true superposition between period and crisis, revealing characteristics of both situations.

As a period and as a crisis, the present epoch appears as something new. As a period, its characteristic variables establish themselves everywhere and influence everything, directly or indirectly. That is why we call it globalization. As a crisis, the same variables that build the system are continuously collapsing and requiring new definitions and arrangements. However, we are now experiencing a persistent crisis within a period with lasting characteristics, even if new contours appear.

This period and this crisis are different from those of the past. This is because its motors and respective bases, which constitute factors of change, do not gradually install themselves as before, nor are they any longer a privilege of some continents and countries. Such factors exist concomitantly and realize themselves everywhere and in a very intense manner.

We are now facing an extreme subdivision of empirical time, the documentation of which became possible through the use of contemporary techniques. The computer is both the measuring tool and the controller of time's usage. In reality, this multiplication of time is mostly potential since each actor—person, company, institution, place—utilizes such possibilities differently and differently realizes the velocity of the world. On the other hand, and due above all to the progress of computer techniques, the hegemonic factors of change contaminate the others, even if the velocity and the range of this contagion varies according to companies, social groups, persons, and places. By the intermediation of money, the contagion of the reductive logic typical of the process of globalization spreads an economic nexus everywhere, which overwhelms everything. The aforementioned factors of change, led by the hands of the hegemonic actors, are blind, egoistically contradictory, and uncontrollable.

The process of crisis is permanent; what we have are successive crises. In reality, this is a global crisis, made evident both by global phenomena and singular manifestations in this or that country, in this or that moment, producing the new stage of crisis. Nothing is lasting.

In this historical period the crisis is structural; hence, when one seeks non-structural solutions, the result is the creation of more crisis. That which is considered to be a solution derives from the exclusive interest of hegemonic actors and tends to favour their nature and characteristics.

The tyrannies of money and information are the pillars of the production of the present globalized capitalism. Without the control of spirits, the regulation promoted by finance would be impossible. The result would be the overwhelming of the financial system and the permissiveness of the behaviour of the hegemonic actors, who act without reciprocation. This leads to the worsening of the situation, that is, of the crisis.

The association between the tyranny of money and the tyranny of information leads, thus, to the acceleration of hegemonic processes. These processes are legitimated by the 'single thought', while the other processes are swallowed or adapt themselves passively or actively, becoming hegemonized. In other words, the non-hegemonic processes tend either to disappear physically or to remain, though in a subordinated manner. This is the case with the exception of some areas of social life and in certain fractions of the territory where the processes can remain relatively autonomous, that is, capable of self-reproduction. However, such a situation is always precarious, either because the locally obtained results are less significant, or because the respective agents are permanently threatened by the concurrence of the most powerful activities.

In the present historical period, the structural aspect (which is to say, the dynamic one) is also critical. This is due, amongst other reasons, to the fact that the present is characterized by the extreme use of techniques and norms. The extreme use of techniques and the prominence of technical thought lead to the obsessive necessity of norms. This plethora of norms is indispensable to the efficacy of action. However, because hegemonic activities tend toward centralization, consecutive



with the concentration of the economy, it increases the inflexibility of behaviours, leading to an uneasiness within the social body.

One should add to this the fact that, due to the marriage between normative techniques and the technical and political normalization of the correspondent action, politics itself ends up penetrating all the interstices of the social body, either as a necessity in the exercise of dominant actions or as the reactions to such actions. This is not exactly related to politics, though, but to a mere accumulation of particularistic normalizations promoted by private actors that ignore the social interest or that treat it in a residual manner. This is another reason why the standard situation is one of crisis, even if the famous macro-economical equilibrium establishes itself.

The same ideological system that justifies the process of globalization and reinforces it as the only historical path also imposes, in the end, a certain vision of the crisis and an acceptance of the suggested remedies. As a consequence, all countries, places, and persons begin to behave, to organize their action, as if such a 'crisis' were the same to everybody and as if the formulae by which they could be deterred were typically the same. Indeed, the only crisis that the responsible agents wish to deter is the financial crisis—this, and no other. As a matter of fact, this is a cause for the worsening of the real crisis—economical, social, political, moral—that characterizes our time.



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