

IORIS, Rafael

Transforming Brazil:
**A History of National Development
in the Postwar Era**

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In September 1957, a young public school student from rural São Paulo named Dorothy Del Ben Pedroso sent a letter to the national Council of Development (CD). President Juscelino Kubitschek had charged the agency with carrying out his ambitious Plano de Metas and the CD had a reputation as a high-level technocratic institution engaged with weighty problems of national policy. Even as it faced these grave responsibilities, the CD's members took the time to read Dorothy's questions about the goal of increasing agricultural mechanization, which she had learned about in published material about JK's plans. The Council's Secretary-General Lucas Lopes, a personal confidant of Kubitschek's and a powerful policy-maker, read the letter along with four other members of the CD. This detail about the agency's internal operations demonstrates one of Rafael Ioris's great accomplishments in his thorough new book about

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development during the Kubitschek administration. Ioris provides a detailed, textured account of the Plano de Metas's origins and how it was put into action. He ties his examination of the debates surrounding the policy and the mechanics of its implementation to the broader story of how it was engaged by various social sectors.

Dorothy's letter shows that debates about development reached widely across 1950s Brazilian society. From political elites to rural schoolchildren, all sorts of people knew something about Kubtschek's goals and felt they had a stake in the process of realizing them. Ioris provides clear and engrossing narratives of these debates' progress, at their various levels of abstraction and influence. He catalogues the perspectives and arguments put forward in a wide range of published material, circulated by business groups and think tanks. He also analyzes the internal operations of federal agencies, as his attention to the correspondence of the CD indicates. And he canvasses the views of the working class, especially from the auto industry, drawing from such papers as *A Voz do Metalúrgico*. Despite the fact that so many groups participated actively in discussing the pursuit of development, Ioris holds that "no consensual definition of national development existed" at the time (p. 6). The heterogeneity of opinion provides all the more reason to reconstruct these debates and determine which voices reverberated the loudest during the rapid development that took place during JK's administration. In doing so, Ioris also provides a corrective to one reductionist view of the time—that Kubitschek presided over a period of social concord and monolithic support for his policies.

One of Ioris's key interventions lies in his insistent argument that the Council of Development did not work as a transcendently technocratic body, insulated from outside influence. The most important of the CD's interlocutors, Ioris argues, came from the business community. The Council maintained clear and broad links to private interests and in fact, the goals from the Plano de Metas that were realized were precisely the ones around which more interaction took place between the agency and private capital. Moreover, the strongest supporters of the Plano came from social sectors most likely to deny the political content of

their positions. Middle- and upper-income sectors, including business leaders, advocated a “technical” approach to politics that resonated with JK’s apparent style. But much as they might obscure it, these approaches were certainly political. And the trend in favor of technocratic governance helped to lay the groundwork for these same sectors’ support of the military, when it seized the government in 1964.

Ioris advances a shrewd argument about the context for the fall of the democratic regime in 1964. First, he provides insight into the growth of a predilection for supposedly non-political administrators. Second, he demonstrates that JK’s consistently business-friendly approach to development closed off opportunities for other social sectors to contribute their own vision of development, most notably the rapidly growing working class. Their increasing frustration with a development model that failed to address regional and class inequalities helps explain the polarization of the Goulart years. While JK’s period saw 11 percent annual growth in industrial output, for instance, industrial jobs only increased at 3 percent a year. At the same time, industrial development concentrated ever more in São Paulo, and particularly the ABC region.

Reading Ioris’s accounts of the debates unfolding in the pages of *Conjuntura Econômica* or *Cadernos do Nosso Tempo*, or in the metalworkers’ papers, one is struck by how the question of national development suffused the culture of the time. Even if Brazilians did not agree about what development should mean, most agreed that they wanted it. Ioris focuses largely on political and intellectual dialogues but he offers important context for other expressions of the larger debates. For instance, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri’s “Eles não usam black-tie” premiered in 1958, in the middle of the period Ioris describes and featuring the segment of workers he examines. The fifth chapter’s characterization of the emerging culture of consumption opens this discussion, but Ioris leaves it to other scholars to further explore the links between culture and development debates.

The book’s six chapters divide neatly into two sections. The first section describes the historical context for the elaboration and implementation of the Plano de Metas and the second examines the relationships

of three discrete groups to the Plano. The three chapters that constitute the first section set the stage for understanding the history of developmentalist thought in Brazil, filling in background and context to grasp the post-war years. Ioris also places Brazil in an international context, demonstrating where its national experience fit into a broader, particularly hemispheric picture. Finally, this section explains how the Council of Development was formed and functioned. The second section is comprised of the final three chapters, which evaluate in sequence intellectuals from the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, business leaders (including advertising executives from the influential U.S.-based J. Walter Thompson Company), and autoworkers. This well-researched book offers a rich picture of the trajectory of development in the JK years and will serve as a valuable reference.