

**Fascist Insurrections in Brazil**

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### Brazil as a Laboratory for Fascist Uprising

There must be a way of recognizing a defeat without being defeated;  
there must be a way of accepting a limit of the will without denying the  
constitutive force of the intellect.

—Antonio Negri

**O**n January 8, 2023, supporters of then-president Jair Bolsonaro stormed government buildings in Brasília, Brazil, in an effort to prevent the transition of power to the newly elected president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula). Many of the Bolsonaro supporters declared their aim to encourage military leaders to launch a coup d'état. This event leaves little doubt that Brazil has become one of the most significant laboratories of fascist uprising in the world (Berardi 2022; Fassim 2018; Giroud 2018; Micocci and di Mario 2018). The unprecedented impact on Brazilian history should no doubt prompt radical discussions regarding a series of fundamental questions in the global political context.

Lula's third presidential term, which began in 2023, has confirmed the expectations of a discourse marked by the return of an old policy of pacts. This indicates the adoption of a conciliatory and appeasing stance, befitted to the fundamental exercise of politics as a negotiation and gradual takeover of the democratic "center." What we have yet to fully grasp is that above all, this grants us time, and not much else. It grants us time to save lives and to organize ourselves. A 1-percent margin does not preclude the claim that Lula's victory was due largely to the success of an oligarchic right that made Bolsonaro's power strategically unsustainable and shifted to supporting Lula.

Since taking office, despite the bold climate agenda set out in his speech on January 1, 2023, Lula's emphasis has been on a "return," to getting back on track, and finally "waking up from the nightmare." This premise is based on the return to a past political moment opposed to the "anti-politics" represented by Bolsonaro.

Let's just remember that according to this same hasty political logic in this politically adverse arena, the 2013 uprisings, which took place when Dilma Rousseff, Lula's handpicked successor, was in office, were also severely repressed. The left has occasionally functioned as a repressive force of order (see André 2023; Nunes 2022; Jourdan 2018; Mendes 2018; Cava and Pereira 2016; Cava and Cocco 2014, among others). Coincidentally and not unusually, the events of June 2013 were also deemed terrorist acts. Bolsonarismo did not just come out of nowhere. The conditions that made it possible are constitutive not only of the collapse of modernity evident in the Lula and Dilma governments (Feldmann and dos Santos 2022), which made notable achievements, but also of the very foundations of colonialism and slavery conceived by the military in Brazil. It must be acknowledged that Brazilian society is divided and will remain so—and even though Bolsonaro lost electorally, the forces of fascism are far from retreating and they are still steering the Brazilian political spectrum.

Those who imagined that the events of January 8, 2023, would fail are concerned about institutional short-sightedness. Bolsonarist strategies have always been marked precisely by anti-institutional dynamics. Paradoxically, but not without a bit of wit, Bolsonaro installed a kind of government against the state, which he repeatedly leveraged as political capital to legalize exceptions as a response to the (supposed) attacks against him at all institutional levels, including sectors internal to the government itself. More importantly—and hence its resounding success—was how Bolsonaro put the elected government itself on the defensive and essentially mobilized its forces in unprecedented ways, demonstrating the power of what they are capable of doing. Without underestimating the adversary, let's assume that, yes, the events of January 8 were a victory for fascism. In short, the primary focus was never to seize institutional control, but to strengthen the ongoing spread of diffuse militia violence, which is always prepared to reterritorialize itself across the most varied contexts. As long as such conditions persist, we must always keep in mind that something even worse than Bolsonaro could arise.

Only a focused, active popular force can face down the formidable momentum and organization of fascism; only a power that seizes the most opportune and decisive moment can once and for all brave some of the

exposed nerves of the Brazilian condition. We must be clear that we are immersed in at least two widespread tendencies that can be observed in world political terms. On the one hand, we have an international reactionary party vividly displayed in the Brazilian laboratory's insurrectionary phase, with the classic themes and their variables of Order: God, Homeland, and Family. On the other hand, a tendency related to liberal democracies and their dynamics of institutional reconfiguration was established. In other words, in order to try to face the current state of affairs, on the one hand, we can cower in the juridical-sovereignist discourse of liberal democracies, hiding that we are advocating for a different type of order; or, on the other hand, we can have the ambition and the will to develop a greater creative potential. Our poverty is in some sense political as well. Our limitation is frequently imaginative, disguised as responsibility. There is a certain unsustainability softened by a deadly fake realism that only leads back to the same circumstances. We see our future abducted by an emptied present; we forget that there is no tomorrow. There is only now, and it is made up of what we do to produce tomorrow.

On the other hand, by fostering discussion about the demilitarization of the Brazilian state, the current predicament clearly points to how the Brazilian Military Police functions as an armed faction that must be dissolved immediately. Each state organizes its own Military Police (PM), so once and for all, we must confront what the police itself signifies in concrete political terms and take seriously the initiative to *end policing in Brazil*, not just the PM. We must radicalize our agenda and show how this is about the police. Evidently, as auxiliary forces of the army determined by our Constitution, the status of the PM is a particular Brazilian excrescence; it allows them to act outside the military as protagonists in the overt policing of the population in general. Nevertheless, we'll lose our political focus if we forget about their depraved situation. We've been warned for a long time about what's rotten: we must not deceive ourselves with the guise of democracy and instead examine what's been strengthened by police fascism. The crux of the matter lies in the perennial possibility that the police can simultaneously colonize politics. This is symptomatic of an ongoing legacy that cannot be ignored.

Police power is the ongoing coup d'état (Amaral 2020: 234). Precisely for this reason, it is the main proponent of political colonization resulting from the blurred lines between violence and the law (Derrida 1990). This is the reason for the resounding failure of each and every effort to humanize the police, which achieves nothing but the expansion of control and the

depoliticization of the discussion, often bolstered by the periodic veneer of legitimacy provided by police reforms. In Brazil, more so than in any other nation, we should already have learned that the role of the police is to manage inequality of all kinds (race, class, gender, etc.) through “security.” It is not, it never has been, and it will never be different from this reality: the police primarily exist to produce inequality through the repression of social movements and the regulation of racialized populations or those who lose out under existing economic and political structures. Regardless of anyone’s goodwill, whether they’re allies or not, administrators or academic reform enthusiasts or not, the indelible mark of the police is colonialism and slavery (Silva 2022; Carneiro 2023). Let’s deal with this, in short, as an index of the unbearable Brazilian condition. And this won’t stop with the punishment of some of the security forces or the armed forces reinforced by the “rotten apple” argument. The police in Brazil need to be abolished. Let’s talk about how that will happen.

On that note, the necessarily broader discussion will thus attend to the fact that it’s not exactly a matter of demilitarizing the Brazilian state. Even if ending the military’s margin for political maneuvering works as a tactic, we must persevere and seek to push the agenda to the extreme, so that there’s an opportunity for abolition to be enacted, and for the dissolution through a slow, gradual, and safe disbanding of the Armed Forces in Brazil. At the very least, there should be an opportunity for this to be discussed. The Armed Forces are the amalgamation that orchestrates the constant colonization of Brazilian politics in the form of the police through the militarized control of society. We do not need to examine training and education in these three forces to understand how this police *dispositif* acts as a regulatory power of the republic, acting as a safeguard from the rest (Carvalho 2019: 23–25)—however much some hermeneutic wishful thinking or other dogmatic dream has the goodwill (or illusion) of imposing some force on the interpretive handling of the Constitution. The military has always felt like the nation’s savior in the face of an imagined enemy and is adaptable depending on the context. They legitimized torture to defend the country from the threat of communism, and according to them, we should still be grateful. Any practical strategy of this police *dispositif* must not deviate, as would be valid for the police contingent, starting with (1) its gradual defunding to limit the technologies it has at its disposal; (2) the radical departure from any idea that more militarization/police would mean greater security; and above all, (3) intensively cutting back the scope of its operations from the outset. All of this attends to attempts to reconsolidate police power in the forms of new

training programs, transparency, and supervision, precisely as if higher remuneration, investment, diversity, and so on, didn't just provoke attempts to give the police greater institutional legitimacy.

As much as we can remain limited by situational analysis in terms of state organization, the thing that most makes possible the laboratory of the fascist insurrection which has become Brazil is understanding and really being able to call things by their name: fascism. Foucault's (1983: xi–xiv) argument has been rightly reiterated ad nauseam; it never treats fascism as a mere historical phenomenon or as located strictly in a state political regime, but as a libidinal regime that regulates our energy, that is, as a way of life and a form of controlling our existence. Furthermore, fascism persists as an immanent presence in the hegemonic forms of life in liberal societies. It is something that dwells in everyone, which haunts our souls and our day-to-day lives. Failing to understand fascism as such is to turn it into something accidental, a misrepresentation, and to lose sight of the fact that it's precisely about the way in which processes of subjectivation took place and continue to take place, to a large extent, today—in sum, in the way individuals have been constituted in modernity. This is a pivotal aspect of the Freudian self-critique of civilization and something that Wilhelm Reich (1970) adeptly explored in order to define a fascist regime of desire. It is progress itself stamped out by institutions that is the immanent source of our regression via modern rationality. Therefore, however shocking it may seem, what we saw on January 8, 2023, plus the corresponding institutional reaction, is not, as common sense would have it, yet another example of civilization's struggle against barbarism. What we saw on January 8 is precisely the opposite: it is yet another expression of the fall of civilization itself, a fall into that which civilization knows oh so well how to produce: ruins. Yes, barbarism is the state in which we live, as violence is naturalized and cunningly rationalized by the most refined arguments. Only in understanding it as such will we take Benjamin's (1985: 226) state of emergency to heart and bring about the “real state of emergency” in his eighth thesis on the philosophy of history.

To take today's fascism seriously is to accept that, yes, it is revolutionary. This marks the new phase of what we emphasize in Brazil as “a laboratory,” meaning in practical terms that the global extreme right will increasingly tend to operate as a *longue durée* anti-institutional offensive force and on an organized large scale. Obviously, as Reich (1970: xiv) aptly put it, fascism operates as a mixture of “rebellious emotions” and “reactionary social ideas.” In any case, its origins are revolution, even if, as Bataille (1979: 81) asserts, that revolution “is fundamentally negated from the moment that

internal domination is militarily exerted on the militia.” The mobilization of the so-called far right currently relies on how they see themselves as a genuinely disruptive and transformative movement. Inasmuch as a large part of the grammar of the struggles that until recently marked a revolutionary left seems to have been colonized by these forces, we must now escape from what generally dominates the critical discourse on fascism, which is heavily entrenched in Brazil, and has been precisely defined by Safatle (2022) as a “deficient reading of fascism.” Such an approach remains bound to trying to explain it for reasons of lack or deficiency, multiplying logics of psychological shortcoming (normally deceived by “fake news”) or moral deficiencies (driven by “hatred” or “resentment”), or even succumbing to extreme bias in pathologizing readings. There is something more fundamental in the molecular scale of the movements of willpower mobilized there. Think of the more fruitful classical lessons—from Spinoza or earlier from Boétie, but followed by Deleuze and Guattari, among others—about how the masses were not deceived; they wanted fascism! In summary, the illusion of the masses is not enough to explain it. Remember Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977: 31) classic words: “At a certain point, under a certain set of circumstances, they *wanted* fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for.” Thus, the masses reach the point of *wanting* fascism not only for others but also for themselves. Here’s the main point: they *want* it before justifying it. What’ll eventually provide a foundation for action will only be the effect of something that *makes us act*, that alters and transforms us beforehand. Hence the importance of affect in politics, not as mere sentimental states, but as a vital *force* that pushes us forward.

This is why we can risk saying that in some sense, the far right clearly understands the problem: the exhaustion of a political order that they don’t know what to do about; and thus they come up with a profoundly wrong and distorted solution. They grasp, as it were, some truth but with the wrong logics. To face this exhaustion, we must reclaim the impulse to create through mutating networks that generate new desires, which infect and set new worlds in motion. It is through the inherent immanence of the living that power increases; therefore, it is always in action and in common, stemming from an ethical anarchy of multiplicity.

At times like these, crossroads always appear abruptly. This dossier only seeks to map some possibilities. Perhaps these possibilities point to a crucial question: will the left really be willing to break away from advocating for institutions in ruins and as a party of the established order? Will we know how to get out of the kind of liberal parasitism that prevents us from radical-

izing agendas and that instead condemns the left to be public policy administrators? Opportunities narrow when cowardice frowns upon the prospect of building new models and instead favors reinforcing the functional aspects of crumbling institutions for their alleged adjustments.

There is undoubtedly something destructive here that will need to be faced, especially in order to create what is yet to come. We will not be afraid to confuse acute hate for this world (Culp 2020: 34) with the fascist destruction that attacks precisely that which protects the silent common power of creating new social configurations. Realism, rather, constantly condemns us to bear the unjustifiable. The issue turns out to be not just how to organize revolt, but rather *why* we don't find ourselves in a state of constant revolt.

How we understand the political will determine whether we face it merely as an expansion of the possible (Berardi 2019: 64). The lesson from the surprising attacks in Brazil in 2023—insurrectional, even if organized and planned—teaches us pedagogically. That's where their political strength lies. It's a left destined to be an administrator of possibilities, forever taken aback by the impossible achievements of fascist forces.

Taking the foundations of this political stage back would require more than expanding the realm of the possible, even if, in addition to the needs of the foreseeable evolution of our present reality, expanding the realm of the possible involves realizing that there is a dimension that can always be freed from its forms.

The very experience of the possible needs to be expressed as a kind of expansion that arises from these movements, creating different rhythms that ultimately broaden what can be seen and spoken. This always achievable capacity to model the imaginary (Negri 1991: 172) can only arise from another sphere: the realm of an *event* that cuts across any conceivable horizon in a biased manner.

The potential power of a “future,” so to speak, of the ability to create possible futures (Berardi 2017) that escape limited patterns and instead recognize shared abilities, is constantly questioned by that which impinges upon its mechanisms of emergence. In order to properly think about its realm of possibility—that is, the structure of these spaces of possibility (DeLanda 2011: 5)—“the question cannot be addressed to the mere *possible*, por justiça ao lema. The demand will continue to arise from the *impossible*” (Derrida 2009: 164–65). For this radical political difference to be possible and actualized such that the *event* is not terminated, it is the impossible that we're talking about, something that moves asymmetrically, which I do not expect to materialize, which is irreducible to any horizon of possibility. The limits of the



possible will always depend on that which is unthinkable, unspeakable, unrepresentable, and inconceivable at some point, even when bound to it by unavoidable contamination: the possible and the impossible bound in complementary asymmetry. Ultimately, contamination is always there. There is impossibility in the possible. May moments like the ones we've experienced in Brazil trigger subversions beyond the predictable, the agreed upon, the politically foreseeable, and the possible. Our resistance is "eternal."

—Translated by Alex Brostoff and Jamille Pinheiro

### Note

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