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# The Fall of the Post-Industrial, Post-Global, Post-Colonial World

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**Abstract:** The essay presents the dynamics of what we call “new globalization,” a second stage of the emergence of a new regime, which, as a result of capital’s need to continuously find new frontiers of accumulation, is extending to countries previously considered as residual peripheries. It analyzes cultural diplomacy and university education as two tools used to manage power and reproduce class divisions now designed by an economic meritocratic system of global intellectual creative elites locally circumscribed and globally connected.

**Keywords:** cognitive capitalism, global elite, universities, soft power, cultural diplomacy, Global South

## Introduction

Until 1989, the world appeared divided into two blocs: the First World, composed of the industrialized western countries of the North; and the Second World, or the communist bloc of the East. The ‘poor were seen as a leftover, a remnant, a “Third World” that had to be integrated northward into one of the two models’ (Hylland Eriksen 2005, 4). The fall of the Berlin Wall is said to mark the obsolescence of a world vision based on the opposition between socialist and liberal political ideologies that leaves room for a world dominated by the neoliberal capitalist economy, or what we know as globalization. Throughout the 1990s, the spread of new information and communication technologies, the development of the world of finance, as well as the increase in the possibilities and rapidity of travel amplified this trend by speeding up the movement of information, goods and people, thereby contributing to the formation of two distorted views of the globalized world: on the one hand, the rise of the idea of a singular connected world, where national borders have been overcome; on the other hand, the maintenance of the pre-existing discourse on the division between the beneficiary of the neoliberal capitalist economy, the Global North, and its victims in the Global South. However, the realities of the contemporary

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world, and the effects of the new global financial regime, force us to question both these statements and require more extensive and in-depth analysis.

This essay presents the dynamics of “new globalization,” a second stage of the emergence of a new regime, which, as a result of capital’s need to continuously find new frontiers of accumulation, is extending to countries previously considered as residual peripheries (Cocco 2009) in not only manufacturing, but also the subjective exploitation of work. I look at new forms of creation of value and at the exercise of power from the perspective of the South. The essay is based on research that I have conducted in Johannesburg and Rio de Janeiro, during my Masters and PhD projects, between 2012 and 2018, regarding the gentrification and definition of Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg as two creative cities in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> The effect of the spread of new economies – defined as creative – in the physical and social territory of these two cities marks the rise of a global élite of knowledge workers linked with the cultural industry and academia within two post-colonial societies and economies. The essay highlights that the neoliberal capitalist economy linked with cognitive production does not overcome colonialist power relations, but reinforces new internal colonialism and enables the movement of capital rather than of people, limiting the right of movement to a group of locally selected and globally connected individuals. The phenomenon to which I would like to draw attention is what the Comaroffs describe as a global movement where “there is much South in the North, much North in the South, and more of both to come in the future” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2015, 25). All the citations included in the essay are freely translated by the author.

## The Spread of Cognitive Capitalism to the South

As result of the transformation of work from tangible, mechanical and repetitive to intangible and immaterial (Lazzarato and Negri 2001), organized through a mix of collaboration and competitiveness, after the crisis of Fordist industrial capitalism and the advent of globalization (internationalization of the financial market), we ascend to the rise of a new capitalism called cognitive capitalism<sup>2</sup> – a new process of capitalist accumulation that creates values through

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at <https://gentrily.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/laura-burocco-1-05-last.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of cognitive capitalism was elaborated in the late ‘90s by a Paris-based Italian-French research group that brought together thinkers such as Yann Moulier Boutang, Antonella Corsani, Andrea Fumagalli, Bernard Paulre, and Carlo Vercellone.

connectivity, circulation of individual knowledge, and constant innovation. The social crisis of Fordism determines the acceleration of the process of real subsumption of work by capital turning the subjective dimension of labor, before negated by the mechanics and repetitiveness of workers' activities, central to the production of value. If industrial capitalism (Taylorism) does not valorize the worker's personal characteristics, and does not show interest in the worker's subjectivity, cognitive capitalism does the opposite: labor only gains value in the dual specificity of the knowledge and of the subject that produces it. Production is, therefore, no longer tied to the place of production, the factory. Production is tied to those who produce, making individual knowledge, relationships, and information (cognitive and relational skills) the main source of value. As Corsani (2003) points out: "the passage from Fordism to post-Fordism can be read as the passage from a logic of reproduction to a logic of innovation, from a regime of repetition to a regime of invention." It continues with Vercellone, who points out that the increasing importance of knowledge and its diffusion require higher levels of education and the expansion of the content of intangible and intellectual work. "The greater transformation that, after the crisis of Fordism, marks an exit from industrial capitalism, lies precisely in the strong return of the cognitive and intellectual dimension of labour." (2005, 20)

This essay presents cultural diplomacy and university education as two tools used to manage power and reinforce, on a global scale, the expansion of creative economy and cognitive capitalism in the Southern hemisphere.

## Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

In the second half of the twentieth-century, the exercise of the conquering force proper to the nineteenth-century colonizers had been replaced by the presence of a typical absence of imperialism (American or Soviet), where military power was used indirectly, i. e. in the conflicts of national liberation and by the nuclear threat (the Cold War). In the following stage of expansion of the "new globalization" – led by cognitive capitalism focused mainly on new Southern markets and innovations – the military occupation is replaced by forms of soft power – "the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion" (Nye 2004, 5) – as a mix of financial, cultural, and technical hegemony that comes to play a fundamental role. International cultural and creative partnerships, satisfying the triangulation requirements of European and South-South cooperation, multiply between selected culture and creativity representatives, foreign and local universities, and cultural institutions making cultural diplomacy central to the management

of power relations between North and South. Cultural diplomacy – defined as “initiatives in the field of information, education, and culture aimed at influencing a foreign government through the exercised influence of its citizens” (Van Hamp 2005, 57) is a means used in the exercise of soft power. International collaborations might appear as a contemporary version of the structural adjustments that have marked the economies of Latin America and Africa in the late 1980s: prescriptions of productive innovations enacted without bothering to question the societies where they apply.

During the nineties, in Europe as a result of the weakening of the public welfare system and the privatization of services, artists and cultural institutions were included in intervention formulas that use culture as a tool for urban planning and social normativization. The process is now extended on a global scale. The trend confirms Atkinson’s and Bridge’s remark that “what is happening at a global scale is being articulated in small urban areas, transmitted by key social groups” (2005, 9). In this context, the promotion of initiatives by foreign cultural institutes, despite their philanthropic character, appears to be linked to economic interests and issues of geopolitics regulated by the international representations of their countries, and turns cultural diplomacy into effective foreign policy instruments for any nation-state that can pay for them (März 2015, 36). Two main issues related to these practices include their lack of commitment to lobby local governments (alongside their partial culpability) in exempting the state and private investors from taking responsibility for local production, and little effort by international cultural cooperation to promote and reinforce local capacity.

As reported by Toussaint Tiendrebeogo, a film producer in Burkina Faso and a consultant in cinematographic and audio-visual policies of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), in the 2015 edition of the African Creative Economy Conference: “After 30 years of support from the international community for the film industry has facilitated more productions, but little has been achieved in terms of the infrastructure and formal education .... Because of international support, African governments have quite disengaged in funding and financing the cultural and creative sectors.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website defines cultural diplomacy as “an important instrument for bringing people together, helping to open markets for the cultural industry and for establishing cultural and linguistic links.”<sup>4</sup>

If the Brazilian case evidences an implicit interest in the use of cultural partnerships to open new markets, the case of Burkina Faso shows the

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3 ARTERIAL NETWORK, 2015. The African Creative Economy Conference 2015 – 5th Year, [http://www.arterialnetwork.org/ckeditor\\_assets/attachments/469/an\\_ar\\_2015\\_eng\\_web\\_highres.pdf](http://www.arterialnetwork.org/ckeditor_assets/attachments/469/an_ar_2015_eng_web_highres.pdf).

4 <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/diplomacia-cultural-mre/19484-diplomacia-cultural>.

permanence of an ancient logic of colonial dependence. In 2009, questioned on the role of so-called “cultural diplomacy,” Achille Mbembe warns that “power and money tend to speak the same language in each place. European funding agencies join with African governments in their attempt to instrumentalize art and limit the power and meaning of any artistic and cultural critique” (Mbembe 2009). So echoes Joseph Gaylard, the director of Pro Helvetica (Institute of Swiss Culture), who, analyzing North-South exchanges during the 2015 edition of the African Creative Economy Conference held in Cameroon, talked about how money and power can be exerted coercively on artistic intentions, and how responsibility for change must engender cultural actors in the South in the defense of meaningful domestic policies, institutions, and cultural mechanisms that would place them on an equal footing with the North.

The issue of local and foreign investments in culture is an invitation to not lose sight of the critical analysis of the geopolitics of its financing, which acts a new border developer within the cultural exchange market. This demonstrates how despite the supposed overcoming of coloniality, or the logic of colonialism (Quijano 2000), the production of culture and economic benefits related to it are still characterized by top-down power relations which often satisfy the interests of the financiers more than the beneficiaries. In 2012, I worked for a year in the South African working group of an India-Brazil-South Africa IBSA Project and had the opportunity to participate in a few Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa BRICS Academic Forum meetings. It was evident that the governmental encouragement given by the BRICS through this Forum is minimal compared to its potential, and almost exclusively limited to the proposal of academic exchange and research in the field of new technologies and economics, leaving little explored the area of human sciences. There is evidence of the use of academic exchange in order to serve the interests of local governments to improve economic performance, productivity and consumption of member countries, rather than to develop an understanding of the cultural differences that characterize them or, contrary to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ statement, establishing cultural and linguistic links. We are not far from the logic in service of political and commercial interests that characterized part of area studies in the cold-war era (Hoffman 2015, 117; Sidaway, et al. 2016, 780).

## University and Inequality

In my personal experience in two universities in the Southern hemisphere, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in South Africa and the Universidade

Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) UFRJ in Brazil, the difference in terms of infrastructure is stark. The first time I entered the Wits University campus, it was not clear to me whether it was a public or private university. Over time, the ambiguous understanding of the concept of the public in the South African university context has become evident, reflecting a society whose extreme inequality ensures access to a high level of quality to a few. College fees are inaccessible to most. As a European student, for my Master's degree I paid the double of the local value, which may be questionable – it cannot be assumed that every European has access to 4000 euros only for being born in Europe – but acceptable, due the undeniable difference in terms of opportunities. For South African students, to get access to my Master's course they must either belong to the economic elite or receive government grants. The university's infrastructure, in terms of libraries, study rooms and laboratories, is incomparably superior to that of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. In turn, the latter, as a public university, guarantees greater access through registration fees accessible to the majority, even if the number of places is limited by the acceptance following a public tender. At UFRJ, there exists security at the gates but the campus is open and the classrooms are accessible to anyone who wants to enter – something impossible due to the walls that surround WITS University and its tight access control system.

The infrastructure disparity is further aggravated by uneven access to academic resources such as international online libraries (available for WITS registered students and staff), debates, seminars and conferences facilitated by the predominance of English in academia. It is common to have seminars organized at the university with the participation of teachers or researchers abroad through Skype connections, as long as they speak English (and the internet works). The language issue in relation to both the production of texts and the circulation of theoretical references cannot be underestimated. To counteract the evidence of the disparity resulting from the fact that English is the dominant language of the academy, it is first necessary to recognize the processes that led to the definition of this privilege, and consequently require academic reparatory practices to encourage an attempt to establish parity in access to production, publication and academic exchange. It can be through funds to the translation and revision of texts – thus to relieve non-native authors of this non-negligible financial interest; or through multilingual editorial commissions that allow potential candidates to submit texts in their own language, or in those in which they feel more trustworthy.<sup>5</sup> Even if in his blog Okwunodu Ogbachie (2007) refers the

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<sup>5</sup> It is significant that this section regarding my experience and language was part of an article submitted for a special issue by a North American university titled “Decolonising Latin

questions to visa requirement and African artists, I would like to adapt the same questions to the reduced participation of scholars based in the South who do not speak English into the academic international debate: “what kind of exchange occurs when African artists and scholars are actively denied a chance to engage their counterparts in the West ... ? What does this do to the production of knowledge about their spaces of practice?” The damage ends up being felt on the two sides: by the no English-speaking academics who – although very proficient – do not see their work being widespread and quoted, and by the English-speaking academics who are lazily hostage to a unidirectional imperialist literature. To this extent, although both universities are located in the Southern hemisphere, the fact of the South African university is anglophile makes it much closer to a Northern university than the Brazilian university, and to its existence at different levels of “being South,” even within the geography of the South.

This disparity is also evident in the possibilities of accessing funds to attend conferences that, almost impossible in the Brazilian case, are, in the South African case, following the logic of high quality by a few, not of simple access but at least of possible aspiration. In relation to funds the disparity of conditions affects work on two levels: to present work at international conferences receiving feedback and making contacts; to conduct data-gathering trips. The situation is further aggravated by thinking of the epistemic violence that Sidaway suggests “foreign scholars and scholars of the diaspora could be guilty of producing in relation to local scholars” (2016, 783). This is the case when local academics find themselves overtaken by foreign academics who, because they are affiliated with universities in the North with greater resources, are more likely to travel either to conduct research or to distribute their findings. This tendency also allows the perpetuation of the “historical trend of the division of labor ... in which the South provides experiences, while the North theorizes and applies them” (Connell 2012 from; Ballestrin 2013, 109) and remarks on the need to question how and through whom “theories travel,” and who defines who are in charge of making these theories travel.

It becomes important to question the financing geopolitics behind academic and creative work. If it is true that universities have the ethical imperative to set up forums and promote intellectual exchanges between different study centers, it is necessary to start reviewing funding agencies and begin to question who are the real beneficiaries of these programs. Much more must be done for the application of Northern funds to be used in the South and to improve the research and working

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Americanist Geography.” The article was initially accepted by the two reviewers but was ultimately rejected by the editor.

conditions of Southern academics locally. Most of the programs aim to promote interchange whose benefits seem to be more on the side of those who finance, rather than of those who receive, them. As demonstrated by the case of the Nigerian doctors who, after their international training, rarely go back home so that the most qualified professionals remain in the North (Olayinka 2019; see also page 77 below.). This is also the case for academics born in the South who (understandably) are comfortably teaching in prestigious universities in the Northern hemisphere, mainly in the USA and UK. Brains were drained from the South to contribute to the continuous development of the North.

## The Right to Come and Go

One of the major bases of the discourse of a world without borders relies upon the satisfaction of two of the main requirements by the organization of the new capitalism: circulation and collaboration. To be successful in the global cultural economy the worker is required to be highly qualified, creative, flexible, collaborative, making communication with others; mobility is one of the fundamental resources of his/her professional development. The idea of a unique connected world appears linked to the development of a global intellectual, creative elite free to circulate between one cultural project to another, within a restricted circle of intellectual oligarchy based in urban enclaves around the world. The novelty that the new globalization introduces is that, if the majority of professionals (high educated/special skills workers) continue to be concentrated in the North regardless of their birthplace, new oligarchies composed of homogeneous cultural elites in and of the South will join in the new global creative elite (Lasch 2001; Rofe 2003; Sassen 1998).

The term “Afropolitan” coined by the Ghanaian-born writer Selasi (2005) defines the generation of African migrant children of parents who had left Africa in the years 1960–70. Defined as “non-citizens, but Africans in the world,” the Afropolitans created an “identity between.” Accompanying the economic changes linked with the post-Fordist immaterial production, “this generation of young African migrants choose to prioritize jobs in art, music, politics and design, preferring the creative society to fields traditionally reserved for immigrants.” Achille Mbembe, in his essay *Afropolitanism*, adds to the term the connotation of pluralism of African cultures in geographical space. In describing the history of the African continent as a result of the phenomenon of the circulation of worlds, the author states that “since the pre-colonial era the history of African societies has been a history of peoples incessantly moving”

(Mbembe 2007, 28). It is this culture of mobility that, according to the author, defines Afropolitanism as an openness to the otherness.

Selasi's essay resonated so much that it ended up generating a series of critical studies dedicated to the exploration of the concept showing how the majority of these "Africans moving around the world" are "African outside Africa." When we examine the conditions of the formal education system on the African continent the picture is rather dramatic. In contrast to the Asian educational powerhouse countries of South Korea, Japan and Singapore, in the Global Index of Cognitive Skills and Educational Attainment published by Pearson in 2014, no African or South American countries appear in the top ten; Brazil ranks 38th following Colombia and Argentina. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2013<sup>6</sup> Brazil ranks 79th and South Africa 118th. Somalia has the least functional educational system in the world with just 10% of children going to primary school, while Eritrea is second worst (Belloni 2019).

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,<sup>7</sup> Nigeria is one of the three leading African sources of foreign-born physicians. The reasons why high skilled professional leave can be related to: international residency training, better payment, better working conditions, and future prospects. The exodus has led to a drop in the quality of health care service due to the absence of skilled personnel. The absence of skilled professionals does not permit an improvement in the quality of the health care service. It is a dog chasing his own tail.<sup>8</sup> If brain drain is accepted by the North, on the contrary, the current Europeans and North American governments' reactions to the exodus of millions of people who are leaving their places motivated by economic, political, safety and personal reasons,<sup>9</sup> shows that the frontiers are still alive and, opposite to what the stereotypical discourse on multiculturalism and

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<sup>6</sup> Data available in <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index>.

<sup>7</sup> Data available in [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2015\\_migr\\_outlook-2015-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2015_migr_outlook-2015-en).

<sup>8</sup> It is also worth remarking that according to Docquier and Marfouk (2005) many African nations have very high skilled emigration rates. Many of the small countries, like Cape Verde, as well as some bigger countries like Ghana and Kenya, have high skilled emigration rates ranging from 67% to 45%. In contrast, the high skilled emigration rates of China and India are around 3% and 4%. Easterly and Nyarko and Easterly (2008), pointed out as a substantial proportion of those emigrating are non-blacks. For example, in South Africa only 3% of the emigrants to the UK are black, while in Tanzania the figure is 13%.

<sup>9</sup> If it is possible to imagine that a young European can seek more stimulating and profitable working conditions overseas, this option is denied to young people born in deprived Southern hemisphere's countries. According to the Mixed Migration Center over 5000 unaccompanied minors from Eritrea sought asylum in Europe in 2015 (Belloni 2019). Most of these minors are

modernity want to make us believe. Western visa regimes, conceived at the end of colonial empires to ensure the maintenance of Northern privilege, continue their mission, limiting freedom of movement, and privileging Northerners at every conceivable economic, social, and political opportunity. As Sohonie affirms: “citizenship is the most powerful currency today, often superseding race” (Sohonie 2019).

Therefore, when we talk about Afropolitans we are talking about just a minimum portion of people in the continent, the oligarchy we referred to previously, or mainly people living in the diaspora. It is, therefore, a matter of questioning the disparity of access in terms primarily to education in order to continue with mobility, which, by providing contacts, becomes fundamental to full participation in the system of cognitive capitalism. The extension of cognitive capitalism into societies such as the Brazilian and South African, which “are not based on equality relations, nor on patterns of collaboration of social organization. On the contrary, they are based on social asymmetries and types of exploitation of social organization” (Cardoso and Faletto 2008, 7). That facilitates the perpetuation of a system where capital concentrates, and reproduces, within circuits of privileges originated by family and clientelist relationships. The surplus that put the professional in a better competitive condition is created by the accumulation of experiences, travels, contacts and individual knowledge, conditions that have their origin in what the family has been able to provide. Subsequently, the dominance of finance capital accumulation is the result of the transfer of wealth, recalling the cumulative exploratory/rentier forms that characterized the colonial economies. Both seem to be based on class privileges that allow the transfer and growth of the patrimony (Doust 2010). The Marxist idea of rentism as an economic practice of monopolization of access to any (physical, financial, intellectual, etc.) kind of property, and gaining a significant amount of profit without contributing to society, manifests itself even more radically within societies whose unbalanced accumulation represents the basis of their economic organization.

In this panorama the rise in cultural initiatives, the renewed interest shown by internal and external cultural investors, and the effort made by African entrepreneurs<sup>10</sup> and media to change the image of the continent lead us to wonder what role cultural industry – often underestimated by local governments

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traveling without their family’s approval that is, in addition to economic, political and security conditions, they are driven by their own individual aspirations.

<sup>10</sup> A series of initiative by private investors exist in the art area in Africa. Following the discourse regarding restitution by European museums of African artefacts, we witness the rise of a series of initiatives financed by African magnates in the field of art, such as acquisitions

– plays in terms of economic development in Africa as part of the Southern global market. The title of Guerreiro’s (2018) interview with Mbembe, “Africa is the last frontier of capitalism,” makes explicit this trend, and the concept of Afropolitanism seems to satisfy this imaginary.

## Conclusion

Since 1989, we have lived in a uniquely connected world under construction (or deconstruction) – a world where the global cultural elites, taking advantage of accelerating communication and mobility systems, are more and more interconnected. The extension of this tendency to the South seems to concretize the pre-1989 need to include this “Third World,” as a remnant of one of the other two. While the well-policed borders of the Northern world serve to give continuity to the persisting systems of racial classification established under colonialism, the closure and internal reproduction of a global groups of intellectuals and artists, now including selected representatives from the South, seems to give continuity to a broader set of power relations and contacts that – operating on local, urban, regional and international levels – serve to give continuity to class divisions now designed by an economically meritocratic system. If the divisions between North and South are diluted, societies are increasingly fragmented internally, favoring an attack on democracy and a (re)-balkanization of the world.

What has already proved to be an unsuccessful model of economic development in the North is still framed in the South as the value of modernization – and still understood as a universalistic Western concept – and internationalization. What presents itself as an apparent positive flexibility, and mobility for the few, becomes a fatal mix between a deeper devaluation of informal workers on the one hand, and the spreading condition of precarity internalized by the subjectivity of the majority of the professionals on the other. As Christopher Lasch warned in 1995, we have already reached the rapid decline in the living standards of the middle classes of those countries (as Brazil and South Africa) from which developing countries began to be defined as emerging. The power and size of a country’s middle class depends on the collective dimension of the national economy. Consequently, “in countries where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a restricted oligarchy and the rest of the country lives in hopeless poverty, the middle class can only develop to a limited extent ... it will never be

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and donations of private collections, the impulse of Art Biennials and proposal for the opening of various art museums in African cities. Despite this, the public investment continues limited.

able to escape from a primary role of class subordinate to the oligarchy” (Lasch 2001, 33).

The logic of cognitive capitalism is organized by the construction of new barriers (new enclosures) to the free circulation of knowledge (as key conditions for its development), as well as the functional application to the interests of the intellectual property market, bringing intellectual property rights to the center of national and international distributive struggle (Burocco 2018). The transfer of this logic to the South needs to be accompanied by a serious and deep inquiry into racial inequality, class division, and the origins of these divisions and inequalities within societies where these elements are still strongly characterizing the daily lives of the poorest people and, for the most part, black people. It requires one to question how these new productive arrangements might favor the creation of that we call “internal colonialism” i. e., an internal exploitation driven by coincidence of the interests of local elites with those of foreign elites (Cardoso and Faletto 1970). Discussing a new globalization fueled by a regime of capitalist accumulation (cognitive capitalism) increasingly based on knowledge and circulation in the Brazilian and South African contexts means discussing the effect of the spread of the precariat in economies where informality still occupies a significant portion of the real economy. The growth provided by these new economies does not translate into less inequality and social integration, and confirms that while the economy is global, and affects all of humanity, it is not necessarily planetary. In other words, it does not cover all territories or encompass all economic processes on the planet (Wallerstein 2004) and even less obtains an equalitarian distribution of the profits. More than anything else this means facing the enormous disparity in access to quality education – a project that, in the current Brazilian political situation, is increasingly being attacked through the dismantling of public universities.

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