

# JUNE OR THE STONE AGES: FOR THOSE WHO DREAMED OF OCTOBERS, IT WAS TOO LITTLE; FOR THE DISPOSSESSED OF UTOPIA, IT WAS MEMORABLE

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That is how I concluded one of the articles I wrote in the midst of the fervent hours surrounding the 2013 demonstrations. During that period, I wrote extensively as a means to process my thoughts, digest intense emotions, and harness the imagination fueled by the energy of the streets<sup>1</sup>:

“What About the future? The *omnibus* movement faces a wide array of scenarios, with others waiting to be forged. Its destiny will likely hinge on its capacity to distinguish political critique from the criticism of politics, avoiding the confusion between rejection of the current political-electoral – and partisan – system and an outright rejection of democracy in any form. These distinctions are bound to sow deep and irreconcilable internal divisions, some of which are already emerging. Will this remarkable surge of energy dissipate into the whirlpool of skepticism, ushering in another era of apathy? Might indignation manifest in authoritarian and ultra-conservative forms? Or will a multitude of tributaries chart unprecedented courses, astonishing us with their creativity while transforming the nation within the democratic framework? The answers do not rest solely with the movement itself but are also intertwined with the choices of those who have not yet taken part, as well as the actions of government and parliamentary leaders.”

“In the wake of this vast and unconventional phenomenon, journalists, politicians, and intellectuals find themselves in a state of perplexity. In the initial days, they sought explanations but encountered the limitations of the traditional analytical frameworks. When applied to this new subject, these frameworks only served to highlight what the movement lacks and what it is not: disorganized, lacking leadership, devoid of clear objectives, without a unified agenda, free from institutional affiliations, lacking political ties, and operating without a defined plan of action. However, the critical question remains: what, exactly, is it? How do we capture its essence and positive aspects? This presents the most significant challenge of all.”

“In the weeks to come, there is a possibility that the initial energy may wane, and fatigue could set in among the masses, causing the movement to fragment into numerous segments, each with its distinct demands. In such a scenario, the battle will shift to the realm of interpretations. The phenomenon will be defined by how we describe it. It will be the interpreters who emerge as

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central figures in the conflict over the assignment of meaning. This is because every attempt to comprehend and every interpretation also constitutes as intervention, carrying inherent social and political significance.”

Indeed, it is undeniable that Brazilian society experienced what was arguably its most extensive mobilization in 2013. It marked the first large-scale movement driven by the Internet, completely spontaneous and lacking centralized leadership, organized structures, political affiliations, or even a unified agenda. However, as events unfolded, it became evident that various forces, representing a broad spectrum of conflicting national and international interests, entered the arena, vying to steer the movement and shape its trajectory. The population took to the streets to voice their concerns, not only in major urban centers but also in small country towns. This contagious groundswell was an extraordinary phenomenon in its own right. Paradoxically, all of this occurred at a time when global public opinion was increasingly intrigued by a country that was 85% urban, with roughly 200 million inhabitants, ranking as the world’s sixth-largest economy. Brazil had weathered the international financial crisis while maintaining full employment, modest growth, reduced inequalities, and record-high approval ratings for President Lula and, just a few weeks before the demonstrations erupted, President Dilma Rousseff.

Perhaps due to the lack of an appropriate understanding of this paradox and the political developments that followed the 2013 protests, a one-sided and oversimplified perspective predominates, particularly within left-leaning circles today, especially among those close to the Worker’s Party (PT). According to this interpretation, the streets in 2013 were allegedly overrun by depoliticized and fascist elements, guided by international interests seeking to topple the Dilma government and tarnish the image of PT. In my perspective, asserting that the true intentions of 2013 would only become apparent during the parliamentary impeachment coup is somewhat akin to claiming that the Holy Inquisition would have laid bare the concealed motives of early Christianity or that Stalinism would have revealed the core of Marxism. This teleological view of history, while mediocre, often serves as a convenient tool to simplify intricate discussions and superficially categorize multifaceted phenomena.

The governments led by PT achieved considerable progress despite their missteps. However, precisely because of their notable accomplishments, the social dynamism of society yearned for more - a stronger voice, greater participation, and a refusal to accept subpar public policies. Traditional activism no longer aligned with the evolving landscape. It became increasingly evident that the liberal-democratic vocabulary was growing outdated, as its incompatibility with the experiences lived by the population exposed the inherent hypocrisy it harbored.

As I detailed in my book *O Brasil e seu Duplo*<sup>2</sup> (Soares, 2019), the future was shaped by the remarkable convergence of energies, and not the 2013 outbreak itself. What truly determined the course of our destiny was how these energies were harnessed, where they were directed, and the unfortunate negligence in recognizing their positive transformative potential.

The true vandals were not the individuals in the streets, but those clad in suits and ties who cynically evoked the sanctity of family values while orchestrating the theatrical performance of impeachment. It was not 2013 that performed the parliamentary coup; it was the very people who had deliberately disregarded the significance of 2013 and exerted pressure on the government to endorse repressive measures. That was evident in the fact that Michel Temer, who had staunchly opposed President Dilma’s efforts to engage with the emerging social agenda of the streets, finished his tenure with a mere 5% approval rating, hovering on the edge of political oblivion. It is crucial to highlight that his presidency was secured through a farcical impeachment process based on the dubious charge of “crime of responsibility.” His administration was both widely unpopular and adverse to the interests of general populace. The public had grown weary of the legal intricacies and political maneuvers within the judiciary. His successor, despite being connected to the street movements, gravitated towards the darker and more regressive aspects of these movements.

The legal-police Car Wash Operation had a clear objective: the eradication of leftist forces in order to pave the way for an extreme neoliberal agenda. This was evident through its dubious legal procedures, selective media leaks, seemingly biased and politically motivated decisions, and the subsequent alignment of its key figures with the Bolsonaro government. These actions served as the catalyst for the erosion of the last vestiges of credibility in what, prior to 2013, had been

hailed as “political representation” or “democratic politics”. As democracy teetered on the brink of collapse, the far-right factions saw an opportune moment to deliver the fatal blow.

Bolsonaro emerged as the only prominent political figure, alongside Marina Silva (though she could not consolidate support), who grasped the profound impact of the 2013 events (which he interpreted backwards). He recognized that the energies unleashed in 2013 were a product of the turbulent and conflict-ridden dynamics within Brazilian society. In the face of expanding citizenship, rising expectations, and the pursuit of a more genuine form of democracy, he positioned himself as a visible political figure. The streets, as we witnessed, harbored a complex mix of fear, resentment, hope and herd instinct. Bolsonaro understood that 2013 represented a pivotal moment, a turning point, and that the future would be shaped by the competition to harness and direct these disruptive energies away from their previous confinement.

His candidacy was conceived as an attempt by the far-right, with strong fascist leanings, to co-opt and channel the energies unleashed by the seismic shifts in Brazilian society, much like the movement of tectonic plates. Democracy had deteriorated into mere ceremonial rituals, with hollow institutions and power theatrics that resembled a farcical performance. This bleak perspective was widespread in the mainstream media. In a society marred by deep-seated racism, patriarchy, and shameless inequality, the existing arrangements, although preventing a return to dictatorship, failed to address the urgent need for substantial societal changes. These conflicts and disparities did not align with the country’s aspiration for genuine transformation.

In this context, the events of 2013 continue to serve as a crucial reference point for understanding the grassroots appeal of Bolsonarism. If the Worker’s Party persists in disregarding the positive aspects of the demonstrations that shook the nation a decade ago, it risks failing to grasp the enormity of the challenges ahead. Meeting these challenges will demand more than political acumen; it will require the courage to drive profound changes rather than merely navigating the intricacies of remaining in power.

## **1 PROGRESS AS THE CATALYST FOR REVOLT**

The series of unexpected events in 2013 commenced with a movement in Sao Paulo to lower public transport fares, although similar protests had arisen, notably in Porto Alegre. Initially, the events appeared to unfold in a somewhat predictable manner, with criticism by the conservative media and authoritative figures making arrogant statements, refusing to engage in negotiations over fare reductions. The situation seemed typical, and the outcome appeared foreseeable. The prevailing scenario indicated that the protests might wane, potentially remaining confined to a localized scale. However, on the second day, the military police in Sao Paulo made an indelible contribution to the nation’s history by responding with excessive force, even targeting journalists. This brutal response ignited the passion of Brazilian populace. Within days, the fare increases were revoked, yet the impassionate masses did not disperse.

The initial reactions of the population shattered preconceived notions of the country’s relationship with itself. Hundreds of thousands of predominantly young people, but not exclusively so, spanning various social classes, participated in protests across the nation. In Rio, the largest of the many demonstrations that followed drew an estimated 300 thousand people according to the police, although some, including myself, believe the actual figure was at least twice that number. What was most remarkable was not just the sheer scale, although that was astounding, but the astonishing speed at which the protests spread to all corners of the country.

The catalyst for this outpouring of frustration was evident: in Rio and Sao Paulo, workers spent up to four hours daily navigating congested urban spaces, plagued by a surge in automobiles resulting in 40 million Brazilians joining the middle class over the past decade. The unforeseen and contradictory consequence of reduced inequalities and rapid development, particularly in the automobile industry, was the urban mobility crisis. Moreover, the increase in consumers, greater access to education, and a growing appreciation of citizenship contributed to a shift in the collective sentiment and willingness to participate. In other words, improvements had compounded to render previously tolerable situations unacceptable under the current conditions. This apparent contradiction was not a new phenomenon. Alexis de Tocqueville, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, taught us that the social groups most inclined to act and react are not necessarily the poorest and most powerless but those with something to lose. This meant that the social advances

of the past two decades in Brazil, especially the more recent ones, had expanded the portion of the population potentially willing to resist the risk of losing their gains. Those who had risen would not relinquish their achievements without a fight.

But what were precisely these achievements I refer to?

## 2 ACHIEVEMENTS PRECEDING 2013

When employing the Gini index to gauge income inequality, it becomes evident that in 2011, Brazil reached its lowest level of inequality since 1960, the year when this calculation was first introduced. Between 1960 and 1990, inequality had increased from 0.5367 to 0.6091. However, starting from 1990, it began to decline, reaching 0.5304 in 2010 (Neri, 2011, p. 26), and further decreasing to 0.527 in 2011 (as per the National Household Sample Survey of IBGE, Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). A lower index signifies a better situation. Nevertheless, despite this progress, Brazil still found itself among the 12 most unequal nations globally. The encouraging news lay in the affirmation of a trend that had started to reshape this scenario on a significant scale.

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the accumulated income growth rate for the wealthiest 10% was 10.03%, while for the poorest 50%, it was a remarkable 67.93%. According to Ricardo Paes de Barros, the poorest 10% achieved a per capita income increase of about 7% per year between 2001 and 2009, which was only slightly lower than China's celebrated average per capita income growth during the same period. (Paes de Barros *apud* Cariello, 2012, p. 30).

Paes de Barros noted that few countries had achieved results comparable to Brazil's in terms of reducing income inequality between 1999 and 2009. Nevertheless, these improvements were still insufficient. The richest 10% controlled 47% of the national income, and then 43%, while the poorest 50%, who initially held 12.65% of total income, had increased to 15% at the end of the period.

One of the most striking and impactful pieces of data was the following: in 1993, just before the implementation of the Real Plan, which successfully controlled inflation, 23% of the Brazilian population lived in extreme poverty, unable to access income sufficient for the minimum calories necessary for healthy survival. The Real Plan transformed this dire situation within a year. In 1995, the first year of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term, the percentage of the population living in such conditions dropped to 17%. Remarkably, in 2003, the population in extreme poverty remained at the same level. By 2009, it had decreased to 8.4%, which, although still unacceptably high, marked a substantial improvement compared to the start of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1993, there were 51 million (51,613,412) Brazilians with household incomes below R\$ 752.00 (value from 2011). By 2001, this number had decreased to 46 million (46,896,647). and further to 24 million (24,684,517) in 2011. Those with household incomes between R\$ 751.00 and R\$ 1,200.00 were 41 million (41,255,368) in 1993, reducing to 38 million (38,907,544) in 2011. In contrast, Brazilians with household incomes between R\$ 1,200.00 and R\$ 5,174.00 were 45 million (45,646,118) in 1993, but this group more than doubled to reach 105 million (105,468,908) in 2011, despite slower population growth during these 18 years.

The rapid expansion witnessed during the 1940s (with an average growth rate of 2.39) and the 1950s (reaching 2.99) started to decelerate in the 1990s (dropping to 1.64) and further slowed down significantly in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (plummeting to 1.17) (Berquó, 2001, p. 17).

The significance of the virtuous decline in inequalities becomes more apparent when accounting for demographic dynamics. These statistics led Marcelo Neri to state that "39.6 million Brazilians entered the ranks of the so-called new middle class (class C) between 2003 and 2011 (59.8 million since 1993)" (Neri, 2011, p. 27).

It is, therefore, essential to acknowledge that Brazilian history is not solely characterized by degradation and decline. There have been achievements, albeit falling short of the egalitarian goals and principles outlined in the Constitution. Moreover, it is crucial to remember that the substantial reduction of poverty provided fertile ground for the discourse of the theology of prosperity, which gained traction and spread in recent decades, coinciding with the remarkable growth of evangelical religions, especially neopentecostal denominations. The real Brazil created

structures that made a version of collective experience plausible, one that was primarily co-opted by political parties and far-right candidates. Paradoxically, these candidates would cast the State, the political system, and the leaders advocating for redistributive policies – those responsible for significant social progress among the poorest – as their enemies.<sup>3</sup>

### 3 THE VARIED AGENDA OF THE MOVEMENT AND THE EROSION OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The movement's agenda was far from uniform, with each participant raising their unique placards bearing proposals, critiques, or demands, often conveyed in either formal or humorous language. These expressions covered a broad spectrum, from opposition to homophobia to resistance against technocratic authoritarianism within the government. I referred to the "movement" in the singular form, yet it is vital to exercise caution in doing so, as the events unfolded as a multitude of mobilizations, each with its distinctive focus and character. Nevertheless, amidst this immense thematic diversity, some recurrent themes emerged: concerns over public transport and urban mobility, anger at corruption, opposition to police brutality, and demands for greater equity in accessing justice, education, and health care. Moreover, there was vocal opposition to the extravagant spending on stadiums for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. Adding to the dissonance, the cacophony of voices included far-right slogans that occasionally blended with anarchist-inspired demands, exemplified by chants such as "no party."

The cost of transportation, in reality, gave rise to a metonymic thread in the collective and individual imagination, connecting various pressing national issues and introducing contradictions that gradually became more pronounced, hinting at developments that ran counter to the original intent or that predominated initially. The essential point was that each individual was inspired to incorporate their unique perception of what they believed constituted the most vital and pressing issue in this grand narrative.

Underlying this diversity of demands was a shared, fervent declaration of the collapse of political representation. This assertion is the watchword that often leads to the adoption of measures either radicalizing democracy or jeopardizing it. In this sense, it could be viewed as the pivotal point, the nerve center of the Tower of Babel in which contradictory dispositions clashed and intertwined.

In essence, the protesters had lost faith in political parties and politicians who seemed to merely renew their mandates in a market-like fashion, without recognizing that adhering to the rules of the game alone could not sustain democracy. Brazil had, since the promulgation of its constitution in 1988, adhered to democratic rule after 21 years of military dictatorship followed by three hybrid years. However, the majority of society perceived this democratic institutionalization as a hollow shell, an empty form, manipulated by unscrupulous political figures. The mere formal endorsement of parliamentarians and leaders through compulsory voting did not guarantee legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The breakdown of political representation had been unfolding without leaders comprehending the magnitude of the rift that had emerged, rapidly deepening between political institutionalization and the sentiment of the majority. The question that loomed was, "What would they do next?" Throughout that eventful year, in interviews and papers, I often likened the situation to the following image (later encapsulated in an installation by the artist Tomaz Klotzel, in 2023): "The institutions are functioning like a fan that keeps spinning even after the world has ended."

In the subsequent years, the criticism of representation transformed into, in the public imagination, a generic aversion to politics. This was prompted by the judicial-police intervention known as Operation Car Wash, which, through dramatic and highly publicized actions, connected legal and moral accusations to values and beliefs of a meritocratic and neoliberal persuasion, actively opposing the State. Over the years, a belief had spread that, left to their own devices, private enterprise and market forces would naturally generate prosperity, benefiting society as a whole. As mentioned in the entry "Bolsonarism," published in *Novo Dicionário Crítico do Pensamento das Direitas*<sup>4</sup>: "The freedom to undertake and generate wealth was believed to be hindered by a bureaucratic thicket of rules and fees." This narrative propagated the idea that bureaucratic regulations and taxes were stifling economic growth, siphoning energy from society,

and hindering entrepreneurship. In essence, it held the State responsible for societal woes, describing politicians and civil servants as parasites wasting public resources. To put it differently, it framed politicians and bureaucrats, the workforce of the State, as the culprits responsible for suffering and stagnation. The mainstream media played a significant role in reinforcing this narrative, with few substantive challenges to its assertions. When allegations of corruption, selectively leaked by individuals within the judiciary, implicated politicians, and their associates, dominating headlines, the equation seemed complete: State parasitism had shifted from a theoretical concept to a concrete reality. Those who were allegedly sapping the vitality of society now had faces and names. The public's resentment was contagious and rapidly spread, contaminating politicians and politics as a whole. This void paved the way for the emergence of a figure who positioned himself as anti-political and anti-system: a self-proclaimed revolutionary ready to dismantle "all that is there." However, as events unfolded, it became evident that this revolutionary was also willing to challenge common sense and rationality, consumed by negationism. In this manner, the nation drew back the curtains on its historical past, welcoming the revival of fascism under a new banner and tethering its future to a reckoning with neoliberalism (Soares, 2022, p. 178-182).

#### **4 INTENSITY**

The hallmark of the 2013 movement was its intensity. The protests unfolded in a language of extremes: masses of people converging daily, myriad issues passionately debated – and, regrettably, an angry and occasionally violent minority vandalizing public structures. Within this fringe of the phenomenon, a motley group of opportunistic thieves and vandals coexisted with those who found pleasure in wanton destruction. But why such passion and intensity? I dare to propose a hypothesis: the threads of symbolic and political proximity intertwined various issues, as I previously explained, emphasizing a pervasive theme – inequality. And they did so within the normative and institutional framework of a democratic rule of law, where the proclaimed and reiterated principle is equity. Therefore, the negative connotations were magnified, amplifying the emotional intensity with which they were both perceived and conveyed. These issues came to the fore because they related to inequality, which starkly contrasted with the expectations arising from the constitutional pact. Ultimately, the question looms: is the discourse surrounding citizenship for real or not? All of this played out against the backdrop of the ceaseless flow of the virtual realm – online networks that illuminated the spirit of contention, igniting a range of negative emotions, among which hatred reigned. Language, however, is not detached from the realm of passions; it serves not only as a mere instrument or medium. The frenetic and swift discourse of these networks deviated from the initial, more dialogical vision of the internet's pioneers and creators. Its logic is one of conflagration, fanning the flames of animosity and fostering identity through negation. Its horizon extends to the obliteration of otherness, sowing paranoia, fear, and war.

#### **5 PERSISTENT HISTORICAL INJUSTICES**

Despite a significant reduction in inequalities, particularly in terms of extreme poverty, they continue to manifest in various forms, just as violence and fatal police brutality against marginalized communities persist. The stark inequality between Black and white populations, though diminishing, underscores the enduring structural racism in Brazil. From 1950 to 1980, white individuals lived on average 7.5 years longer than their Black and mixed-race counterparts (categorizations used at the time) (Wood and Webster, *apud* Berquó, 1987, p. 27). In 1980, life expectancy for Black individuals did not exceed 59 years, while in 1987, the white population had an average life expectancy of 72 years, compared to 64.5 years for Black people (Berquó, 1987). Other troubling statistics further substantiate these historical disparities: in 1980, the child mortality rate for Black and mixed-race equaled the mortality rate of white infants under one year in 1960, standing at 105 deaths per thousand live births (Garcia Tamburo, *apud* Berquó, 1987). The color of one's skin, an inconsequential factor according to those who uphold the myth of Brazilian racial democracy, essentially segregated Black and mixed-race individuals from the

social progress achieved by the white population over two decades – advancements that would have been unattainable without the contributions of people of color.

Marcelo Neri offers illuminating data on three significant phenomena whose historical implications, in my estimation, run deep. First, the demographic effect of building a social identity as citizens: the proportion of society that self-identifies as Black has shown substantial growth. Comparing the two most recent IBGE Censuses before 2013 – 2000 and 2010 – Black representation in the Brazilian population increased by 22.6% (Neri, 2011, p. 226). I believe the primary driving force behind this shift is the expanding political awareness among Afro-descendants, who are increasingly proud of their heritage and its significance.

The second phenomenon studied by Marcelo Neri highlights the glaring and unsettling disparities: "The likelihood of a person self-identifying as white living in poverty is 49% lower than for a Black person and 56% lower than for a mixed-race person. [...] Even when comparing individuals with identical attributes - except for race - such as middle-aged, illiterate, living in a favela in Salvador, the probability of a white person being poor is 29.4% lower than that of a person of color" (Neri, 2011, p. 227). Prior to Neri's analysis, the 2010 Census had already underscored the correlation between race and economic inequality, revealing that 70% of extremely impoverished Brazilians were Black.

I can contribute with additional disconcerting data on violence, public security institutions, and the criminal justice system. The "Map of Violence" published before 2013, in 2011<sup>5</sup>, demonstrated that from 2002 to 2008, the number of Black individuals murdered increased by 20.2%, while the number of white victims of the same crime decreased by 22.3%. There is no disputing that Black and poor individuals were, and continue to be, the primary victims of the most heinous crimes, particularly intentional homicides, as well as lethal police brutality and unlawful apprehensions (Ramos and Musumeci, 2005).

Thirdly, some good news: "Between 2001 and 2009 the income growth was 44.6% for Black individuals, 48.2% for mixed-race individuals against 21.6% for white people" (Neri, 2011, p. 226). This piece of data, combined with an increase in the participation of Black people in the population and the utterly important arrival of Black individuals in great numbers at the universities, due to affirmative and distributive policies – such as the Program Universidade para Todos (University for All – Pro-Uni) and quotas for Black students – gave rise to a new scenario that justified positive expectations in regard to the future of the substantive democratization of the Brazilian society. According to data published by IPEA (Institute of Applied Economic Research), in the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of their *Boletim Políticas Públicas: acompanhamento e análise*<sup>6</sup>, the net enrollment rate of students between 18 and 24 years old increased over five times from 1992 to 2009. While in 1992 only 1.5% of the Black youth entered university, 8.3% managed to begin their studies in higher education in 2009. Throughout this period, the net enrollment rate of the white youth jumped from 7.2% to 21.3%, but the contingent of Black students, which was not higher than 20.8% of the white segment in 1992, represented 38.9% in 2009<sup>7</sup>.

## 6 PROTAGONISTS OF A GLOBAL NARRATIVE: FROM INVISIBILITY TO THE STRUGGLE FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Another determining aspect was Internet access: in 2011, 115,433,000 Brazilians, at the age of 10 or older, had a cellphone (this figure was 56,104,605 in 2005) and 77,672,000 were able to access the Internet. Their participation in social media had undergone an expansion and enabled the demonstrations, which started having their own media outlet. Furthermore, it allowed Brazilians to identify with and put into practice the globalized model of taking over public spaces as a method of "direct" democracy, i.e., political action that is not mediated by institutions, parties, and representatives. Evidently, the model refers to the classic idea of direct democracy as ideal, without being fully executed, once mediations never stopped happening as a way to connect different institutionalized procedures to the mass energy in the public squares. In this dramaturgical scenario, what counts is idealized memory and common language, as if the events would mutually quote one another, building a virtual constellation of hypertexts (using a category already proven dated at the time of the demonstrations). In this context, the following became possible: including oneself in the transnational narrative under the new democracy; the pride of those who were invisible to the public power and felt disrespected; the identification with the

civic hero persona; politics experienced in a group, as a cultured antipolitical type of entertainment (even though it involves a death risk); the congregational fraternal experience (facing an enemy as abstract and phantasmatic as it is obvious and immediate, with a police face and sense of tragedy); the experience that fills hearts with joy, elevating feelings and taking them to an almost-spiritual scale.

People watched football at the FIFA Confederations Cup, in several Brazilian cities, an international competition that took place one year before the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Billions in expenditures were decided by the governments without public consultation. The stadiums, built with governmental budget, were opened, and displayed admirable quality – at least at first sight. But public health and education continued neglected by public policies. Also, high ticket prices excluded the vast majority of supporters. In summary, the popular sport, after billions in costs autocratically taken on by the governments, expressed the adoption of priorities incompatible with social needs and implied the veto of people's participation. The demonstrations allowed the masses to insert themselves into the great national narrative, shift the stage of significant events, become the central protagonists, and alter the course of the game.

In Rio, the major events included not only the 2014 FIFA World Cup, but also the 2016 Olympic Games. Still in 2013, Pope Francis visited the city. The municipal government took this opportunity to implement urban construction works with the promise of transforming public roads and the transportation sector, which would leave a legacy in the form of useful buildings for the society. What we witnessed was the eviction of poor residents and an accelerated gentrification process, deepening inequalities, and their territorial expressions.

## 7 PERSONAL NOTES IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

I conclude the paper with a leap in style, context, and intentions. The analytical framework exposed in the previous chapters, even though certainly insufficient, corresponds to my understanding of the events that marked our history and aimed at contributing to the still ongoing academic and political debate. The text ahead assumes an unpretentious, free, and impressionist tone. These are just notes made in the heat of the moment, in the format of a journal, with the purpose of recording my personal statement about those months of 2013, both in the streets and in presential and virtual debates. I wrote extensively about the streets and the aesthetic, affectionate, symbolic, and political singularities of the demonstrations, on the chapter “*É tanta coisa que nem cabe aqui*”<sup>8</sup>, from my book *Rio de Janeiro, histórias de vida e morte*<sup>9</sup> (Soares, 2015). Here, I try to bring the passionate and fierce pulse that transcended the experience on the streets.

I decided to add some of the notes to this paper because my analysis, even having often mentioned categories such as: intensity, passions, affections, and energy, failed in surfacing and making minimally tangible the atmosphere in which I immersed myself along with thousands of other activists. Such atmosphere was an essential dimension of the demonstrations and the arc of the hours, days, and nights which surrounded them. Such dimension was the bond that joined the acts, words, gestures, and people, at a monumental party.

The seminar at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, felt like an assembly. There was no vibe. And there were too many people. At an assembly environment, do not try to be ironic, nor reflect upon contradictions. Remember: everything you say may be used against you. If your argument has two sides, noting this and that – both being true, even though they appear to deny each other mutually – you are lost. Your days are numbered. In the crowd, the first leg of the rationale will be retained by some, who will later expose it, dismembered. In front of the pack, salivating, in starvation, the second leg of the rationale will be ripped from the body and thrown to the fire of accusations against your ideological deviations. One way or another, there will be no hypothesis in which the two legs of your idea will escape mutilation. In the audience that roars catchphrases and watchwords, thoughts have no unpredictable, creative, tortuous, undisciplined path. There, an idea, like an individual, will only be a plump and single object, a stone cast against your good intentions. Your multifaceted argument will be butchered and exposed at a public square as a definitive proof of your crime. By the way, take note: there are no slip-ups, mate, there are crimes – or do you think that the punitive culture is a heritage exclusive to the right? Therefore, I recommend prudence. Less sophistication and complexity,



more convictions. Don't be naïve, don't act like an intellectual. Show the audience, fellows, show to those who grant you a minute of their attention – in-between selfies – that you will never be the modest worker or the modest server of your own cause. Those who are accredited to lead are those who confirm what is already known. We are not gathered in an overcrowded auditorium to think, but to celebrate our supreme and incontestable value. The ritual demands sacrifice: in this case, the identification of the deviants and the purge of the dissidents. We are the diaspora. It is embedded in our hearts; it is the backbone of our gelatinous soul. The divisions thrive amidst us like the plague, the metastasis, and the metaphor. The left is baroque. In any case, what I said was something kind of intelligent and performative, quoting the stars of the current political-intellectual firmament, based on my chaotic notes.

Below, I transcribe some of them. They are more interesting than the concepts stewed that night, because they save the frenetic pulse of those days:

The 2013 demonstrations did not invent outrage. They gave way to the accumulated uprising. They let go of the leash. They liberated the contained anger. Hatred imposed itself. It started ruling days and nights. It earned its place in the center of our altars. It was the god and the devil of our common worship. It growls and reigns, rehearsing the decay of what is left of democracy, ruminating ruin. It exhales decomposition steam while pumps the toxic blood inside and outside our bodies. It sticks its nose where it does not belong. It steps all over the place. It does not leave a stone unturned: it will need them. Any gossip is a reason. Every post rots under a bunch of pestilent adjectives, like “pestilent.” A word like “sputum” efficiently describes the lynching that happens in social media, because it sticks and drips on the first bastard to show their face defending anything. Anything. Late into the night, in social networks, rage turns up its volume. There is always a vigilant zombie metabolizing the poison someone shoved down their throat, ready to throw up on you. The spectral idiot was trained in deconstruction workshops, a fashionable name for slander. In urban caves, the neophyte learns to gargle their cheap fascistoid vocabulary. Meanwhile, the gang piles up everything they find to build a Molotov kit-proof bunker: that explosive combination that the Black Blocks nicknamed a ‘drink.’ “Will you take the drink, comrade? Yes, fellow. And you take the vinegar and the towel, and everything else we use not to go blind when the police use pepper spray directly into our eyes, and everything else we use not to suffocate when the police spray tear gas directly into our throat. Okay, no problem. I got it.” They are disguise virtuosos, these guys. In this ingenious trick, they displayed their never-enough-praised sagacity. And there is more: using English they dealt a blow to imperialism. Get it? They worshiped the prophets of anarchism. The sincere or bought militants of the party of order hate the gang in black who wears masks and break shop windows, and the group who breaks shop windows and wears masks hates the guys from the party of order. On this, they are all honest. Hatred purges the cheeky theater of politics. Hatred purifies it. It washes the sidewalk sprinkled with blood. The blood sprinkled on the curb will always belong to the others, until we can no longer report shit. And then, there is more work left for the obituary writer of the sensationalist press, the one who covers this sort of thing. And do not get me started on this empty talk of undercover work, simply because this is not new, nor it diminishes the social importance of the movement. It only confirms its multiple, contradictory, irreducible character. Everybody knows that there are undercover agents, from P2 to the military ultra-right movement, passing through the CIA, the Mossad, and the KGB. And everybody knows that the NSA is reading what you and I just wrote on our cellphones. Snowden demonstrated that privacy was a contemporary experience of the petticoat. If you have no idea what a petticoat is, ask your great-grandmother.

In regular intervals, a huge fight lights up the night. There is no killing, but they wish. If you are the type that chases after things, hopping from link to link until you locate the original big bang, you will not sleep again tonight because this is a never-ending thread. It seems like someone showed their dick online and someone did not like it. I mean, I don't know if they liked the dick. But it is certain and known that they did not like the display. I wonder if the guy showed his knee instead of his dick, or his bank account, would he not be considered a flasher? The dick is the problem. That enraged a lot of people. I don't know if the rage has to do with the so-called envy of the penis, which is an eminently masculine feeling. The guy came to have great prestige in his city – I just noticed how the verb I used is contaminated; I have the impression I am writing obscenities. The rage fired up social media. The outraged are at a point of taking up arms – oh!

What am I saying? I will change the subject. Before that, I make this note: the dick-man did not publish the photo of his flesh on Facebook, nor he could. There lies the empire of chastity. He sent a private message, but the story became viral just because. It does not matter. Life goes on. Not for the owner of the famous cock. He hit the road. Left town. He went to the country to plant potatoes. Some said forever. He emigrated. I wonder where it would be far enough when the beast is social media. And what if the dick were not his? And if it were a fake profile? And what if it were not even a dick, but a fake fetish? The pack disdain any fucking pondering and this telenovela may last a while. The ever-so-subtle receiver who spread the word, one fine day, cuts the blue ribbon on the Christmas gift and... The horror. Who knows – this second hypothesis is the healthier, however catastrophic – if one day, the man returns, dick in hand, passing the baton to the owner of the land, after the climate apocalypse? Will it be a woman, the sovereign of what is left in the world after the environmental apocalypse? Or what we call gender will not make sense anymore? For example, in the sentence: the gender of the report is confusing.

Things are not easy to anyone. We can see in the details. The other day, I heard that an old thinker of the orthodox left uses a fake avatar to join a lesbian chat room – there are a lot of orthodox people in Rio de Janeiro. Such fact will probably shake those who associate the city to beaches, the sun, and the sea, and these to naked bodies, idleness, and pleasure, and these to hedonism: fuel to heterodoxies and Dionysian transgressions. But it is not like that. There is orthodoxy under the burning sun. There is strictness by the sea. Tropical sensuality does not melt the dogmas of the revolution priests. They are few, it is true, considering the eight million people who live in the city and the fifteen million in the state, which are served daily rations of other sacred books. One way or another, all of them believe in salvation and faithfully await the last judgment. To the right and to the left, all are Sebastianists here. What changes is the expectation for the day after the end of the world – and the nature of the cataclysm. Varying in color, suit and measures of time, the great eruption is on the tip of the tongue of the demented, philosophers, activists, and prophets. Come buy your burning brazilwood, one for five, and three for ten – take it or leave it. Brazil performs miracles: the liberals defended slavery; in the 19th century, they supported the military dictatorship, in 1964, the integralist fascism, always. There is a lack of professionalism and some sharpness. The increasingly widespread impression is that the world does not fit the world, the city does not fit the city, nobody fits themselves, and the overflow does not smell good. Even if, for some acid rain and blood, or the purifying State, make way to paradise. The trendy tropical optimism may only be a symptom of the messianic spirit. And tolerance towards the unacceptable may derive from that: soon, it will all be corrected or forgiven, penalties will be executed, the magnificent vengeance will recover everyone's wounded honor, outraged dignity, the ignored rights, and the daily payment stolen at the end of the workday, when you opened your purse to search for the glasses. Rio de Janeiro's lenience, Brazil's self-indulgence must be a matter of time, nothing more than faith in our planned obsolescence, and also an extremely poor rhyme.

In this context, praise the clarity of the black blocks and their severe intolerance. The gang in black took the supporting role in the demonstrations of June 2013. In little time, governments and the media realized that they had fallen from heaven. Black angels sent by the god of all things serene. The black blocks had become, then, the chosen people, the focus of cameras, the eye of the editor, the reference to cut the scenes. From the dark depths of time came the girls and boys dressed in black, with boiling hormones, craving for an extra dose of adrenaline. The marketers and the political genius of Rio's governor, the main target of the protests, identified in those characters the erotic tension, the mystery and the charm of the name, black blocks, and rebaptized them: "vandals." On the streets ablaze, the young men and women in masks turned themselves into a sort of damned sourced of hidden fears. The post-puberty boys and girls became the meaning of danger and threat to the order, not in the trivial, every day, prosaic meaning – because the daily risks on the streets were not, have never been, and would not become those few dozen young adults wearing the costume of rebel avengers. But they would embody, indeed, disorder in the deepest symbolic, unconscious, and radical meaning. Not the freedom-party-anarchy, but the death-plot-entropy. The governor of Rio found out he could hang on those dystopian vampires the desire for order that would bring him back to the political stage under applause. The masses

would ask for an encore – more, more police violence, rubber bullets, beating, tear gas, pepper spray, stun bombs.

Little by little, the popular demonstrations were replaced by the black blocks performances, who tirelessly would repeat the script that made them famous. They imitated the police choreography and, eager to report and repel the State violence, they mirrored it, without realizing that the mimicry of their poor dramaturgy produced effects opposite to what they expected. Week after week, month after month, the mass ebbed and left the streets to the boys in masks. The “direct actions” constituted tactics, technique, deliberation, and training. Planned emotions lose veracity and verisimilitude. The romance with the public opinion, rehearsed at the premiere, failed. It is curious that the boys in black did not notice any of this. Even refusing hierarchies and organizations, leaderships, or the institute of representation, many considered themselves the only and true revolutionaries, bearers of the people’s interest, spokespeople of June and heirs of the great demonstrations. The enlightened avant-garde, whose memoirs were abominable, was jumping out of its historical tomb. Nothing like the youth to relive anachronisms. Nothing like stupidity to put an archaism back in circulation. Nothing like a politicized insult to reason to restore the ideological erection to weary elders – and many of them unsheathed their rusted swords and formed hieratical lines, waiting for the boys to summon them for the winter palace invasion. “Revolution,” roared the masked ones, “revolution,” not noticing the pathetic pastiche: the chanting evoked a century of catchphrases and clichés.

The common thread that transmitted energy to the protests and connected them to one another, boys to boys, protests to protests, boys to protests, was hatred. If you took out hatred, there would be practically nothing genuine and serious left. Nothing even close to the dull rush with sticks and stones, marked by shattered glass, epic aspiration of the protagonists. The boys and girls wanted to get out of the closet. Some of the boys. Some of the girls. Others wanted to get out of the house. Some of them who considered that moment an opportunity to come back home after the curfew determined by their parents. Calling that permanent agitation “a movement” was great. But that was its real name, and it would be eternalized as a frugal nickname among the ones closer to it: JUNE. For those who dreamed of Octobers, it was too little; for the dispossessed of utopia, it was memorable.

Find below some items for future agendas, or:

On the art of throwing rocks:

- (1) Would there be more to this than expressing emotions, like hatred? Certainly, because it has happened according to disciplines, regulations; there is method, aesthetics, targets, moments, scenarios, etc. There is a language that educates “spontaneity.”
- (2) As there is history in table etiquette, there is history in assaults with stones; and there is culture (from children’s games to the fulfilment of legal sentences), since hunting: there is measurement of strength and aim, that is, there is dispute of expertise and virtues, besides courage.
- (3) Even according to formulas and models, there is hatred, or rather, there is the performance of hatred, manifestation of hatred. That is, as important as defining the object of rage, it is important to specify the audience that contemplates the rage scene, the public who is the recipient of the stones thrown as messages.
- (4) The aesthetics mirrors the one adopted by the police, in gestures, in rage, in concerted action, but not in weapons.
- (5) The agent is collectivized and dilutes individuality; the use of masks contributes to that (because they hide but reveal a built-up identity: the warrior).
- (6) The destructive action encompasses a certain aesthetics, in the place of an epistemology. There is no room in speech (and gesture) for complexity and nuance. Stones do not match the hesitation and uncertainty inherent in thinking. The stone crosses the landscape as the line that traces all other hypotheses.
- (7) There are political considerations worth making, as a lot is learned by reading comments, justifications, and criticism. It is worth remembering what Heidegger said on the criticism to the self-annulment of “relativism”: the terrorist explodes themselves but achieves their goal. Their target was not protecting themselves but destroying the

- enemy. The action is successful. Regarding providing involuntary shelter to a traitor: what does it matter if they throw stones?
- (8) Laws and transgressions, speeches and aphasia, repetitions as a threat to protagonism.
  - (9) Undercover work and conspiracies.
  - (10) Gratuity and the series of events. Controlling the future as a prophecy that fulfills itself: take the empire to the ground, toppling the monument, stone by stone, (de)constructing, revealing what is there under the shape: ruins.
  - (11) The waning poetics of the big gesture.
  - (12) Laughing, marching, and killing. Death expectation and the adrenaline of adventure.
  - (13) Taking the masked boys seriously, direct action as a supposedly defensive tactics. The search for legitimacy (in this case, in the genealogy of the tactics) is uplifting.
  - (14) Abrupt, sudden, percussive, marked by spasms, imposing discontinuity in the evolution line of events. Stoic and integrated, epic and Dadaist, scholastic, and baroque.
  - (15) The targets: bank branches, temples of consumption, public agencies, but also bus stops, subway stations, buses.
  - (16) Tactics and rational mediations: hatred as a technique. The theater, the performance, the dramaturgy, the characters (the chorus), the costumes, the soundtrack, the lighting, the scenography, the audience.
  - (17) Words of order, trucks, floats, flags, placards, catchphrases: sticks, stones, is it the end of the road?<sup>10</sup> The end of an era, burying the archaic aesthetics, that rhymed with the socialist realism. Now, it's a party. Sticks and party. Party and fire.
  - (18) From black block to vandal. The erotic tension of the name and the suppression that represses the stigma.
  - (19) Direct action is not the rite of passage to protest.
  - (20) Where do they sleep, hanging upside-down, the anti-heroes of reason, vampires of the tidy and sanitary utopias? Butchers of barbarian and unburied humanism. It is necessary to think of the passage of reactionary troglodytes of the right who define the Other as an enemy to be eliminated, the evil to be exorcized, to this new moment, circulated by the athletes of confrontation, by the childish infantry, by the horsemen of the night, drunken with the erotic of the hammer, lovers of hand-to-hand confrontation with the State, grinding on death in search of brute transcendence, on the stone, on the stick, on the hand, searching for the sublime in the immanence of matter, dismantled into pieces to display the chaos from which order is made.
  - (21) Expectation, spectra, fear, and fantasy. If revolution is impossible, let's remember to stage it for the commoners. If politics is about game and hypocrisy, let's eviscerate it with the tips of our fingers. There is a deaf call in the waiver of proselytism. There is exportation and alarm in the refusal of words. If apocalypse is around the corner, let's anticipate it and open the doors of hell.
  - (22) Power, legitimacy, mediations, words, imagination (disobedience and institutions).
  - (23) Let it be said in the opening: the best liberal tradition recognizes the legitimacy of civil disobedience in situations that denote non-compliance with the social contract (in our case, represented by the Constitution) by the governing power, especially when the instances responsible for correcting the route fail, moving away the transgressing leader. Therefore, on my behalf, there is no doubt as to the impertinence of legality being invoked under capitalism to criticize and punish those who protest by breaking windows. To the owners of damaged objects, the right to request, in an appropriate forum, reparation for loss and damage. But nothing else, please, or else we enter the land of hypocrisy and give up on thinking with the minimum amount of seriousness. Calling those who shatter shop windows after public protests troublemakers and vandals when the country is pushed to the abyss by the capital is an insult to reason, to say the least. Governors whose police officers loot households and promote extrajudicial killings of thousands are still governors; the commands of criminal operations still commands; the silent promoters are promoters. So, let's leave cynicism aside, be frank and apply our rationality and moral sensitivity reserves to treat the so-called "direct

actions” in popular demonstrations. Without this preamble, it would be inadmissible to criticize them, let alone do so with the radicalism they propose and deserve.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I refer to the article published on July 1, 2013, in the Los Angeles Review of Books, under the title “*Brazil: The Ground Shakes in the Country of Inequalities and Paradoxes*”.
- <sup>2</sup> T.N.: *Brazil and Its Double*, in free translation.
- <sup>3</sup> I delve into a comprehensive analysis of the religious revolution and its interaction with the prevailing neoliberal values, including concepts like meritocracy and a disapproval of the State and politics itself, in my works “*O Brasil e seu Duplo*” (2019) and “*Dentro da Noite Feroz; o fascismo no Brasil*” (2020).
- <sup>4</sup> T.N.: *New Critical Dictionary of Right-Wing Thought*, in free translation.
- <sup>5</sup> Research coordinated by Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz, conducted with the support of the Ministry of Justice.
- <sup>6</sup> Public Policy Bulletin: follow-up and analysis, in free translation
- <sup>7</sup> cf. [www.ipea.gov.br/igualdaderacial](http://www.ipea.gov.br/igualdaderacial)
- <sup>8</sup> “It is so much, it does not even fit here,” in free translation.
- <sup>9</sup> Rio de Janeiro, stories of life and death, in free translation.
- <sup>10</sup> In the original passage, the author references the famous bossa nova song by Tom Jobim called “Águas de Março,” for a play on words.

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