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**Transition and Crisis of Civilization in the Time of the Pandemic and Climate**

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**A Crisis of Civilization and a Transition**

Today we are facing a conjunction of a major climate crisis and a pandemic crisis. As Kyle Harper[[1]](#footnote-1) underlines, the environmental crisis that accompanies the Anthropocene, this new era in the history of the earth, is the result of the effects of human civilization on the physical and biological systems of the planet and its consequences on the acceleration of world warming, the radioactive traces of nuclear technologies, the degradation of the relations between species and the deterioration of biodiversity.

This crisis concerns the civilization carried by capitalism and capitalist globalization, at least in its neoliberal phase and probably in the foundations of capitalism itself. Ecological contradictions question the relationship between the Human Being and Nature. Economic and social contradictions question the dominant system, namely neo-liberal capitalism. Political contradictions question institutions, states and democracy. Ideological and cultural contradictions question world understanding. Geopolitical contradictions question the international system. The debates are open on all these aspects, the overall corresponds to a crisis of civilization.

The exhaustion of capitalism hypothesis is shared by many. It does not define the mode of production that would succeed it and which could be another unequal and destructive mode of production. It does not give an indication of the duration of the transition; this duration and the nature of the transformation depend on the contradictions and on the social and ideological struggles during the transition period.

To think about transition is partucularly important because history is not written and is not linear. Transitions are long and uncertain periods. A transition is not just a revolution, and especially not in the imaginary of the Great Evening which may see one civilization brutally succeeding another. Samir Amin had emphasized the importance of transitions between modes of production. He also questioned the linearity of History which would have seen the succession of modes of production of primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism to reach the expected end, that of socialism and communism. He had shown the bias of this Western-centric vision and insisted on the neglected modes of production such as the lineage modes of production, important in Africa and Asia, and as the central or Asian tributary modes of production, that of the great empires that played a major role in history, among others the Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Inca, Ottoman, ... empires and in particular the Roman Empire, without forgetting the colonial empires of capitalism.

In the discussion on transition, Fernand Braudel wrote that he had particularly appreciated, in Samir Amin, the differentiation introduced between transitions through decadence, as in the case of the Roman Empire, and the transition controlled as in the case of the bourgeoisie in the transition to capitalism. I would also like to underline the idea, developed by Samir Amin, that the transition is being prepared in the peripheries, where the balance of power is less fixed, where the new can make its way, where the imagination of the dominated and the excluded can discover the vulnerabilities of the dominants.

The discussion on ecological, social, democratic and geopolitical transition is not just a slogan.It has the interest of naming the great contradictions at work, without forgetting the ideological and cultural transition. Now it remains to nourish each of these dimensions with new proposals for the construction of another possible and necessary world. It is also necessary to develop the alternatives, the new social relations of surpassing capitalism, in today's societies, as merchant capitalist social relations developed in feudal societies before the capitalist mode of production became dominant and the bourgeois political superstructures imposed themselves.

The question of democracy is at the beginning of certain paths of transition: democracy in corporations, local democracy, democracy in public action and in state institutions, international democracy. Freedoms, which may be real in some situations, are not really shared and many are excluded from them. Similarly, this situation is based on inequalities between countries and peoples, which are unbearable and are becoming less and less supported. Democracies have to be reinvented. By making Western democracies the model, we risk endangering the idea of democracy itself.

The situation revealed by the pandemic also leads us to reflect on historical ruptures and continuities. The hypothesis of discontinuities cannot be ignored. The ecological rupture leads us to reflect on the implications of a crisis of civilization, taking the scale of the resulting shocks. A crisis of civilization leads to upheavals that some may describe as collapse, which characterizes processes and does not signify falling into millennialist fears. For example, the fall of the Roman Empire is often described as a collapse. It was not the end of the world. It has liberated repressed cultures and gave birth to new civilizations. The Medieval period was not an obscure period, it was a period of emergence of a new civilization. What some now call the collapse is also the preparation of a new civilization. It is not the end of the world, it is the beginning of a long transition that will not be linear and that will experience regressions.

**The decline in the resilience of the international system**

The way the world has reacted to covid-19 has demonstrated the significance of the shocks that are taking place. The covid-19 health crisis demonstrated the weakening of the United States as the dominant pole and the weakness of the organization of the international system in its inability to respond to a global crisis. The fall of the American empire is an open assumption. The example of the collapse of the Soviet empire has shown that this development is possible and can be accelerated. The form and duration of this fall cannot be predicted, but the dynamics seem to have started.

The covid-19 coronavirus pandemic revealed the low resilience of the international system, particularly the Western one, to a large-scale unforeseen event. The Western system (United States and Europe) is still militarily dominant, but has lost the ability to think globally. This capacity seems to have been displaced to Asia. It should be pointed out that this shift towards the Pacific is not, in itself, a civilizational advance, a new model, but a new geopolitical balance leaving more room for multipolarity.This shift towards Asia, while it may open up new contradictions and possibilities, does not call into question the foundations of capitalism that have been taken up and accepted by all the emerging Asian countries.

The health crisis has also demonstrated the inadequacy of the international system. Responses to a global crisis have been national, without much concertation. The United Nations has demonstrated its paralysis and inadequacy. After the bipolar equilibrium until 1989 and a more and more unstable unipolar episode, the possibility of multipolarity is open. The alterglobalism movement should take the initiative to open the way to possible advances in international law and international institutions for an international system that respects human rights and the rights of peoples, and the responsabilities of human being towards Nature and living environments.

**And today**

In the current situation, the contradictions will be exacerbated. The ruling classes are still there and they will do everything they can to regain control. They will implement the shock strategy described by Naomi Klein. We are in danger of moving from an austeritarian neoliberalism (austerity and authoritarianism) to a dictatorial and even fascist neoliberalism, the beginnings of which we see with Trump, Bolsonaro, Dutertre, Orban, Modi and others.

The first task of the movements will be to resist. Resist xenophobic, racist and securitarian ideologies. Resist the questioning of individual and collective freedoms. Resist economic and social blackmail, unemployment and misery. Resist wars and the police and military build up.

This resistance will create contradictions and opportunities: social contradictions with the exacerbation of inequalities; internal contradictions within capitalism between extractivist capitalism and GAFAM capitalism; social contradictions between the mass of executives and shareholders; ecological contradictions with the awareness of living conditions on the planet, climate, biodiversity, pandemics; demographic contradictions with high schooling and unemployed graduates, population ageing and migration ; geopolitical contradictions with the rise of the Global South and the

decline in the resilience of American and European empires.

The second task of the movements is to work on alternatives and to start building a new world in the ancient world. The combination of the climate crisis and the pandemic crisis is challenging certainties.The religion of capitalist development no longer makes sense, it carries a philosophical crisis, the end of unlimited time ; it is a crisis of civilization.

During this period in which part of humanity has been confined, many proposals emerged, and among others: public health, commons, buen vivir, public action, the limit of markets, social and solidarity economy, new energies, food sovereignty, territorial localizations, the idea of socially useful work, ...

The battle for cultural hegemony has begun. It will be hard but it is not lost. Against the ideology of deadly neoliberal capitalist globalization and inequalities, what is being asserted are rights and equality of rights: rights against profits; rights to health, education, housing, income and wor; rights and obligations of the Nature and the living environment. We promote women's rights, the rejection of discrimination and racism and the rejection of police violence. It is a new global movement that articulates classes, genders and origins. It is an awareness of the persistent traces of slavery and colonization. These ideas have progressed, and the climate and the pandemic crisis have confirmed their evidence.

1. Kyle Harper, The Fate of Rome, Priceton University Press, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)