handed down from the nineteenth century; it is a body of knowledge that has to be continually revised to fit changing circumstances. This kind of sociology is very demanding, because it requires him to "read everything" and make his own judgments about each policy issue. The technical details may be left to experts, but the major decisions are dependent on his analysis of the historical conjuncture . . .

Is Brazil Hopelessly Corrupt?

Roberto DaMatta

In 1985, Brazilians emerged from the twenty-one-year military dictatorship hopeful that democratically elected civilians would address the country's grave social and economic woes. To their dismay, the fledgling democracy withered on the vine. First, the highly respected Tancredo Neves entered the hospital, fatally ill, on the eve of his presidential inauguration in 1985. His successor, José Sarney, practiced a brand of politics that featured patronage and favoritism. Then, in the 1989 presidential election, Brazilians placed their faith in the photogenic, youthful Fernando Collor de Mello. Collor never finished his term. While the country suffered spiraling inflation, Collor and his cronies bled the national treasury, thereby leading to his impeachment on charges of corruption in 1992. When other governmental scandals came to light in 1993, anthropologist Roberto DaMatta searched into Brazil's soul to explain why its leaders wantonly disregarded the law. His remarks, although critical of elite behavior, offer hope that Brazilian democracy will succeed.

Deeply revolted by the corruption of Fernando Collor de Mello, their first democratically elected president in thirty years, Brazilians cheered as Congress removed him from power last year.

But now a new scandal is shaking up Congress itself. Along with more than thirty other lawmakers, João Carlos Alves de Santos, director of the powerful National Budget Commission, is being investigated on suspicion of illegally appropriating up to $40 million. The police found $1 million in cash stuffed in his mattress.

Meanwhile, in the impoverished and corruption-ridden northeastern state of Alagoas, the governor's wife proudly parades before the peasants in gold jewelry, French suits, and Italian shoes. A true egalitarian, she says, "Poor people have just the same right to see me pretty as people in society."

Do such scandals—and they are merely a current handful—justify the conclusion that it is impossible to clean up Brazil, freeing the future from the vast corruption that permeates its past? In other words, can public and private morality be transformed as Brazil struggles on the threshold of modernization?

Brazilian corruption is the fruit of a double ethic. One kind of morality exists in the space Brazilians call *rua* (meaning street or, more broadly, the public world); another morality applies in the *casa* (house), a universe that encompasses family, followers, and friends. In the realm of the *rua*, Brazil is just like any other modern nation. It is governed by universal law and institutions that, formally speaking, apply to all its citizens. In the universe of the *casa*, however, Brazil is ruled by unwritten and unspoken norms that promulgate and protect the ethic of privilege and those who act on it. As they say, this is not the land of know-how but of know-who.

Political corruption is a connecting link between the *rua* and the *casa*. Since no moral code exists that applies simultaneously to both spheres, as in most countries that have undergone modernization (Italy is something special), when something cannot be done under the rules of the *rua*, it can be done under the ethical protection of the *casa*.

That is why Brazilian corruption is so hard to correct and prosecute. Corruption is never an individual act. It always involves groups of people bound by one fundamental rule of association: an exchange of favors. This collective corruption is founded on traditional morality, well-established friendships, and the opportunity at hand. It allows crimes to be practiced with impunity and is characterized by an intolerable arrogance.

All this has led society to build a profoundly ambiguous nation-state—a state that indulges its elite and fends off its citizens. As Brazilians say, "To our friends, everything; to our enemies, the law!" The drama has a lot to do with the childish vision of an elite convinced that it is able to manage social contradictions by manipulating the law. It is as if the state were not part of society. To understand corruption Brazilian-style, it is necessary to understand this profoundly negative relationship between a state that is considered above society and a society that wants to be insulated from the state that rules it.

This dangerous illusion is finally under challenge. Since the end of the military regime that ruled from 1964 to 1988, prodded by an aggressive

and liberated news media, Brazilians have questioned publicly whether it is legitimate to use the state and politics for personal enrichment.

Now, popular demand is not so much for liberty (which was always of interest to the elite), but for equality. In this milieu, corruption is viewed as an immoral political style. How can the government ask the people to make sacrifices required by modernization if the political elite is not willing to follow the rules and if public officials profit from the emergency, deepening the crises of the state with their immoral conduct?

I interpret the recent scandals and the accompanying uproar as the final gasps of traditional politics. First, the elites have been exposed in their perversion of the political process; second, the public is no longer willing to tolerate a state more satisfied with passing laws than with enforcing them honestly.

So instead of focusing on corruption as Brazil's main problem, look at it as a sign of the change that society and government need to undergo. We also know that friendship, kinship, and personal loyalties are not pure and inviolate institutions. In a democracy, they have to submit to the law.