

Increasing Global Transformative Capacities vs. Inertia of the Irrational

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Facing a dramatic crisis, colored by an increasing number of violent conflicts, ecological calamities, sharp social inequalities, erosion of democracy and the rise of authoritarian tendencies, the question of global transformative capacities is crucial. The paper indicates several possible directions of increasing transformative energies. Perceiving knowledge as a location of resistance, the paper suggests that enhancing our diagnostic capacities, transcending positivism and including insights of different cultures is one possible path, examining the assumption of revitalizing the idea of global civil society, considering the Global South as a location of reimagining a New World Order are other. The paper concludes that the Quest for energies of change has to be based on bold dreams, bold critical insights and bold actions based on thinking and linking in place of “coping, shopping, and doping” (Streeck 2016).

In a particularly complex moment, heavily marked by dramatic uncertainties that seem to exceed the capacities for constructive choices, solutions, i.e. for an effective collective “STOP” being uttered to the eco-economic, political, social irrationalities, above all to all the ongoing wars, the word “Quest” in the title of our Conference signifies a great challenge.

-The Quest, amidst an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness, is nevertheless a persistent need and responsibility to seek answers, transcending accumulated despair, ineffective solidarity, and actively respond to the urgency created by the fact that the survival of the human species is endangered by the profound global crisis, reducing already many human beings to living the unlivable, “enduring suffering beyond words”, to an exile and dehumanization in the current world order caught in a spiral of violent social, inter-state, geopolitical and transnational conflicts. The global crisis is often defined as (albeit politically and socially decontextualized) polycrisis (Tooze 2022), a simultaneous crisis in interacting sectors of social, political, economic life that are not reducible to each other, or a crisis of capitalism. However, having in mind its overwhelming complexity, accumulated fallacies, growing

threat to survival and the lack of transformative answers it is in fact both capitalism and the human species in crisis.

- *The Quest* is to be pursued in a moment when the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity – axes of peace – are under severe attacks.¹ Among else, unaccountable power structures, national and transnational, gaps created by transforming norms of international law into self-serving rules of the powerful, the incoherence between the moralizing rhetoric and practical omission of deeds, the celebration of greed and acceptance of surging inequalities destroying societies as communities, have contributed to the erosion of the noted principles and drastically endangered world peace. In spite of all the marches, petitions, demonstrations, mediation efforts, initiatives of UN and ICC, we are witnessing, by and large, a hoarse, powerless voice of peace in the face of the wars in Ukraine, and Gaza, Lebanon, as well as in Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, Congo, and elsewhere. (According to the UN, at this moment, the current number of conflicts (59) is the highest since World War II (UN Press 2023).² Furthermore, the Quest for cooperative NWO is challenged by a new cycle of unprecedented militarization, the systematic nurturing of the image of the antagonistic, threatening Other, by the insistence on the finality of the dividing lines between the forces of light and darkness, by shattering the elementary foundations for dialogues beginning and ending to assert life as the highest value.³

-*The Quest* is to be pursued within an impasse, created by profound accumulated contradictions of global neoliberal capitalism, aspiring to the total subjugation of citizens (by classical and digital means), unprecedented arrogance of power that is producing fragmentation, canceling moderating, corrective mechanisms, transformative energies that the very survival of capitalism requires. The unprotected and uncared for citizens, workers, exposed to brainwashing media have become part of a global mass of individuals lacking the capacity to recognize own interests/needs, recognize allies and act collectively (Streeck 2016).

¹ Jean Baudrillard (2009, p. 65) asserts that today freedom is being transformed into “indifference without illusions”. We can add that brotherhood has not turned into “radical empathy”, but is also colored by indifference, while equality has lost its link with redistribution and sank into “diseases of despair and/or misguided anger.

² Also, according to Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the new data show record number of armed conflicts.

³ Obviously “the intelligence of Good” is lacking. Baudrillard, op. cit.. p.23.

- *The Quest* is to be sought despite the pressing consequences of lost opportunities, the last being the end of the Cold war and the chance to move toward a world order based on cooperation and dialogue, respect for diversity and the Common good, i.e. the chance of moving toward stable world peace (peaceful co-existence), instead of sliding toward a Third World War. Looking at the inertia and depth of the historical betrayal following the end of Cold war, the lost opportunity for the world to finally add and subtract its brilliance and lunacy productively, and leave behind the logic of confrontation, we are confronted with the following question: how can the void between the present betrayals and the possible future transformative opportunities be transcended, how can the inertia of irrationality be surpassed and the energy of creativity mobilized? How can the wisdom of Common good penetrate the walls of power of the greedy minority? The difficulty of finding the answer is underlined by the shocking realizations that suffered traumas, (colonization, WW1, WW2, Holocaust, Hiroshima), i.e. the numerous past experiences of vast destruction have not led to “Never Again” becoming an imperative of humankind. Chapter after chapter of brutal violence and war are opening. Thus, *the Quest* for transformative energies, moderating, insightful actors, seems to be the decisive challenge.

Quest for transformative global energies

The formidable Quest for transformative energies, forces includes, among others, enhancing diagnostic capacities, revitalizing the idea of global civil society, and taking seriously the existing New Global South.

a. Efforts to enhance our diagnostic capacity

Quest for knowledge Enhancing diagnostic capacities is part of the quest for knowledge and the awareness that humbleness is a required companion, because, on the one hand, “like climbers on a mountain, the higher we go the further away we see that our ignorance stretches” (Grayling 2021, p. 374), and on the other, today’s truths may turn out to be tomorrow’s illusions.

In spite of this fact, that Grayling warns that the “sheer extent of ignorance revealed to us by our giant strides in knowledge suggests that we are only at the beginning of a journey, (for) we are still bedeviled

by too much primitivism in our thinking and feeling: we still go to war, quarrel among ourselves, believe nonsense, waste our short lives on trivialities” (*ibid*), the journey must continue. Efforts must be made to extend, refine knowledge as a form of resistance to the epistemological injustices, injustices of simplifications, of neglecting, exiled historical experiences and insights of Others, to the imposition of myths⁴ as universal truths, and thus a precondition, as Escobar points out, of resisting social injustices. Furthermore, extending, linking different worlds of knowledge, as well as reaffirming multi-disciplinarity in the broadest sense, from archeological forensics to the “singing philosophy”, and recognizing different sources of knowledge (intuitive, spiritual, affective) a whole well of accumulated knowledge can become a pool of enriching insights, a foundation for transformative synthesis, creating a path of transcending the TINA (There Is No Alternative) trap, the entropy that is proclaimed as the triumphant “end of history”. In other words, such a journey contributes to replacement of the reign of the Western cosmovision by *pluriversum*. According to Walter Mignolo (2000), for instance, the Western modern cosmovision is a myth that has been narrated as unique and universal ... a local history with a global design. For S. Chattopadhyay (2024), pluriversum speaks of a world intersecting beyond the hegemonic logic, a world of dialogue and cooperation. She distinguishes between multipolarity and pluriversality. A multipolar world is predicated on power differentials between nation, seeking control of resources and influence. In terms of the rules of the game it does not change much the framework of the unipolar world, increasing only the number of contenders for power primacy. There is a need for recognition of many worlds in one world. As A. Q. Escobar refers to “the reality constituted by many kinds of world” (2016) and the different types of knowledge, the space for seeking, creating mobilizing alternatives could be fruitfully extended.⁵

⁴ See also: Mignolo, 2000.

⁵ In her article, Amaya Querejazu Escobar argues for the recognition of the knowledge of indigenous peoples, depicts the Andean perspective, which “affirms that knowledge is not only rational but also affective, emotional, bodily, mystic and can have origin in experience, memory and suffering as well as in the possibility of changing the point of view.” In other words, to paraphrase Sabelo J. Ndlowu-Gatsheni, there are many interrelated worlds of knowing, whose contributions have to be “re-membered and re-humanized”.

In that context, it is imperative to actively incorporate the substantial number of scientific discoveries (archeology, anthropology, etc.) made in the new readings of world history that affirm beyond doubt that the evolution of human societies cannot be arranged according to linear stages of development, that there is no single pattern of organizing human life nor a hierarchy dividing the patterns into superior and inferior, and that respecting diversity and contributions of the many requires replacing the domination of dualistic thinking by relational thinking. Graeber and Wengrow (2011) demonstrate with ample empirical evidence, why all significant forms of human progress before the twentieth century cannot be attributed only to the ‘white race’ (p. 17), why human societies cannot be “arranged according to stages of development” (p. 8), and why contributions to social thought, including “indigenous critique” (p. 5) of the Western civilization have to be taken seriously. Many worlds are interrelated and the more this is recognized, the more “other possible ways of being in the world” (Escobar 2016) can be sought. When this is ignored, it logically leads at some point, to the noted conclusion that Fukuyama made after the end of the Cold War and the triumph of neoliberal capitalism - the end of history. A triumphant conclusion that may lead to an apocalyptic outcome.

Beyond the noted, efforts of enhancing diagnostic capacities encompass a rereading of own history, a “precise reconnaissance of the present” (A. Gramsci), an understanding of the inner workings of the world order (W. Robinson), and efforts for a multicultural, multidisciplinary synthesis. Together they may contribute to creating and recovering many existing, ongoing critical analyses from their digital enclaves.

- Rereading own history particularly for the countries of the global periphery, is part of an emancipatory effort. It presupposes exploring and understanding the structural shadows of the past that take part in perpetuating disfigured, mal-development, and extend the residing on the periphery in spite of liberation from the colonial, imperial rule, and modernizing efforts, into an inescapable fate. In other words, it is an effort to recognize the processes of *longue durée* that perpetuate internal divisions, conflicts, submissions to the external “civilizing forces”, and require systematic, collective engagement to be transformed. Rereading means both confronting the externally imposed deep traumas, sufferings, but it also means becoming aware of internally made wrong

turns, choices and decisions. Therefore, it entails developing healing mechanisms, striving for self-discovery beyond prevailing stereotypes, and rehabilitating the experience of own fruitful principles and practices of community building, economic functioning, of relating to others, to nature. The creative bridges that link nuanced and accurate remembering can strengthen the internal pillars and forces of autonomy, transcending the option of submission and mechanical imitation of formulas of development.

- A precise reconnaissance of the really existing present, means dealing with the consequences of the transformation of the state and society in the transnationalized global order which has diminished their capacity to provide protection to the citizens; the state serves the needs of capital and not its citizens, while fragmented society does not provide the sense of community, giving rise to “runaway individualism” (each for himself), reducing solidarity and the capacity to recognize fellow victimized (the case of antagonism towards migrants by the local workers, for instance). Reconnaissance means dealing with the economic and political foundations of the rising inequality and the reduction of citizens to frustrated consumers; the irresponsible celebration of greed and egotism, i.e. the collective amnesia of the Common good. Reaffirming, the need, existential rationality, value of the Common good, public interest, solidarity/fraternity⁶ may lead to recovering a degree of self-confidence of the citizens, to developing new social mechanisms for defending society from it turning into a conglomeration of lonely, powerless human beings, at the mercy of the greed⁷ of the transnational (oligarchic) class and profoundly alienating consequences of new technologies (robotization and AI). New technologies which are not only replacing human beings in a number of professional locations, taking decision on their own, but

⁶ Frantz Fanon has articulated this profound connection of solidarity and brotherhood by the concept of *radical empathy*, defined as a politics of recognition and solidarity with communities beyond one’s own immediate experience, in order to transcend differences, and enduring patterns of discrimination. See in: Christopher (2021, 191-195).

⁷ In 1952, several years after the end of World War II, Bertrand Russell (1968, p.84) warned that the world needs to avoid “cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, search for irrational subjective certainty, and what Freudians call the death wish” – i.e. the things that brought it to the brink of catastrophe. The heights greed, cruelty, competitiveness and the death wish have reached at our age, underlie the tragic inertia of human irrationality.

gaining the power of manipulating human consciousness, needs and behavior. In other words, they have the potential of taking the position of submission, powerlessness, and fragmentation to a dystopian level.⁸

- Understanding the inner workings of the present neoliberal World order requires deciphering the new forms, locations, structures of transnational power, its social, economic, political, ecological consequences, contradictions and vulnerabilities. This requires shedding light on interconnections of the local and global, legal and illegal, the “seen and unseen”,⁹ democratic and authoritarian strands, i.e. focusing on the locations and flows, “multiple nodes of power, multiple constructs of privilege. (Nordstrom 2007, p. 207). The growing divide between the new transnational class, a minority privileged materially and politically beyond comprehension, and the Rest “coping”, unable to identify and reach the new locations of power and resist their capacity to devour the community, and erase the rights of workers, minorities, migrants, poor is a particularly dramatic predicament that requires a loud articulation within the ongoing diagnosis. So does the question concerning the aspiration of the present hegemon, U.S., to perpetuality, because it considers itself as being the embodiment of a superior liberal order that provides global stability and prosperity (Ikenberry 2005), the only power suited to lead the world from now to eternity. The aspirations for a hegemonic position that is to last indefinitely because U.S. is superior, indispensable have become the basis of transforming international law into ad hoc self-serving rules, the unprecedented degree of applying double standards, the basis of unaccountable control and surveillance, militarization

⁸ Yanis Varoufakis (2024) points out that AI is not only a commodity, but a means of producing behavioral modification. According to him that is the most dangerous aspect of the advancements in the AI technology, i.e. its growing capacity to manipulate human behavior, thoughts and needs.

⁹ Carolyn Nordstrom (2007, p. 208) warns that “People can see only what they have the conceptual tools to see. That makes the unseen a powerful tool of both hegemony and resistance: seeing *is* power.”

and numerous, in terms of numbers and forms, of violent interventions, regime change that have resulted in prolonged instability.¹⁰

b. **The strategy to revitalize the idea of a global civil society** is based on the need to limit, disrupt, weaken the existing national and transnational power structures benefiting a tiny privileged minority, an arrogant minority that can ignore, marginalize for instance the effect of 40 million people protesting around the world against the then pending intervention in Iraq in 2003. The need is based also on the existence of a number of important social movements (some of them with huge number of members, f. e. The *Via Campesina* peasant movement consisting of 250 million farmers from 70 nations, or Latin American indigenous peoples movements, or the international network of Global Greens), and groups, the abundance of initiatives emerging at the local level, and the spaces of solidarity they have all created. Their limits are however also sharp: in spite of networking, the predominant fragmentation of efforts, insufficient interconnectivity, lack of sustained alliances to counter the global system of power based on the interlinking of the military-intelligence, financial, corporative oligarchic, media, political complex. Thinking through a strategy of an increasingly effective networking and

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, all those that speak of the U. S. as the indispensable nation due to its liberal principles, economic power, the capacity to secure global stability and prosperity, set aside the internal problems the U.S. is confronted with: rising poverty, lowering of life expectancy, inequality, lack of Medicare for the whole population, racial discrimination. Bernie Sanders (2004) argues: “We are the wealthiest nation on Earth. There is no rational reason as to why we are not the healthiest nation on Earth. We should be leading the world in terms of life expectancy, disease prevention, low infant and maternal mortality, quality of life and human happiness. Sadly study after study show just the opposite. ...The United States cannot continue to be the only wealthy nation that does not provide universal healthcare. Working-class Americans live far shorter lives than the rich. Too many Americans are struggling with intense anxiety and ‘diseases of despair’.” The reason, according to Sanders, lies in the political and economic crisis created by the unprecedented level of corporate greed. One would expect a necessary coherence between the external and internal, not to forget the more than 750 military bases around the world, illegal, violent coups, change of regimes (from M. Mossadegh in Iran, P. Lumumba, in Congo, S. Allende, in Chile, M. Gaddafi, in Libya ...) it organized, radically shifting the fate of these societies, military interventions without abiding the norms of IL, UN Charter, heavily investing in weapons, i.e. nurturing the highest military expenditure. Concerning internal problems, the UN index of happiness of nations is an indicator, for U.S is not at the head of the list. In fact, it is not ranking among the first 10; it was ranked 23 both in 2023 and 2004. (*Axios* 2023; *World Population Review*, 2024).

coalition making¹¹ is necessary, as well as organizing simultaneous, global actions demonstrating the vulnerabilities of structural power and unwavering visibility of the GCS.

c. Taking seriously the really existing New Global South¹²

The emergence of the New Global South on the global scene is generated by the accumulated grievances of the advancement made by a number of developing countries, and the crisis of the unipolar world system, i.e. the tense transition to multi-polarity. Those that celebrate the (re)emergence of the GS, perceive it as sufficiently coherent and radical transformative global force unified in its search for a just World Order. Others criticize it from two political spectrums. Some (J.Nye, C. R. Mohan) either consider it as an impossible, incoherent concept, attempting to place more than ½ of humanity into a single bucket, to artificially homogenize the non-Western world, or as an Anti Western movement, servicing Chinese and Russian geopolitical interest. Criticism from the other side of the spectrum – the left, perceive it as being not a transformative force, but an attempt to better only the position of the privileged national elites in the existing global structures of power and preserve the status quo, the neoliberal capitalist World order.

What these types of critical observations disregard is the question how coherent can Global South be at this stage of chaos, entropy, disfiguring historical wounds, runaway irrationality. Obviously the Global South cannot be approached as a self-evident, harmonious given; it is not, as E. Hagan and S. Patrick point out, a rigid grouping but an organizing principle to guide reimagining a more just World Order.

The global South is incoherent, geographically economically, in terms of the size of the territories and population, and the relations with the West, in terms of internal regimes, the reproduction of the South within the South. For that reason, J. Comaroff (2012) notes that Global South is “a polythetic category, its member sharing one or more – but not all, or even most – of a diverse set of features.” However, one common

¹¹ Speaking of coalition building, considerations should be given whether it should aim towards including the progressive parts of the ruling elites, as well.

¹² This part of the article is based on the research I have done for the project at the Johannesburg New South Institute, under the working title “Controversies Concerning the Global South” and headed by Dr. Jelena Vidojevic.

denominator is recognizable, the need to problematize dominant global relations of power, and the desire of the “global majority” to be adequately represented and to take part in the decisions “about how to live together”, i.e. in decisions shaping global governance. In other words, GS is a persistence both of the “wretched”, discriminated, exiled and the marginalized to attempt to speak the language of effective resistance to the dominant geometry of power.

The Global South as a redistributive effort, process, organizing principle, has to be addressed, within the really existing framework, context, and its transformative threads, seeds, recognized and supported as a Quest, within all its really existing incoherencies and limitations. Because, in spite of all the incoherencies, spaces of a parallel reality are emerging, new institutions are being created,¹³ new initiatives of cooperation are launched, in the field of finances, infrastructure building, security, climate change, etc. with the aim of providing greater degree of autonomy and protection against punitive measures (sanctions, for example) of the U.S. and its western allies. Therefore, it should be approached from an angle of “emancipatory realism”, meaning, investing efforts to distinguish threads of alternative thinking and acting, of the “global majority”, amidst inconsistencies, tensions and rivalries.

The current global crisis has created the space for the intellectuals, civil society, progressive elites of the Global South to demonstrate the possibility of extending the possibilities for a cooperative, more just and diversity respecting world order. A possibility to approach the world as not belonging to anyone, i.e. belonging to all, is present as is the possibility of increasing the respect for the existential significance of radical empathy and peaceful coexistence, vs. greed/indifference, and antagonistic rivalry, wars. A possibility is visible, but it needs to be chosen and persistently pursued through dialogue and solidarity, it needs to be appropriated by social energies of transformation in order not to disappear into the well of lost historical opportunities.

¹³ In his book *Post-Western World, How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order*, O. Stuenkel (2016) has made an inventory of the new institutions that have emerged, among else, BRICS and its various working groups, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Bank, the New Development Bank, China international payment system, Free Trade Area of the Asia, Pacific, Silk road Fund, etc.

Conclusion

The Quest for energies of change has to be based on bold dreams, bold critical insights and bold actions based on thinking and linking in place of “coping, shopping, and doping”. Visions of bold actions are the center of the riddle, challenge, the dramatic need, requiring the quest for serious informed imagination and dedication. Thus, the main task is how to create/connect various locations of transformative energies, emerging dots of counter-hegemonic power able to articulate an effective *No* to the irrational tide that combines economic, technological, political moral coercion and eliminates existentially rational alternatives. At this dramatic moment, the Quest, the urgent elementary need is to stop the ongoing carnages, the atrocities of war, the danger of planetary annihilation. The vulnerabilities of the extreme power possessing an unprecedented reach has to be deciphered, and the many positive, life enhancing efforts have to be linked into an alliance/coalition for radical solidarity and human brilliance in the NOW. That is a path leading from the irrational, antagonistically divided World Order to a New Cooperative World Order under the banner: “... never admire might, or hate the enemy or despise sufferers.” (Weill 1939 quoted by Fuentes 2006, p. 302).

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