

National Liberation Movements

National liberation movements (NLMs) constitute a large spectrum of socio-political movements which share in common the target of struggling for establishing an independent state for what they consider their nation within the borders of a territory recognized by the international community. These movements also share that they privilege the struggle for the liberation of their nation over the many other targets of other social movements, and therefore call their people to unite around that priority. The very existence of such movements assumes that the nation either must be united with a view of constituting a single state, or must separate from a plurinational state in which it is included and that is in their view dominated by another nation, or has to emancipate from a colonial status and achieve political independence of that territory. NLMs have indeed been among the major political forces which operated mainly in Europe in the nineteenth century and later, in the twentieth century, expanded to Asia and Africa. They have shaped major changes in the political geography of the modern world and possibly will continue to do so in some areas.

There are, of course, different approaches to the study of this set of important social phenomena. Some scholars take for granted the pre-existence of the nation which these movements mobilize, and therefore focus on the analyses which help in understanding the reasons for their success (or failure), their strategies, tactics and ability to mobilize objective realities operating within the society or in the field of international politics which may support their project.

Other scholars focus rather on the relationship between the deployment of NLMs and the major changes which singularize the process of modernization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Along with Eric Hobsbawm, Immanuel Wallerstein, and the Austro-marxists, the author will adopt that specific approach for the analysis of the NLMs. Commodification of production, industrialization, urbanization, expansion of education- and all these dimensions of the process of modernization are deeply related to that of capital accumulation- played, in that respect, a decisive role in the crystallization of a new type of community, usually called nation. The new economy and social life implied an intensified use of written communications and therefore gave to the language used for education and in the workplace a role far greater than it had been the case in premodern societies.

1. Centers and Peripheries in the Modern World System

Nations as well as social classes are products of modern times, even if one can discover ancestors to them in the past, which anyway have been radically reshaped by the dominant rationale of capital accumulation operating simultaneously at the various local ('national') and global levels. In that respect, the history of capitalism is that of a continuous conflict between the logic of capital accumulation and that through which various other social interests express themselves. NLMs have their place in that historical frame, just as the other social movements, particularly those of the working classes. In fact, these two families of movements- labor and national liberation- have represented, throughout at least the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the major antisystemic forces, compelling capital accumulation to adjust to the social interests that they meant to represent.

National liberation refers to 'nation' and that term presupposes certain articulations between this reality, real or alleged, and other realities such as the state, the world system of states, the local economy as related to the world economy, social classes. We owe these concepts and their articulation into a system to the different social theories developed in the light of the nineteenth century European historical experience. Within this framework, the elaboration of two sets of theories took place- as it turned out, in counterpoint to one another: on the one hand, socialism and the theory of class struggle; on the other hand, nationalism and the theory of class integration into the nation- state. Both theories take account of many aspects of the immediate reality which is marked both by social struggles ending in deep transformations of capitalism and even in revolutions, and by struggles between nation-states ending sometimes in war as well as national liberation movements ending in many cases in the creation of new independent states. For protagonists of these theories, they have proven to be potent guides to action.

The expansion of capitalism on a world scale has always been, and continues to be, based on unequal economic and therefore also political relations between those areas which constituted themselves as full fledged centers of the system controlling the global process of accumulation and those areas which have been submitted to the logic of that accumulation i.e., the peripheries. Therefore, the relationship between state and nation on the one hand and the economic system on the other is not similar in the centers and in the peripheries of global modern capitalism. In the centers there is a rough coincidence between the state (whether national or multinational) and an auto-centric productive system; in the peripheries such a coincidence is always lacking. That coincidence between the state, the nation, the high level of capitalist transformation and the dominant position of such states in the world capitalist system which led these central partners to form 'autocentered' interdependent economic units enjoying a high degree of autonomy vis-a-vis each other, defines a possible field for 'national' economic policy. The instruments of this policy- the national centralized monetary system, customs, the network of material infrastructures in transport and communications, the unifying effects of a 'national' language, the unified administrative system, and so on- enjoy a

definite autonomy in relation to the constraints imposed by an economy operating worldwide. Relations between classes, however wrought, are relegated to and by the national state.

True, there is no Wall of China to separate these national systems from the world system that they constitute. Internal social relationships are partly dependent upon positions occupied by the national states, in the world hierarchy. If social relations permit it, these states can improve their position by pursuing coherent national policies. This effectiveness in turn facilitates social compromise and, without 'abolishing the class struggle,' puts definite limits to conflicts

However, at closer inspection it appears that these circumstances, pervasive but limited in time to the nineteenth century, are even more limited in space. Around a few 'model' nation-states, the world of the capitalist system-structured by different pasts which in turn lost their legitimacy and efficacy- remains undefined in the light of an uncertain and obscure future. Therefore, the problem changes when we quit the limited framework imposed by the central bourgeois nation-states. For this forces us to examine more closely 'regions' whether they are organized into the states or not. Regions are peripheral in relation to continuously expanding capitalist reproduction. On this level there is only a central state, i.e., a state which masters external relations and submits them to the logic of autocentered accumulation. On different levels, there are only 'countries,' which are administered from outside as colonies or semicolonies; these appear to be independent but incapable not only of molding the outside according to their needs but also of avoiding their drift and shaping from outside.

The consequence of that fundamental and continuous contrast between centers and peripheries immanent to the history of really existing global capitalist expansion is that 'national liberation movements' have been continuously produced by the uneven development associated with that expansion. These movements have always pursued the same major target, that of 'catching up' with the advanced centers, through constructing in their turn a modernized independent autocentered nation-state able to act as an autonomous participant in the global capitalist system. They always have nurtured a basic ideology of modernization and national building. In their struggle against the dominant forces in the global system, NLMs have also often attempted to build 'international common fronts' associating the movements involved. Mutual sympathy, common strategic and tactic approaches helped in constructing such common fronts. These common fronts often survived the victory of the national liberation movements, i.e., after those movements had conquered political independence. Yet these fronts were also gradually eroded by the very success of the NLMs. The new states pursued their own policy targets within the global system, which led to their insisting on their particular interests and specific strategic and tactical policies aiming at helping them to achieve them. The similarity with the other major antisystemic movement- that of the working classes and socialism which have built their own successive 'internationals'- is striking.

2. *Stages of Deployment of the NLMs*

Capitalist global expansion has moved through successive stages. For each of those stages specific forms of the relationship between centers and peripheries can be identified. The NLMs produced in each stage have therefore been confronted with specific challenges.

During the mercantilist stage of capitalist expansion (1500-1800) the American continent was conquered and indigenous populations subjugated when not exterminated, Africans were imported as slaves, while migrants from Europe either created autonomous small production systems (in New England, for instance) or constituted themselves as the local ruling class operating as a transmission belt for the metropolitan dominant powers (slave owners and masters of *encomiendas*). The NLMs in the late eighteenth century (the 'American revolution') and in the early 1800s (in Latin America) were led by those local ruling classes of European origin, disregarding the interests of subjugated peoples (black slaves and indigenous Indians). Haiti is in this respect an exception. The common front which was constituted with a view to excluding European powers from the continent was quickly captured by the new capitalist center which emerged in the USA (that is the meaning of the Monroe declaration in 1823). The pattern of an uneven relation was gradually constructed in that frame between the US center and its Latin American periphery. It was only much later, in the twentieth century, that nationalist bourgeois movements started questioning that uneven relation, along in some cases with a revival of indigenous Indian peoples movements. The Neozapatistas (Chiapas) movement in Mexico is the most recent expression of that unfinished struggle for national liberation and social progressive change.

A second wave of NLMs developed throughout the nineteenth century in central, eastern, and southern Europe, associated with the expansion of capitalism beyond its north-western European corner of origin. In two cases, Germany and Italy, these movements led to the constitution of new nations, which became new capitalist centers. Further to the east the three multiethnic autocratic empires (the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman) were assaulted by the expansion of capitalism, moved by a conjunction of internal forces (produced by industrialization and the formation of modern social classes- a bourgeoisie and a working class) and the impact of external forces dominating the global system. The dilemma with which those societies were confronted was the

following: could capitalist development flourish within the frame of such large states, becoming multinational and democratic, or should they be dismantled on a more or less national base? In these countries more than elsewhere the various class struggles (between the autocratic leading groups of the old regime and the new bourgeoisie, between the latter and the working class, between the large landowners- often of different ethnic origin- and their peasants), the political struggles (for democracy, for socialism) and the 'national question' overlapped and interacted in a complex manner. The major organizations within the socialist movement were rather in favor of maintaining the large multinational state (so was the meaning of the struggle of the Austro-marxists for cultural autonomy). However, the peasant and bourgeois movements favoured 'national liberation first,' and that option was finally the one which succeeded in imposing itself.

Simultaneously, during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an extraordinary expansion of global capitalism which conquered Asia and Africa and colonial (or at least semicolonial) systems were established there in most cases. The national question was moving out of Europe and national liberation movements of a new type started being constituted, inspired by the local elites and fractions at least of the new bourgeoisies. The ancestors of those NLMs which played a decisive role in the making of the twentieth century could be identified at least, in China, India, Persia, Egypt, and Syria, where it animated cultural revivals (such as the Arab Nahda) and the first political modern organizations. These new NLMs related to class issues in a variety of ways, but in general they gradually became what has been labeled later 'antifeudal-anticompradore' political movements, associating in their struggles for reconquering the lost national independence and modernization the 'external enemy' ('imperialism') and its local allies (precisely the 'feudals' and 'compradore'). Yet the dominant force among the international socialist movement—the social democracy of the Second International—ignored those new NLMs, overlooked their importance for the future and shared the dominant European imperialist ideology of the 'civilisation mission' of colonialism.

The colonization of Asia and Africa has nationally produced a wave of most important NLMs which finally won their struggle for national independence after World War II and played an important role in the changing of the face of the world since. The NLMs of Africa and Asia were very different in outlook. The past and recent history of their peoples, the social forces, the political and ideological parties and trends which they represented, their visions of the future of the societies to be constructed or to be reconstructed, and its relationships with the West were all subjects on which they differed. However, what brought them together was their common project, which included the completion of the political decolonization of Asia and Africa. Beyond, the Afro-Asian States which emerged out of the victories of NLMs after World War II all considered that the political independence they had regained was only the means, the end being the achievement of economic, social and political liberation. In the opinion of by far the majority 'development' would be possible through interdependence within the world economy. The NLMs and then after the new states they created never intended to 'leave the system,' or 'delink' even if they did not all share the same strategic and tactical vision of 'development.' But, to varying degrees, they considered that the building of an independent, developed economy and society (even within global interdependence) implied a certain amount of 'conflict' with the West in its dominance (the radical wing thought it necessary to put an end to the control of national economies by the capital of foreign monopolies). Moreover, anxious to safeguard the independence which they had regained, they refused to take part in the military struggle at planet level and to serve as bases for the surrounding of the socialist countries which American hegemony was attempting to impose. However, they also thought that if they refused to be part of the Atlantic military alliance, this did not imply that it would be necessary for them to seek the protection of the latter's adversary, namely the USSR, whence 'neutralism' and 'non-alignment.'

Wilson's 'principle of nationalities' (a state for each nation), which was restricted to Europe after World War I, was thereafter partly recognized to Asian and African peoples by the UN after World War II. Yet it took several more decades for the NLMs to achieve their target. That success was favored to a certain extent by the bipolarity which characterized the international system in those times.

The coming together of the Afro-Asian states had already begun by the setting up of the Arab-Asian group within the United Nations in the late 1940s with a view to defending the independence of the colonies in arms. In 1955, the foremost Heads of State of the countries in Asia and Africa which had regained their political independence met for the first time at Bandung. Nasser, Nehru, Sukarno and Chou En Lai were to have a considerable influence on their times, even although the experience of the new powers they represented and to a large extent inspired was very recent. India and Indonesia had been independent for barely 10 years, communist China for not quite 5 and in Egypt the monarchy had disappeared from the scene only 3 years previously. The struggle for the achievement of the historical task of independence was not over: the first war in Vietnam was barely over when the second one loomed on the horizon, the Korean war had just ended in a status quo, the Algerian war was at its height, the decolonization of Africa south of the Sahara had not even been contemplated, the Palestinian drama was still in its first stages, South Africa was closing itself in hard apartheid. Bandung had the effect of reinforcing this rapprochement and of giving an impetus to this struggle. Three years later, in independent Accra, Kwame Nkrumah declared that 'Africa must unite.' But it was only to do so one independence had been achieved and after the failure of Nkrumah's pan-africanism, followed by the demonstration of the impotence of the two groups formed as a result of the Congo crisis (the Casablanca group and the Monrovia group between 1960 and 1963), in the minimal form of the setting up of the OAU in 1963.

From summit to summit, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, 'non-alignment' was nevertheless gradually to change direction from a position of a front of political solidarity based on the support for national liberation movements and struggles and the refusal of military pacts, to a position of building a common front with a view to reinforcing collective economic demands from the North. It inspired the 'decades of development' in the United Nations system, the creation of UNCTAD in 1965 and a whole series of global negotiations on crucial economic global issues. The struggle for a 'new international economic order' which began in 1975 after the October 1973 war and the revision of oil prices was the culmination of this development and the beginning of its end.

The West had no intentions of accepting the spirit of Bandung as a foregone conclusion on either the political level or on that of the economic struggle. The project of society which constituted a kind of basic charter for the NLMs and thereafter inspired the policies of the Asian and African states did exist, although it was often implicit and imprecise. This project, setting aside its various concrete manifestations and the specificities of its expression at national level, can be defined in terms of the following elements: (a) the desire to develop the forces of production and to diversify production (in particular to industrialize); (b) the desire to ensure that the nation-state controls and directs the process, (c) the belief that 'technical' models constitute 'neutral' data which, once mastered, only have to be reproduced; (d) the belief that the initiative did not imply its being initiated by the people in the first instance but only their support for state actions; (e) the belief that the process is not fundamentally in contradiction with the participation in exchange within the world capitalist system, even if it implied conflicts at times with the latter.

The circumstances of capitalist expansion between 1955 and 1970 to some extent encouraged the crystallization of this project. The implementation of this national bourgeois project implies that the hegemonic national, bourgeois class, by means of its state, controls a series of processes which include as a minimum:

- (a) the management of the reproduction of the labor force, which implies relatively full and balanced development so that local agriculture, for example, is capable of providing the elements required for this reproduction in sufficient quantity and at suitable prices to ensure the valorization of capital;
- (b) the control of national natural resources;
- (c) the control of local markets and the capacity of entering the world market on competitive conditions;
- (d) the control of the financial circuits enabling the centralization of surpluses and the directing of its productive usages;
- (e) the control of the technologies being used at the level of the forces of production concerned.

Seen from this angle, the experiences of the Third World inspired by the ideology of NLMs can be divided into two categories: that of the countries which have attempted nothing more than the acceleration of growth without considering the implementation of the conditions outlined above (Ivory Coast, Kenya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, etc.) and that of the countries which have attempted to implement the conditions outlined (Nasser's Egypt, Algeria, Tanzania, India, Brazil and South Korea, etc.). It is obvious that the classification does not necessarily distinguish between regimes concerned with the implementation of a modicum of social justice and reforms, in particular agrarian reforms (e.g., Nasser's Egypt and South Korea) and those which have had no hesitation in accepting the intensification of social inequality (e.g., Brazil). Nor does it necessarily distinguish between the attitudes towards transnational capital (Brazil and Kenya both encourage the latter, but the former attempts to integrate it into its own national policy, whereas the latter simply adjusts to its demands), nor even between the question of the political relationship of conflict or alliance with the East and the West. It is true that there are correlations but the variations in composition as a function of the concrete situation make a special case of each of the Third World countries. However, over and above the variety of experiences, the fact remains that the most coherent implementations have taken place when there has been the conjunction of an intense nationalist struggle and a powerful social revolution. Led by communist parties, these NLMs in China, Vietnam, and Cuba are the most distinct examples of such a radicalization.

It is no longer possible to disregard the inadequacies of all these attempts, which collapsed when circumstances became favorable to their overthrow or erosion. The food and agricultural crisis, the increased technological crisis, the external financial debt, the increased technological dependence, the fragility of the capacity to resist possible military aggressions, the advance of waste on the lines of the capitalist consumption models and of their ideological and cultural content, point to the historical limits of the attempts. Even before the present crisis presented the possibility of an 'offensive from the West' which would succeed in reversing the trends, these inadequacies had already led to an impasse.

In this sense, we may consider that the NLM project under consideration deserves to be described as a national, bourgeois project. The project for the society that the NLMs had in mind was, as we have shown above, that of creating a new state integrated in the global capitalist system. In that perspective the ruling class imagined itself becoming similar to that which controls the process of accumulation in the capitalist centers, and therefore it deserves to be qualified as 'bourgeoisie' (including state bourgeoisie forms), although of course it constituted itself out of different historical origins. Moreover, it has proved to be impossible. In this sense, history has proved that the national bourgeoisie is incapable, in our times, of implementing what it achieved elsewhere, in Europe, in North America and in Japan in the nineteenth century. A concrete examination of the history of NLM ideologies and the policies they

inspired in the Third World independent countries would illustrate that fact: that of the uninterrupted sequence of attempts by the national bourgeoisie, of their repeated failures and of the submission to the demands of subordination which followed on each occasion; in Latin America since the nineteenth century (we shall only refer here to the more recent examples of the Mexican revolution between 1910 and 1920 and of Peronism in Argentina), in India (e.g., the change in direction since Nehru's 'first plan' until the return to power of the right after the first failure of the Congress), as in numerous Arab and African countries.

The favorable economic circumstances at the end of World War II were indeed exceptional and could not last. On the economic level, strong growth in the 'North' facilitated 'adjustment' in the South. On the political level, peaceful co-existence along with the rise of Soviet power, and its combination with the decline of the old French and British colonialisms and the rise of the Afro-Asian struggles for independence made the Soviet alliance truly efficient.

3. *New Challenges, Problems, and Perspectives*

The page of that history of NLMs has now been turned and the global capitalist system has entered in a new stage of its expansion. In this respect it is often said that any attempt at a national development has become irrational and impossible, that the challenges are basically global and therefore cannot find their solutions but at that level, in other words that there is no more national capital, national bourgeoisies, but only a globalized capital managed by a globalized bourgeoisie. Yet the system is not moving toward reducing global polarization, but is rather deepening it. Uneven development between centers and peripheries and therefore nations and peoples not only continues but aggravates, albeit in new conditions.

The global capital and bourgeoisie- if existing- would be restricted to the central triad, whereas in the peripheries they are bound to be comprador transmission belts of domination of the first. Therefore, the national question remains on the agenda; it continues to be a real challenge. What can be said in that respect is that the change marks the end of an epoch which in the case of Asia, Africa and, Latin America can be called the century of the national bourgeoisie, in the sense that it has precisely been marked by successive national bourgeoisie edification attempts. The Third World bourgeoisie now finally sees its own development in terms of the comprador subordination imposed upon it by the expansion of transnational capitalism. A new wave of NLMs should therefore be expected, different in their social targets and methods from the previous ones. The crystallization of the alternative new national popular (not bourgeois) strategy involves a merging of three conditions. First, delinking in the sense of a strict submission of external relations in all areas to the logic of internal choices taken without consideration of criteria relating to world capitalist rationality. Second, a political capacity to operate social progressive reforms through advances of democracy. This political capacity is a condition of delinking- since existing hegemonic classes have no interest in it. Delinking without that transfer of political hegemony has little chance of emerging, and if it did emerge under such conditions, it would lead to an impasse. Third, a capacity for technological absorption and invention, without which the autonomy of decision making acquired could not be realized.

Thus defined, the conditions for a positive response to the challenge of history appear severe, and any merging of such conditions remote. That is not surprising. The response to new challenges never comes spontaneously. It takes time for the social structures to stabilize, for the new forms of social movements to produce efficient strategies, for them to formulate legitimate ideologies in keeping with the real challenges. In the meantime, what we have is rather chaos, and therefore disarray and nostalgias of the past, in other words, false responses to real problems. It is in this frame that we can observe revivals of movements which label themselves 'national liberation,' usually on the basis of ethnicity and religion, denying importance to any other dimension of social reality, such as class. Often presented by the dominant ambiguous ideologies as 'primordial' in the sense of being the expression of a transhistorical fundamental 'difference' and 'specificity,' these movements are in fact more of the nature of being a symptom of the crisis rather than an answer to it.

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