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The Brazilianization of the World

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The periphery is where the future reveals itself.
—Erroneously attributed to J. G. Ballard by Mark Fisher

"It couldn't happen here." Pandemics and other threats to health security were supposed to be problems in and from the Global South. But the deficiencies Western states have faced in developing and executing coherent plans, coordinating state agencies, communicating with the public, or even just producing and storing sufficient medical and pharmaceutical equipment (to say nothing of the EU's scandalous vaccine rollout), have highlighted state failure in the very heartlands of global capitalism. Hollowed-out state capacities, political confusion, cronyism, conspiratorial thinking, and trust deficits have exposed the crumbling legitimacy that now makes rich and powerful states look like banana republics.

Surveying the rankings of pandemic readiness from before Covid-19 struck—like the Global Security Index or the Epidemic Preparedness Index—one finds that the United States and the United Kingdom were supposedly the two best-prepared countries, with EU countries ranked highly, too. These were states that felt they had nothing to learn from the previous experiences of countries such as Brazil, China, Liberia, Sierra Leone, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And although countries that have managed the pandemic well are few and far between, state failure in the heart of Western capitalism puts paid to any complacent notions about the End of History and the primacy of one model over another. We all seemingly live in "less-developed countries" now.

The reality is that the twentieth century—with its confident state machines, forged in war, applying themselves to determine social outcomes—is over. So are its other features: organized political conflict between Left and Right, or between social democracy and Christian democracy; competition between universalist and secular forces leading to cultural modernization; the integration of the laboring masses into the nation through formal, reasonably paid employment; and rapid and shared growth.

We now find ourselves at the End of the End of History. Unlike in the 1990s and 2000s, today many are keenly aware that things aren't well. We are weighed down, as the late cultural theorist Mark Fisher wrote, by "the slow cancellation of the future," of a future promised but not delivered, of involution in the place of progression.

The West's involution finds its mirror image in the original country of the future, the nation doomed forever to remain the country of the future, the one that never reaches its destination: Brazil. The Brazilianization of the world is our encounter with a future denied, and in which this frustration has become constitutive of our social reality. While the closing of historical horizons has often been a leftist, indeed Marxist, concern, the sense that things don't work as they should is now widely shared across the political spectrum.

Welcome to Brazil. Here the only people satisfied with their situation are financial elites and venal politicians. Everyone complains, but everyone shrugs their shoulders. This slow degradation of society is not so much a runaway train, but more of a jittery

rollercoaster, occasionally holding out promise of ascent, yet never breaking free from the tracks. We always come back to where we started, shaken and disoriented, haunted by what might have been.

Most often, "Brazil" has been a byword for gaping inequality, with favelas perched on hillsides overlooking millionaire high-rises. In his 1991 novel *Generation X*, Douglas Coupland referred to Brazilianization as "the widening gulf between the rich and the poor and the accompanying disappearance of the middle classes."[1] Later that decade, Brazilianization was deployed by German sociologist Ulrich Beck to mean the cycling in and out of formal and informal employment, with work becoming flexible, casual, precarious, and decentered.[2] Elsewhere, the process of becoming Brazilian refers to its urban geography, with the growth of favelas or shantytowns, the gentrification of city centers with poverty pushed to the outskirts. For others, Brazil connotes a new ethnic stalemate between a racially mixed working class and a white elite.

This mix-and-match portrait of Brazilianization is superficially compelling, as growing inequality and precarity fractures cities across Europe and North America. But why Brazil? Brazil is a middle-income country—developed, modern, industrialized. But Brazil is also burdened by mass poverty, backwardness, and a political class that seems to have advanced little since its days as a slaveholding landed elite. It is a cipher for the past, for an earlier stage of development that the Global North passed through—and thought it left behind.

North and South, Then and Now

After the eclipse of the East-West conflict of the Cold War, the new global dividing line in the age of globalization was said to be North-South. In the new division of the world at the end of history, the Global South was understood as a zone of poverty and conflict. Consequently, Western powers would assume two alternate postures in relation to it: a defensive one (guarding against its terrorism, environmental degradation, new diseases, organized crime, and drugs) and a paternalistic one ("helping them develop"). While the first posture suggested little hope that things might improve in the Global South, the latter did suggest a telos. The South would gradually come to resemble the North, with increasing affluence driven by masses of the "new middle class" desperate to emulate northern patterns of consumption.

Here was a reheated version of Cold War modernization theory, adapted for the era of globalization. For the poorest countries, international and NGO-led "development" programs pushed small-scale schemes like digging wells or microfinance, belying a failure of conviction that these countries could ever really "catch up." These meliorist efforts were often sponsored by the same international financial institutions that had rent those societies asunder with structural adjustment in the 1980s.

For the better-off societies in the South, now called "emerging markets," neoliberal development aped the tacit assumptions of modernization theory in assuming these countries were just "late," but that they would get there eventually—they would become "like us." Just look at the shopping malls springing up in São Paulo or Bangkok or Cairo! We just need to wait for that wealth to spread and soon these countries will join the rich-world club. In the pages of the *Economist*, for example, it was said that countries like Brazil just needed some liberal reforms before growth would once again take off. After all, Mexico, South Korea, and a handful of countries in Eastern Europe joined the OECD in the 1990s, with Chile following in 2010. It was only a matter of time.

What this story ignores is that the policy tools wielded by modernization theory (such as import-substitution industrialization) were now gone, as was the international scenario and technological relations that had made catch-up development possible. The technologies and associated industries of the Second Industrial Revolution were no longer in the vanguard. An economy based around the technologies of petroleum, rubber, and steel—say, the manufacture of automobiles—was no longer the stuff of "high value-add." The important stuff—the really valuable ideas—were now protected by intellectual property rights, inaccessible to a country such as Brazil. Global South and North are therefore no longer avatars of past and present, with the former slowly catching up to the latter, but now seem to exist in the same temporality.

Brazil consequently finds itself stuck—caught in the perennial fluctuation between hope and frustration. And the fate of being modern but not modern enough now seems to be shared by large parts of the world: WhatsApp and favelas, e-commerce and open sewers. In fact, leaving aside the exception of China's remarkable ascent, the global story of the past forty years is one of retrogression, whatever bluster there

may be about the new middle class—or, really, a working class that has entered consumer society precariously, now able to buy a fridge and a TV, and maybe even go to university for the first time in family history, but which has not achieved real security.

Indeed, this story of regression is now perhaps most conspicuous in the Global North, which today is demonstrating many of the features that have plagued the Global South: not just inequality and informalization of work, but increasingly venal elites, political volatility, and social ungluing. Is the rich world not also becoming "modern but not modern enough," but in reverse?

Modernity without Development

The only way to understand what Brazilianization truly means, and what it might have in store for us, is to understand Brazil's developmental trajectory and, by extension, to grasp what it says about our present and future. Indeed, Brazil's consciousness of its own promise, and consequent frustration, has prompted the development of a critical perspective on modernization that the world would do well to study.

Brazil's displaced perspective—that of a modern yet underdeveloped society—was perhaps best captured by literary critic Roberto Schwarz, one of a remarkable set of thinkers who composed the Marx Seminar in the late 1950s at the University of São Paulo. The seminar also included economist Paul Singer, philosopher José Arthur Giannotti, sociologists Michael Löwy and (future president of Brazil) Fernando Henrique Cardoso, among others. They built on the work of scholars like economist Celso Furtado, sociologist Florestan Fernandes, and literary critic Antonio Candido, who, for their part, stood on the shoulders of a generation active in the 1930s—the historians Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Gilberto Freyre, and Caio Prado Júnior. All of these figures (many of whom we'll encounter again) were united by a concern with describing and analyzing Brazil's social formation, the dialectic of the new and persistence of the old, and in mediating between local peculiarity and the cosmopolitan reality of the country's integration into global capitalism.[3]

In 1973, Schwarz wrote the influential essay "Ideas Out of Place."[4] Although the publisher's English translation has the title "Misplaced Ideas," the Portuguese title does not imply forgotten but rather inappropriate, inadequate, incorrectly placed ideas. It is this inadequacy to which Schwarz drew readers' attention: In nineteenth-century Europe, liberal ideas of the rights of man and liberty-equality-fraternity were becoming hegemonic—an ideological and legal superstructure based on a regime of production centered on free labor. Brazil was different, however. In the tropics, liberalism could only be a baroque accoutrement to a society where unfree labor still obtained.

Elites spoke in liberal terms, but the reality was that slavery was only officially abolished in 1888, while other forms of unfree labor, and unfreedom in labor, remained in practice even longer. While in Europe liberalism might serve to conceal the complete reality of the dark satanic mills, it at least faithfully reflected one material reality—one in which individuals were formally free. In Brazil, liberalism could only be absurd, and so the test of reality or coherence never really applied.

Precisely the same mismatch of ideas and reality is now being found in modern times. "Conservatives" encourage the forces that destroy things worth conserving (say, the family); liberalism means defending the illiberalism of surveillance apparatuses; hyper-individualism winds up reifying essentialist conceptions of race (such that group belonging is treated as logically prior to the individual person); the Left is increasingly the party of the highly educated and well-heeled. All around we're confronted with *deaptation*, an idea the philosopher Adrian Johnston has taken from memetic theory to describe the way that an initially adaptive memetic strategy later becomes useless or even counterproductive.[5] If liberalism was a set of ideas appropriate to the bourgeoisie's rise and then consolidation—all in the name of freedom—it is today in a state of deaptation, wielded in defense of hierarchy and domination.

Brazilian intellectuals have been tangling with deaptation for decades, and thus offer an important perspective from which to understand our moment and the misalignment between ideas and contemporary reality. Moreover, as scholars Luiz Philipe de Caux and Felipe Catalani remark, "in historical situations in which transplanted ideas are forced to readjust themselves to material conditions that do not sustain them in the same way as their conditions of origin, this maladjustment does

not need to be discovered through reflection, as it is *always already a daily feeling of the common man*."[6] The average Brazilian has always sensed the hypocrisy of out-of-place ideas. Globalization—or Americanization, via the internet—means that ideas become unmoored from their conditions of origin and the determinate material realities to which they bear witness. Ideas are out of place everywhere, as seen in Europe when young people, in the midst of a pandemic with looming economic devastation, took to the streets to attack "white privilege" in overwhelmingly white-majority countries, thereby imagining themselves American.

As for Brazil, people once thought that its promised future would materialize when it erased the core-periphery division within itself—curing the problem of islands of wealth surrounded by oceans of poverty. Instead, it seems like it is the Global North catching up with the Global South in replicating this pattern. Brazil is once more in the global vanguard.

The Brazilian philosopher Paulo Arantes advanced the Brazilianization thesis in a remarkable 2004 essay, "The Brazilian Fracture of the World."[7] Arantes began by surveying various thinkers in the Global North who had registered disquiet about the course of development of global capitalism. As early as 1995, the conservative strategist Edward Luttwak wrote about the "Third-Worldization of America." In the same year, Michael Lind referred directly to Brazil in his prognosis of an American society divided through a rigid, though informal, caste system. White elites governed a racially mixed society but the masses, internally divided, would allow for the strengthening of oligarchy.

A year later, Christopher Lasch would attest to the ruling class's self-enclosure and separation from the rest of society in *The Revolt of the Elites*. Meanwhile, the former Thatcherite John Gray would write of an emerging "Latin American–style *rentier* regime" in which elites made a killing in the new globalized world, while the middle class lost its status and workers were proletarianized anew, putting an end to the great expectations provoked by postwar growth.

Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells saw that many would be excluded entirely even from this divided society. A new reality was emerging in which *only* the bourgeoisie would remain as a social class, albeit a transnational, cosmopolitan one.

The Birth of Belíndia

Brazil was born modern. It came into existence as a colony, a site for resource extraction, already linked into an emerging world market. Brazil may have been the last country to abolish slavery in the Western Hemisphere, but its chattel slavery was a product of early modernity. Brazil was never premodern or feudal. By the same measure, Brazilianization does not mean a simple return to semifeudal relations.

What then explains the persistence of unfree labor, the latifundia system, and its cultural and political effects, well into the twentieth century—in sum, all the "backward" elements of Brazil? Precisely that, in Brazil, the modern fed off the old and in turn reinforced and recreated it. In rural areas, an elastic supply of labor and land reproduced "primitive accumulation" in agriculture, holding back improvements in agricultural techniques. With industrialization from the 1930s onwards, this pool of rural poor came to serve as a reserve army of cheap urban labor.

What made Brazil's process distinct is that the country's industrialization and modernization during the populist period, from the mid-1930s to the mid-'60s, did not require a rupture of the system, as bourgeois revolutions in Europe had a century earlier.[8] Instead, the rural propertied classes remained in power *and* continued to gain through capitalist expansion. As the sociologist Francisco de Oliveira put it in his 1972 *Critique of Dualist Reason*, the "expansion of capitalism in Brazil happens through the introduction of new relations into archaic ones and the reproduction of archaic relations in the new." This was reinforced politically through President Getúlio Vargas's corporatist labor legislation, modeled on Mussolini's as a means of formalizing and disciplining an urban proletariat. Crucially, it exempted labor relations in the countryside, preserving rural poverty and unfreedom.

For de Oliveira, the new world thus *preserved* earlier class relations. Consider, for example, that the new urban poor would build their own homes, thus reducing the cost of reproduction of this class: employers would not have to pay wages high enough to pay for rent. Favelas, then, are not an index of backwardness but something produced by the new.

Or consider how personal services rendered in the domestic sphere reinforce this model of accumulation. Upper-middle-class households in Brazil have maids or drivers that service them—an economic relationship that could only be replaced by costly investment in public services and infrastructure (for example, industrial cleaning services or public transport). As a consequence, the Brazilian middle class has a higher standard of living in this respect than its equivalents in the United States or Europe. The exploitation of cheap labor in the domestic sphere also impedes any political drive for improvement in public services.

Are we not faced with precisely such a Brazilianization of the world today—with a growing array of "concierge services," whereby the professional class and elite alike hire private yoga teachers, private chefs, and private security? An upper-middle-class household in San Francisco comes to replicate an aristocratic manor with a whole economy of services rendered in the domestic sphere, but now everything is outsourced: digital platforms intermediate between private "contractors" (formerly employees) and the new elite. Brazil's social structure showed us our future.

Reflecting on Brazil's social formation once again in 2003, de Oliveira classed Brazil as a duck-billed platypus: a misshapen monster, neither any longer underdeveloped ("primitive accumulation" in the countryside having been displaced by a powerful agribusiness sector), nor yet having the conditions to complete its modernization—that is, to truly incorporate the masses into the nation.[9] Crucially, this was not a foregone conclusion. Growing workers' power in the lead-up to the 1964 coup could have led to a new settlement and an end to the high exploitation rate, while agrarian reform could have liquidated the source of the "reserve army of labor" that flooded into the cities in the 1970s, as well as finally destroying patrimonial power in the countryside.

Such a modernization project, however, would have required the participation of the national bourgeoisie in alliance with workers. The bourgeoisie backed the right-wing coup instead. In a great historical irony, noted by Roberto Schwarz in his introduction to de Oliveira's platypus essay, it was Fernando Henrique Cardoso—the neoliberal president in the 1990s—who had observed, as a left-wing sociologist back in the 1960s, that the national bourgeoisie did not want development. Cardoso argued, in opposition to prevailing Left opinion of the time, that the bourgeoisie

would prefer being a junior partner to Western capitalism than to risk seeing their domestic hegemony over the subaltern classes challenged in the future.[10] Brazil's elite chose not to develop.

According to de Oliveira, Brazil's promised but endlessly frustrated future is visible in the fact that it is "one of the most unequal societies in the world . . . despite having had one of the strongest rates of growth over a long period. . . . The most evident determinations of this condition reside in the combination of the low standing of the workforce and external dependency."[11] Brazil thus could be a sort of utopia, given its natural blessings, fast growth, and enviable culture. The reality, in Caux and Catalani's words, is that it is a country "whose essence consists in not being able to realize its essence." It is not backwardness that prevents Brazil from claiming its destiny; its destiny is endless frustration.

Moreover, the social exclusion that seems so essential to Brazil's social formation is not an accident, but a *produced duality*. In Brazil, this has been known as *Belíndia*, a term coined in 1974 by the economist Edmar Lisboa Bacha: Brazil is a rich, urban Belgium perched atop a poor, rural India, all in one country. Those in the Brazilian "Belgium" inhabit a country that is ostensibly modern and well-functioning, but is held back by those "outside," in the backwards, semifeudal India. Yet as de Oliveira showed, the "inside" is dependent on the exploitation of the "outside" for its progress. Not only that, but the dualism shapes the inside of the "Belgium" itself; it creates a corrupt, patrimonial, and selfish elite, only too happy to wash its hands of the conditions found in its own "India."

Unfortunately, rather than the *Belíndia* metaphor becoming less relevant in recent decades, it has only become more so. Consider what each component country represents in our times: Belgium may still be wealthy, but it is bureaucratized, fragmented, and immobile; India may still be poor, but it is now also high-tech and governed by reactionary populism. This could just as easily be a picture of Italy, the United States, or the United Kingdom, with their deep regional inequalities, sclerotic politics, and spectacular populism.

Coping with Modernity

If we return to Arantes's Brazilianization thesis, we find that the *cultural* features of Brazilian development are also being echoed in our new, post-growth world. Certain patterns of behavior that appeared as Brazilians coped with their instant modernity—social relations structured around flexibility, rather than binding contract; a need to find semi-licit workarounds, through hustling; a not-truly-bourgeois bourgeoisie—now mark the world around us.

Brazil, the "born-modern" former colony, is not a society that emerged out of feudal relations, nor one that announced its own birth through a revolutionary break with the past. Instead, it was a site of production and distribution, first and foremost.

Writing in the early 1940s, the great Brazilian historian Caio Prado Jr. analyzed the colonial form of contemporary Brazil, remarking upon the efficiency of the colonial order as an organization of production combined with a sterility with respect to higher-level social relations—all economy, no culture. What defined a modern periphery molded by colonialism was therefore a "lack of a moral nexus," that complex of human institutions that maintain individuals linked and united in a society and that weld them into a cohesive and compact whole. If we already hear echoes of the contemporary neoliberal disaggregation of society here, it is not by chance.

Historically, the Brazilian "quasi-society of the mercantile vanguard" was conditioned by the place of freemen in a society of landed elites and slaves. Thus in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Brazil, we find the generalized practice of the *favor*, or "quasi-universal mediation," as identified by Schwarz in the novels of Machado de Assis. In a world of slaveholders and slaves, poor freemen depended on favors from the owner class to survive. Rather than citizens endowed with rights, freemen had to hustle to be granted the patronage of the propertied class. Already we can see the seeds of Brazilian patronage and clientelism.

While the world of ideas and institutions held to modern liberal conceptions, what obtained in reality was not a rationally ordered society but one governed by the arbitrary decisions of the wealthy—a situation in which the elite naturally benefited, but so did the freemen, confirmed in their status as beneficiaries of favor, as not-slaves. This nexus of the *favor*, overlaid with liberal ideology, has all the conditions

for systematic hypocrisy: highfalutin liberal ideas justifying caprice and venality. Or to apply this relationship to the Brazilianized United States of today, and to put it in the parlance of our age: "information wants to be free," but not if it violates "community standards" or doesn't suit the oligarchy's interests.

In a similar vein, Schwarz discusses another central element in Brazilian subjectivity, the "dialectic of the *malandro*" (trickster), a concept advanced by Antonio Candido in his reading of eighteenth-century novels. In Schwarz's reading, the dialectic of *malandragem* entails the suspension of concrete historical conflicts through cleverness or practical know-how—in effect, a sort of evasion. This was linked to a "very Brazilian attitude, of '*corrosive tolerance*,' which originates in the Colony and lasts through the 20th century, and which becomes a main thread in our culture." Here we find the often-lauded Brazilian disposition towards accommodation, rather than all-or-nothing conflict. This attitude may seem inferior to the more puritanical values of North Atlantic capitalist society, of clear yeses and noes, of decisive condemnation (Schwarz references the Salem Witch Trials and the world of *The Scarlet Letter*). But, for Schwarz, it might be precisely this attitude that could facilitate Brazil's insertion into a more "open" world. What emerges is an image of a "world without guilt."[12]

This softening of conflicts is a pattern throughout Brazilian history, in which it is rare for matters to be definitively resolved. No great bourgeois revolution, no clean breaks with the past; the new eventually vanquishes the old at the cost of incorporating the old into the new. Brazil's re-democratization in the 1980s, for example, birthed a new constitution replete with social rights that promised excluded classes a greater degree of integration than comparable documents elsewhere. At the same time, however, it guaranteed old patrimonial elites their place in the new order, and failed to neuter the military brass. The consequences are all too evident today. Indeterminacy and irresolution rule. Or, in the Brazilian idiom, *tudo acaba em pizza*: it all ends in pizza.[13]

This "world without guilt"—a world without moral dramas, without convictions or remorse—is our postmodern world writ large. The new global elite is entirely *désembourgeoisée*; there are no fixed and hard rules, everything is up for negotiation. Morality is at most an individual, subjective matter, if not a cause for embarrassment; the elite prefer the empty avowals of corporate ethics nowadays, not moral

pronouncements. Morality is no longer the keystone of paternal, social authority. The postmodern elite feels no responsibility. It has not internalized the law, and thus feels no guilt.

In the world of work, adaptation and accommodation are key in the new economy. As a contractor (not an employee), you must constantly seek to please your client. For Arantes, the "professionalism" required today is nothing more than a cynical stylization of the qualities needed for survival in a precarious world. As for the Brazilian *malandro*, or trickster, there is no higher commandment today than to "respect the hustle." What might otherwise be seen as generalized opportunism—or, in nineteenth-century Brazil, poor freemen out in search of a "favor"—is recast as the new way of the world.

Notably, the anthropologist Loïc Wacquant finds a similar attitude in the ghettoes of North America. There, the hustler is a generic type, "unobtrusively inserting himself into social situations or in spinning about him a web of deceitful relations, just so that he may derive some more or less extorted profit from them." (The opposite to the hustler is formal wage labor, taken to be "legal, recognized, regular and regulated."[14]) This attitude is no longer restricted to the ghetto, but becomes the ideal subjectivity of the neoliberal "entrepreneur of the self."

Always Already Postmodern

It is here that the Brazilian past encounters a global contemporaneity. For Ulrich Beck, Brazilianization represents a doomed future, not just of social exclusion and savage capitalism, but also the end of the state's monopoly on violence, the emergence of powerful non-state actors, criminal gangs, etc. Yet Beck also finds something positive in Brazilian attitudes: flexibility, tolerance, adaptability to new situations, acceptance of the paradoxes of life with tranquility. "Why do we accept the pluralization of the family but not the pluralization of work?" Beck wrote. Perhaps Brazilians, many of whom have yet to fully encounter the "first modernity" of full employment, lifelong careers, and so on (i.e., Fordism), were already born compatible with the "second modernity" of flexibility (post-Fordism, postmodernity).

If classical and high modernity were about security, certainty, and clear demarcations between yes and no, postmodernity is governed by the risk regime, in which know-how and adaptation is king. The Brazilian *malandro* was already an expert in this world, well in advance of its arrival. Perhaps this explains the surprising popularity in Brazil of Polish theorist Zygmunt Bauman's books on "liquid modernity," "liquid love" and so on—stocked even by street-corner newsdealers in São Paulo.

Thus it is that a country lacking a true bourgeois-revolutionary foundation, and therefore historically lacking respect for the law, lacking citizenship and even guilt, comes face-to-face with our postbourgeois twenty-first-century capitalism. In this light, even the United States or France, countries that did undergo dramatic bourgeois revolutions, seem afflicted by a Brazilian-style irresolution and muddling-through. We need only think of the inane response to the global financial crisis in the United States, bailing out banks but leaving the structural conditions that led to the crisis untouched; a fortiori, we can think of the eurozone's continual kicking the can down the road, which Wolfgang Streeck has called "buying time."

The Brazilian style also comes to serve as a useful legitimation for the new capitalism, in which hypocrisy and corruption are part of the furniture. Is not the promiscuous alternation between licit and illicit—found equally among the Brazilian poor (see Paulo Lins's *City of God*) as among the rich (who have one foot in "clean" global capitalism and another in "dirty" local patrimonialism)—not a cipher for financialization's grey legality? Consider, for instance, the vast sums originating from the drug trade that are recycled by the world's top banks. The Panama Papers were of course met with a collective shrug; nothing changed. But *what are you gonna do?* Is this not precisely a very Brazilian "corrosive tolerance"?

Cynicism and the Death of Satire

As is to be expected, tolerance of corruption and indeterminacy breeds cynicism. In classic-modern Europe, irony would serve to demonstrate how economic interests hid behind liberal ideals. In Brazil, by contrast, where infractions were the rule, irony could not have recourse to liberal norms, because of liberalism's embrace of its supposed opposite: slavery. As Caux and Catalani argue, what developed in Brazil was a sort of negative irony, more morbid than satirical.

Is this not our situation today? The death of satire has been widely remarked upon. We cannot show how reality fails to live up to ideals, because we mistrust ideals, holding them to be always ideological; that is, concealing selfish interests. A figure like Trump was an encapsulation of this new post-satirical attitude: a man holding the most powerful office in the world incorporated a satirical representation of himself in his buffoonery (in this he was merely following the path forged by Silvio Berlusconi over two decades earlier). Trump basically said he was corrupt, but so were all the others, and so it would be he, with no concern for establishment niceties, that would drain the swamp.[15] Cynicism is pervasive, only interrupted—now perhaps more frequently—by moralistic denunciation. The latter is sustained on the basis that opposition to cynicism can be inscribed in the logic of culture wars: each side's ever more hysterical condemnations serve to obscure their own cynicism.

Here Brazil provides us with another example. The June 2013 mass protest wave was an uprising of the young precariat, demanding social rights, better schools and hospitals, and an end to corruption. This can be read as a protest against indeterminacy, against corrosive tolerance: "we won't take it anymore." Brazil had experienced a decade of growth, but the public sphere had not kept pace with improvements in private spending power. The Lula strategy of "inclusion through consumption," itself a response to an earlier period of indeterminacy after the neoliberal assault under Cardoso, had met a wall, leading to a mass public explosion.

By 2015, however, protests had shifted, becoming explicitly anti-political and denouncing any and all politicians, parties, and institutions. "Anti-corruption" became their focus, urged on by the spectacular "Lava Jato" investigations that saw politicians and businessmen led off in handcuffs for the first time in Brazil's history. It was on this wave that Bolsonaro was eventually elected in 2018. But anti-politics, in refusing to seize power in the name of an idea and instead only denouncing all comers, is in essence *politicized cynicism*. It believes the establishment isn't fit to rule, but admits that no one else is, either. Over time, it turned out that Lava Jato itself was corrupt, with collusion between judge and prosecution allowing former president Lula to be found guilty on shoddy evidence. Now the old corrupt establishment, of which Bolsonaro is a part, has conspired to shut down those investigations.

Thus the June 2013 "revolt against cynicism" ended up contributing to the most cynical denouement of all. It has all ended in pizza. These are the "elements of truncation that fed Brazilian self-irony, sometimes caustic, but always based in fact," as de Oliveira had earlier put it.[16] America's own advances in lawfare (not just in supporting the judges' crusade in Brazil, but in using these methods at home), from "lock her up" to the double impeachment of Trump, are another facet of Brazilianization. In the place of ideological competition, politics is reduced to the cynical game of pursuing victory through the courts. Legal scruple conceals unscrupulousness. The result is the judicialization of politics—and the politicization of the judiciary. Politics becomes ever more remote from the people.

A Nonnational Elite

The Brazilianization of the world leads to a generalization of indeterminacy and irresolution. Neoliberal capitalism, in its decadence, can't find a way past its crisis, and its opponents are too divided, too cynical, too disbelieving that things could really change. This is Mark Fisher's capitalist realism: not just the assertion that "there is no alternative," but the inability to even conceive of one. It's not just that reality does not and cannot match our ideals; it's that we disbelieve in ideals altogether. And this is precisely because political ideas seem complicit with our corrupt reality. Ideas are out of place everywhere now. Like Brazil, the Western world as a whole not only lives with the frustration that we do not have the future that was promised us; frustration has become constitutive of our social formation itself.

In Brazil, the same ruling class that profited from colonialism, slavery, and the latifundiary system was also the one that backed the 1964 coup so as to prevent workers from gaining any more of a foothold in society, an act that thereby also stopped the country's chance at national autonomy. Elites preferred dependency and submission to international capital and to the United States. As a result, they also missed what may have been the last entry ramp to catch-up development. Later, when faced with a belated (albeit limited) attempt at incorporation of the masses in the 2000s and 2010s under Workers Party (PT) governments—which might have created a larger and more prosperous internal market and, crucially for elites, bought social peace—they decided instead to kick the PT out of office through an institutional coup. This constitutional rupture was part of a chain of events that saw Lula, leading

the polls in the run-up to the 2018 election, arrested, charged, and sentenced in a hasty and prejudiced trial. The same elite that cheered on lawfare then found it faced a "difficult choice" in the 2018 runoff between a technocratic center-left candidate (the PT's Haddad) and a sociopathic former army captain. Given the country's natural bounty, its admired and widely shared culture (despite everything), and some of the fastest growth rates in the world over decades, when we look upon Brazil's dualized society today—this monstrous platypus—we are driven to conclude that Brazil has the worst elite in the world.

The Brazilian elite, however—famously living in gated condominiums with private security guards—is merely a more grotesque version of elites in "advanced Western democracies." The disavowal of responsibility for society finds its most outré example in Peter Thiel's seasteading. But this process is much more widely distributed, and depersonalized, across the West.

When Brazil's ruling class opts for diminished sovereignty in order to maintain their dominant position amid deep inequality, we should see its mirror image in the European Union. The regional bloc is best understood as an "economic constitution" which is devised to prevent politics from interfering with market regulation, thus locking in policy choices. When national elites opt for membership in the bloc—in spite of the EU's neoliberal death spiral—they trade away national autonomy and with it political responsibility for social outcomes.

Just look at Italian elites' desperation to remain part of euro, despite the penury to which it subjects the country and the destruction of any future for it. Just as Brazilian elites wish they could permanently decamp to Miami, for long the capital of Latin American reaction, so globalized elites in Europe and North America wish they too could escape the masses that "hold them back." Italian elites wish they were German, British "Remainers" do likewise, and American liberal elites wish they were "European"—or at least that America's flyover country might disappear.

Nowhere (except perhaps in China) do we find ruling elites pursuing any sort of "national project"—something that thereby implicates, and aims to integrate, the masses. Insofar as neoliberal elites have any project, beyond short-term crisis management and government-by-media, it is always anti-national. Brazilian president

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who sold off state-owned family jewels to investors at cut prices in the 1990s, had been right all along: the national bourgeoisie cannot be relied upon.

From Deindustrialization to the Death of the State

The growing disappearance of a "moral nexus" in contemporary society is intimately tied to what we should call the end of modernization. We are living, according to the late German Marxist Robert Kurz (widely cited by both Schwarz and Arantes), in post-catastrophic societies. In *The Collapse of Modernization*, written at the very end of the Cold War, Kurz scathingly criticizes the regimes of the Eastern bloc. For him, their perpetuation of commodity production and wages meant that they were not communist societies, but instead were akin to the state capitalist regimes that were essential to kicking off capitalist accumulation in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, as well as to drive late industrialization—such as the projects carried out by Bismarck in the nineteenth century, or under the Meiji Restoration in Japan, or indeed by Korea in the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the state apparatus of really existing socialism had fulfilled its purpose of collectivizing agriculture, creating an urban proletariat, driving industrialization, and the like. And so it fell behind Western capitalist societies organized on the more productive basis of competition, rather than bureaucratic diktat.

The crisis that came to a head at the end of the 1980s in the East, therefore, was merely the second episode of a more general crisis—one that had hit the South, the old Third World, first. The debt crises marked the end of the process of modernization, through which poor countries might have hoped to catch up with developed ones. By the late 1960s, Brazil's experiment with Fordism was already waning, and with it the possibility of integrating the masses through labor. "Premature" deindustrialization marked Brazil in subsequent decades, with industry's share of GDP falling by half since its 1985 peak, and share of employment down from over 15 percent to around 10 percent today. Brazil is now primarily a service economy, with the poor in urban peripheries offered little hope of ascent through the means previously available to the western European and North American working classes: stable employment and with it the leverage that it might offer against employers.

This is not, however, an automatic process; it requires political action. Brazil's corporatist labor regulations had survived neoliberalism, until the PT were thrown out by institutional coup in 2016. The resulting interim government, whose approval ratings hit a rock bottom of 1 percent, rapidly undid them, allowing for infinite outsourcing, even of a company's core activities, thereby significantly extending the casualization of labor already underway. We needn't look far to see similar moves afoot elsewhere. The recent passing of California's Proposition 22 (the most expensive ballot initiative in history) allows companies like the never-to-be-profitable Uber to continue classifying their employees as private contractors, disobliging them from providing any employment benefits. The company, like many others of its kind, is a "bezzle"—John Kenneth Galbraith's name for legalized larceny. Again, the illicit and licit are two sides of the same coin; it is in these gray spaces where the hustler flourishes.

The attack on labor rights goes hand in hand with a crisis of valorization. As contemporary capitalism struggles to profit from productive activity, it turns to financialization. Fewer and fewer workers in the West are involved in economic activity that is productive of new value. This crisis of the society of work, or modernization through formalized work, began in the Third World, then hit the Second World, and is now with us in the First World. And with it the dream of mass affluence, national autonomy, and an integrated society withers.

If colonial Brazil, a society based around naked economic extraction, was at the vanguard of capitalism, contemporary Brazil is now at the vanguard of the crisis of modernity. Brazilianization is not the act of becoming backward. Nor is it the importation of something foreign. Rather, Brazil merely expressed earlier the forms and tendencies of social development that are immanent to the social world of rich countries.

The truly doom-laden future that Brazil has in store for us is the collapse of state authority. While the drug trafficking gangs that control territory in the favelas and peripheries are well known, less so is the growth of the *milícias*, paramilitaries formed by off-duty cops who run extortion rackets and death squads. The rise of non-state actors has been a preoccupation since the age of high globalization and the War on Terror. But the diminution of sovereignty is not just a problem "over there,"

in the failed states of the Global South. Less violent and more legalized, the negotiations between U.S. city governments and big tech companies, as if the latter were sovereign entities, tells a similar tale.

The Brazilianization of the World

Modernization everywhere meant the destruction of old feudal vestiges in the countryside, urbanization, and the incorporation of the masses through formalized work in an industrializing society. This process would generalize wealth and citizenship—or at least, it would form an urban proletariat who would fight for these rights, gaining concessions and thereby disciplining elites. It would root out patrimonial and clientelist relationships. Politics would become more regularized, ordered along ideological lines, with salutary effects on the state and its bureaucracy—at least in the most advanced countries.

The undoing of modernization through its principal process—the coming apart of formal employment and of the rise of precaritization—is the root of the whole phenomenon of "Brazilianization": growing inequality, oligarchy, the privatization of wealth and social space, and a declining middle class. Its spatial, urban dimension is its most visible manifestation, with the development of gentrified city centers and the excluded pushed to the periphery.

In political terms, Brazilianization means patrimonialism, clientelism, and corruption. Rather than see these as aberrations, we should understand them as the normal state of politics when widely shared economic progress is not available, and the socialist Left cannot act as a countervailing force. It was the industrial proletariat and socialist politics that kept liberalism honest, and prevented elites from instrumentalizing the state for their own interests.

The "revolt of the elites"—their escape from society, physically into heavily guarded private spaces, economically into the realm of global finance, politically into anti-democratic arrangements that outsource responsibility and inhibit accountability—has created hollowed-out neoliberal states. These are polities closed to popular pressures but open to those with the resources and networks to directly influence politics. The practical consequence is not just corruption, but also states lacking the capacity to

undertake any long-range developmental policies—even basic ones that might advance economic growth, such as the easing of regional inequalities. State failure in the pandemic is only the most flagrant recent example.

Brazil's ignoble history of irresolution and indeterminacy, coupled with a dualized society in which hustling is essential to survival, gave birth to Brazilian cynicism. Increasingly, the West is coming to ape this same pattern. Not only does there seem to be no way past capitalist stagnation, but politics is characterized by a void between people and politics, citizens and the state. The ruling class's relation to the masses is one of condescension. Elites call anyone who revolts against the contemporary order racist, sexist, or some other delegitimizing term. They also advance outlandish conspiracy theories for why electorates have failed to vote for their favored candidate—most visibly with "Russiagate" in the United States and beyond. This phenomenon, dubbed Neoliberal Order Breakdown Syndrome, only breeds further cynicism in Western publics, who are increasingly taken with conspiracy theories of their own. This is another Brazilian speciality: in a country with very low levels of institutional trust and plentiful examples of actual conspiracies, conspiracy theories flourish.

Revolts against the establishment, when they aren't driven by QAnon-style derangement, wield the weapon of anti-politics, whereby not only formal politics, but representation and political authority itself are rejected. Anti-politics tends to result in either a delegitimation of democracy itself, leading to authoritarian rule, or it prompts technocrats to learn from populists, returning to the scene promising an end to corruption and real change. The result is the same sort of distant, out-of-touch politics that prompted anti-political revolts in the first place. Brazil's history from 2013 to 2019 is this dynamic presented in pure, crystallized form. But the same pattern is visible in Italy's Five-Star Movement, the anti-corruption protests that led to Viktor Orbán's ascent in Hungary, Trump, and Boris Johnson's technopopulist attempt to defuse Brexit.

Society of the Void

What might the response to Brazilianization look like? Perhaps we are seeing a movement towards a more protective state, more jealous in its guarding of sovereignty and eager to offer citizens a more paternal relationship. Clearly, the pandemic seems to be pushing things in this direction, with state support and direct cash transfers to citizens marking President Biden's first months in office. But the state is transforming in other ways too. Straitened conditions for profitability appear to be leading to an ever-greater interlinking of political and economic power, furthering a process that has been called "accumulation by dispossession." Even Robert Brenner, doyen of the study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, has hinted that we may be undergoing a transition from capitalism to something else entirely.

The high point of globalization, in economic relations as well as ideology, has already passed. But the dualization of society and the "flexibilization" of labor continues apace. No doubt, "revolting elites" may conclude things will only get worse from here and seek to shelter themselves even further from social consequences. Not only that, but the growing dualization of societies across the West creates a society of the void: the void between the winners of the new economy and the rest, and the void between the state and citizens. Fears of populism, complaints about bureaucratic incompetence, lack of leadership, and general political volatility and incoherence—things that concern economic elites—are symptoms of this void. They would do well to remember this.

It is here that the debate over neo-feudalism comes into view, with its four interlocking features, which bear resemblance to Brazilianization: parceled sovereignty, new lords and peasants, hinterlandization, and catastrophism. But the argument advanced here is that what we are seeing is precisely not a return of the old. It is the expression of tendencies immanent to capitalist modernity. To see the globalization of degraded social conditions and capitalist dependence on the state—features that have long been a reality in the global periphery—as a return to "feudalism" is not only misguided but Eurocentric. Nevertheless, if we are indeed living through the end of the society of work and its accompanying modernization, with the inevitable consequences for social and political integration, then capitalism will be more reliant than ever on the state—not just for regulation and the provision of

physical and legal infrastructure, but to participate directly in the extraction of value or the guaranteeing of profits, be it through the transference of wealth upwards or the creation of artificial scarcity.

Is this a stable arrangement? Brazil's unceasing turbulence since 2013 began with Brazilians becoming sick of mere "inclusion through consumption." It is clear that our contemporary drift cannot continue indefinitely. Cash transfers may buy elites time, just as private debt-fueled consumption did for the last few decades, while wages stagnated. But the post-pandemic world will not settle down; Brazilianized state failures in the richest and most powerful countries in the world are laid bare for everyone to see. At the End of the End of History, protests, revolts, and uprisings have become a global phenomenon, perhaps presaging a more general insurrection. Denunciation of elites will not be enough; seizing collective control of our destiny, taking responsibility for our future, will be required, lest another wave of popular agitation all end in pizza.

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Notes

[1] Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991).

[2] See, for instance, Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

[3] Leonardo Belinelli, "O marxismo e as interpretações do Brasil: o caso do Seminário d'O Capital," *III Semana de Ciência Política UFSCar–Democracia, Conflito e Desenvolvimento na América Latina*.

[4] Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London: Verso, 1992).

[5] Adrian Johnston, *Žižek*'s *Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

[6] Luiz Philipe de Caux and Felipe Catalani, "A passagem do dois ao zero: dualidade e desintegração no pensamento dialético brasileiro (Paulo Arantes, leitor de Roberto Schwarz)," Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, n. 74 (2019): 119–46. Author's own translation, emphasis added.

[7] Paulo Arantes, "A fratura brasileira do mundo," in *Zero à esquerda* (São Paulo: Conrad, 2004).

[8] Francisco de Oliveira, *Crítica à razão dualista/O ornitorrinco* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2003).

[9] Francisco de Oliveira, "The Duckbilled Playtpus," *New Left Review* no. 24 (Nov./Dec. 2003).

[10] Roberto Schwarz, "Prefácio com perguntas," in Francisco de Oliveria, ed., *Crítica à razão dualista/O ornitorrinco* (Boitempo, 2003).

[11] Francisco de Oliveira, "The Duckbilled Playtpus."

[12] Roberto Schwarz, "Pressupostos, salvo engano, de 'dialética da malandragem,'" in *Que horas são?* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987).

[13] The origin of the idiom merits a story on its own. The bosses of Palmeiras football club in São Paulo, a historically Italian-descendant club, had an almighty row, requiring a fourteen-hour meeting to resolve. At some point, eighteen large pizzas were ordered, along with beer and wine. After feasting, tensions were resolved and they managed to come to a big messy compromise. It all ends in pizza.

[14] Loïc Wacquant, "America as Social Dystopia" and "Inside the Zone," in Pierre Bourdieu, et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[15] There's a similarity here with a former dictatorship-era São Paulo governor and mayor, Paulo Maluf, who ran on the slogan *rouba mas faz* (he steals but he gets things done). Contemporary populists wishing to call out the hypocrisy of liberal technocrats, while justifying their own corruption, should take note!

[16] Francisco de Oliveira, "O adeus do futuro ao país do futuro: uma biografia breve do Brasil," in *Brasil, uma biografia não autorizada* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018).