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## Trajectories of Perversion: From the Formation of the Modern Brazil to Its Reflections in the Global World

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*Ideology*  
*Perversion*  
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### Abstract

A theoretical perspective has been developed in Brazil, based on literary criticism and psychoanalysis, which proposes that there is a “perverse” subjectivity in Brazilians, in contrast to the classic European neurotics. Such subjectivity, forged throughout the 19th century, comes from the shaping of different social systems, as a function of the way in which Modernity was installed as a project. From literary pages to an academic interpretation of Brazil, this results in a country of contrasts, in which the “myth” of “cordial man”, which defines the Brazilian people as being generous and placid, is mixed with the harsh reality of its social inequality and violence. In the field of alterity, while internally such contrasts lead to a relationship that annuls the difference, the invisibility of the “other”, externally the relationship with foreigners is one of full acceptance that everything comes from outside, even in the field of ideas, the impacts of which are felt, for example, in Brazil’s business administration schools that are totally influenced by the American model. Starting with a reconstitution of the objective shaping of “perverse Brazil”, supported by both Brazilian and international works from the philosophic, psychoanalytical and literary fields, this article intends to show how, paradoxically, a contemporary reflection has been developing that points to the perversion of advanced modern societies, which leads to a questioning of why, despite such different cultural bases, these societies are also pointed out as being perverse nowadays. Although it is not intended to reach any definitive conclusions, this article starts from the hypothesis that this happened because local perverse features embraced universal enlightenment ideals that proved to be unsustainable with the globalization process of the modern capitalist project.

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### Introduction

The main objective of this theoretical essay is to present a paradox: that the “perverse feature”, attributed to Brazilians when constituting a subjectivity that is unique to them as a function of the political culture that formed them, is being today indicated as the characteristic of advanced modern societies. Authors from the philosophical and psychoanalytical fields (Zizek, 1990; Sloterdijk, 1987; Roudinesco, 2007; Melman, 2003; Dofour, 2005; Dejours, 2001; Safatle, 2008) have reflected on a subjective

transformation in these societies with their advanced modernity – which has been the ground for a neurotic subjectivity in the classic Freudian conception – to forms of “perverse” or “cynical” subjectivity. From the viewpoint of their “rationality” these two concepts are equal in the sense that they indicate the “existence of dual normative structures”, resulting from a process of socialization in which individuals are “socialized by means of the simultaneous internalization of two normative structures that, although contrary to one another, are articulated in a relationship of deep complementarity” (Safatle, 2008, p. 15).

Of course, such “perversion” has a different outline today, even in Brazil, as will be discussed in this article. However, in any reconstitution of the “perverse” shaping of the subjectivity of Brazilians some characteristics require a more in-depth look at the relationship between “retarded modernity” (Bauman, 2005) and the one that was the cradle of Modernity, i.e. “Western Europe, the center of the largest domination that has ever existed in the world and, at the same time, the center of emancipatory ideas that undermine this same domination” (Morin, 2009, p. 59).

In the first place, even this view of modernity, whose cradle was Europe, has to be questioned. According to Escobar (2004, p. 210), this was only an interpretation of Modernity as

an intra-European phenomenon. This subaltern interpretation makes visible modernity’s underside, that is, those subaltern knowledges and cultural practices world-wide that modernity itself shunned, suppressed made invisible and disqualified. Understood as ‘coloniality’, this other side has existed side by side with modernity since the conquest of America... From this perspective, coloniality is constitutive of modernity.

That is why this article asks, on the one hand, if the “perverse local feature” did not help sustain European enlightenment ideals that only became possible thanks to these “colonialities”, and on the other, if perversion, as a subjective structure, was not related to “times and societies undergoing a legitimization crisis process” (Safatle, 2008, p. 13), such as, for example, when faced with an “unregulated” capitalism. At least, that is what certain contemporary writings that analyze the social and psychic impacts of neoliberal capitalism would have us believe (Escobar, 2004; Roudisneco, 2007; Melman, 2003; Doufour, 2005; Dejours, 2007). Obviously, the two questions may be related depending on the way in which one understands how “modernity has been an indissociable part of capitalism, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century”, at the same time in which both were interpreted as being European and not global phenomena (Mignolo, 2005, p. 72). This discussion will be returned to in the final part of this article.

To ensure that its objective is met this article starts from the premise that it is possible through literature to examine the theme of the cultural and subjective formation of a country. Such a point of view had already been defended by the very father of psychoanalysis who hailed from Vienna, Sigmund Freud, when he sent a letter to poet, Arthur Schnitzler, assuming that the literary field, in particular, and the artistic field, in general, have the refined gift of knowing “by intuition...” from “a fine self-observation”, everything that he, Freud had “discovered in other people by means of laborious work” (Jones, 1989, p. 430), in other words, the work of analyzing his patients.

In Brazil, this approach becomes even more essential. Reconstructing the “lineage of Brazilian political thinking”, Brazilian social scientist, Gildo Marçal Brandão, has already made it clear how even the most academic interpretations of Brazil cannot dispense with its literary and essayical sources, given that “the treatment of the literature, art, culture and the sciences here practised ends up having an important political dimension because of the urgent relationship that is established between the shaping of culture and the shaping of the nation” (Brandão, 2007, p. 22).

It was by assuming this point of view that academics of psychoanalysis and literary critics in Brazil produced their own body of interpretation on the subjectivity of Brazilians, which allowed for the production of thinking that was different from that constituted from the Freudian approach of European subjectivity (Ab´Sáber, 2007; Mezan, 2002; Dunker, 2008). This is what the first part of this article will deal with.

In the second part the article will show how the concept of ideology, as proposed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer for the new historical post-Fascism moment in Europe, was already operating extensively in a post-colonial and slavocratic Brazil<sup>6</sup>, showing the close relationship that exists between the concepts of ideology in Adorno and of perversion in Freud. In

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<sup>6</sup> It is initially appropriate to relate a little of the history of Brazil to the reader: Brazil was a Portuguese colony until 1822, when it declared independence. It was a slavocratic country until 1888. However, in order to understand this article, the definition of Souza (2009, p. 106) will be used, that “the modern Brazil was born in 1808...it has to do with ‘imports’, in other words, modernity for Brazilians is constructed from the ‘outside in’, from fundamental institutions of the centralized State and from the competitive market”. The fathers of this modernization were Portugal, which sowed the seed of the centralized Brazilian State, and England, “modern and bourgeois”, which introduced the seed of the competitive market, which happened with the opening of the ports by the Portuguese court in 1808, giving rise to an as yet incipient form of exchange of merchandise. In 1930, there was another revolution in Brazil, which was the industrial revolution, but that was also a “passive revolution”, leading to the “preeminence of economic forms over cultural and political forms that so marks the singularity of Brazilian society until today” (Souza, 2009, p. 107).

other words, it will be shown how a theory of ideology was produced in Brazil that at that time was the opposite of Western modernity, but that it is today its most obvious face. It is known that it was Adorno and Horkheimer, in particular, who undertook a reinterpretation of the theory of ideology, in which subjective phenomena assumed a central importance. Avid and discerning readers of Sigmund Freud, these authors soon perceived that it was necessary to resource “to the conditions that make man what he is...” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 185), indicating the strict correspondence between material life and subjective life. That is why they proposed, as far back as the 1950s, that it was no longer possible for critical literature to work with the concept of ideology as a mere “false consciousness”. It was necessary to analyze concrete historical conditions because:

the very theory of ideology belongs to history and if not its substance, at least the function of the concept of ideology became modified historically and is subject to the dynamic that it wants to reject. So, the meaning of ideology and of what ideologies are, can only be understood if we recognize the historical movement of this concept... (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 185).

Because of this, the authors suggested a modification of the concept of ideology from the way in which it operated under fascism. Classic concepts, like reification and false consciousness, left the picture in order to make ideology into a “scheme of conduct disposition analyses, capable of explaining how individuals are led to see certain modes of subjectivization of social ties as rational” (Vladimir, 2008, p. 19).

The proximity relationships between the concept of perversion in Freud and of ideology in critical theory, starting from the concept of fascism, will also prove useful when it comes to enabling our understanding of the emergence of “perverse societies” in the heart of “European modernity”, defined by Escobar as “the growth of social fascism”. According to the author, a globalization process guided by the logic of neoliberal capitalism led to this new type of fascism, and that “the ever widening territories and peoples subjected to precarious living conditions under social fascism suggest the continued validity of a certain notion of a Third World, although not reducible to strict geographical parameters. In fact, the modern crisis is a crisis in models of thought; modern solutions, at least under neoliberal globalisation (NLG), only deepen the problems. Moving beyond or outside modernity thus becomes a *sine qua non* for imaging after the Third World” (Escobar, 2004, p. 209). The initial motivation behind this article was the proposal to present a less “culturalist” understanding of Brazil, an understanding that reinforces the gaze of the foreigner on our “exotic” side, which is so dear to the “intellectual voyeur”, who is still prisoner to a “fantasy of Brazil” (Souza, 1994)<sup>7</sup>, to indicate how this perverse feature was the product of concrete and contradictory relationships between a country divided between its colonial heritage and the most “advanced” ideals of European modernity. This division generated a subjectivity that was also brilliantly captured by cinema historian and critic, Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, who said that “we’re not Europeans, nor North Americans, but destitute of original culture, nothing is foreign to us, because everything is. The painful construction of ourselves develops in the rarified dialectic between the non-being and being another (Gomes, 1980, p. 77)”.

This Brazilian feeling of “incomplete modernity” ended up molding a different relationship of the country with foreigners – understood to be Europe, and later the United States – in the sense of taking what comes from these places as being something linked to the most advanced customs or ideas in history. This had, and still has, an impact on the most diverse of areas, including the intellectual area, leading to a “mental colonialism” (Brandão, p. 183). To stay with the example of the business administration field, which affects us most closely, local studies have already shown how the American influence in Brazil, which replaced the European influence as from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was determinant for the rise of the first business schools, and it is having an impact, even today, on our organizational practices and in determining the subject’s hegemonic theories (Caldas & Rafael, 2006; Caldas & Wood, 1997; Rafael, 2010). So, although this article does not refer directly to an internal analysis of organizations, certainly the problems it raises have an impact on the area, because they refer to the fundamental discussion about the relationships between modernity and coloniality, seeking to understand their reflections in a globalized world.

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<sup>7</sup> This interesting study by Brazilian psychoanalyst, Octavio Souza, raised the problem of the constitution of “national identity” from the point of view of the European with regard to a “fantasy of Brazil” that oscillates between exoticism and racism, a view that even today Brazil fuels with its cultural production that reinforces the idea of this place of ours being “different”. One of the main arguments put forward by the author is that it can change from exoticism to racism, and vice-versa, as a result of small changes in the socio-cultural set of circumstances that serves as a backdrop. So our “external” image may oscillate between being a country of soccer, samba and happiness to being a country of violence and a lack of care for the environment. With regard to this, Souza relates in his book that “a short time ago a French psychoanalyst who was visiting Brazil said to me, full of emotion: ‘I couldn’t sleep with all these abandoned children in the street’. I could only reply by asking him the question that was implicit in his observation: ‘How do you manage to sleep, then?’” (Souza, 1994, p. 194).

## **Perverse Brazil: a subjective constitution which is contrary to Freudian psychoanalysis**

All science has principles from which its system derives. One of the principles of political economics is free labor. In Brazil the ‘unpolitical and abominable’ fact of slavery dominates (Schwarz, 1977/2000, p. 11).

When writing about the importance of the work of literary critic, Roberto Schwarz, for an understanding of the Brazilian reality, psychoanalyst Tales Ab’Sáber achieves an extraordinary feat: he starts with Schwarz’s analysis of Brazilian writer, Machado de Assis, in order to propose an interpretation of a subjectivity forged in Brazil that is different from that which had been defined by Viennese psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, whose theory of the subject was one of the bases of the thinking of the theoreticians of the Frankfurt School, particularly Theodor Adorno<sup>8</sup>.

More than a century after the foundation of psychoanalysis, Ab’Sáber reminds us how Freud erected a field of knowledge that included something of all Western ideological life, but whose discipline was founded on an original social space:

that was concentrated on its own order of reasons that had a positive, materialistic and ‘biologizing’ scientific basis, the heir to a poetic expression of a physical and mathematical character, having the real horizon of enlightenment and European liberal bourgeois citizenship as the broader inscription picture, its general symbolic basis, in relation to which the discipline developed its specific design of subjects (Ab’Sáber, 2007, p. 269-270).

As this author reminds us, Freud’s discursive turnabout happened in the sense of indicating the false side of the ideology and of the symbolic marks socially constituted by liberal enlightenment. It also indicated a new aspect, which is the radicality of desire in humans.

However, the backdrop against which this other aspect was assembled is the one that became the object of analysis by Brazilian psychoanalysts, in the sense of pointing out that the type of subjectivity analyzed by Freud could only originate in that particular historical arena, i.e. the arena of a Europe with its followers of enlightenment and their contradictory libertarian ideals that forged a type of “public sphere as a *compromise solution* in the form of abstract rights between the classes, albeit rights that were barred – *repressed* – and socially divided by the private possession of the means for producing wealth...” (Ab’Sáber, 2007, p. 272 – author’s italics). It is in this sense that Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, states that the famous Lacanian phrase, that Marx “invented the symptom”, indicates that the psychoanalyst understood how Karl Marx had identified:

a split, an asymmetry and a ‘pathological’ imbalance that belie the universalism of bourgeois ‘rights and duties’; an imbalance that, far from announcing an ‘insufficient realization’ of this universalism and being, therefore, a remainder to be abolished because of its subsequent radicalization, functions rather as its own constitutive moment. The ‘symptom’, in the strict sense of the word, is this private element that denies the Universal of which it forms part (Žižek, 1988, p. 139).

In other words, the neurotic Freudian subject was the one who represented the very tension between the subject and his culture. It was not by chance that Theodor Adorno stated that psychoanalysis was the final moment of bourgeois self-criticism (Adorno, 1951/1992), i.e. that moment in which bourgeois illusions and the cracks of an ideal that would end in tragedy – a clear reference to the two world wars that overshadowed the later writings of both Freud and Adorno – were already evident.

In Brazil the scenario was different: at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the same period in which psychoanalysis was being born against the backdrop of that specific social and cultural context, people were living in a post-colonial and slavocratic country. In accepting the proposal of Roberto Schwarz that the literary form is a representation of the ideological structure of social reality, in Machado’s work that was unveiled by the literary critic, it is possible to glimpse a “materialistic theory of the subject that fashions... *a radical and complete view of his historic other*, which is almost the opposite of the central psychic and ideological structure that Freudian discipline originally blessed” (Ab’Sáber, 2007, p. 269 – author’s italics). Here, what Ab’Sáber is trying to show is that Machado de Assis, one of the principal Brazilian writers (1839 – 1908) put into operation another form of access to

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<sup>8</sup> It is also possible to have resource to another Brazilian psychoanalyst who, in making use of another piece of historical literature about Brazil, also talked about the crucial importance of social structure and subjective formation to then state that if Freud was starting on his psychoanalytical studies in Pernambuco, one of the states in Brazil, “he’d probably not find such a large dose of sexual repression; if we are to believe Gilberto Freyre and other anthropologists who tell us about the sexual customs of the big old plantation houses he would perhaps find a large dose of sadism or fetishism and psychoanalysis might have started being structured from studies of perversion.” (Mezan, 2002, p. 444).



symbolic life – through literature – that has the same epistemological value as clinical psychoanalysis. This other form, which Machado's literature gave life to, along with psychoanalysis, ends up presenting illusions of autonomy that are peculiar to the bourgeois norm, although "the problem of Machado's *limitless wavering* is not the same as bourgeois unconsciousness and its *formations of compromise*, but is rather a particular, tropical, cultured and *blameless* type of his negative side" (Ab'Sáber, 2007, p. 272 – author's italics).

This is the short-circuit that Ab'Sáber creates in the works of Schwarz and Machado in order to finally confront psychoanalysis and its universal ideal. But for the purposes of this article what interests us is understanding in what sense the achievement of the psychoanalyst can help us develop a theory of the subject that is peculiar to Brazilian social and cultural reality. In this case, it is a question of highlighting in Machado's work, how the formation of the subject operated in a recently-formed nation that was founded on a particular economic and power relationship that was very peculiar to it and different from the European one: that of the use of slaves as merchandise.

At this point we need to evoke the deviation of the subject that is manifest in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, [Posthumous memoirs of Brás Cubas] (published in 1881), one of the seminal works of Machado de Assis that was analyzed by Schwarz, to provide evidence of how, in this way, the classic Brazilian type is presented. This type was formed from another order of subjectivation that was very different from the commitment solutions that were typical of the European subject. In other words, if in a Europe of enlightenment the Freudian neurotic was the result of a simple divergence between civilizing ideas and capitalist demand for the expropriation of the labor force as goods, here in the tropics the post-colonial subject was shaped from the use of a social slavocratic structure and the body of the slave as the object of joy.

According to Schwarz, Brazil experienced an ideological comedy that was different from the European one, because if freedom of labor and equality in the eyes of the law were there presented as ideology, in the Brazilian case this ideology corresponded:

to appearances, concealing the essential, the exploitation of labor. Here among us, the same ideas were false in a different way, meaning original. The Declaration of the Rights of Man, for example, partly transcribed in the Brazilian Constitution of 1824, not only hid nothing, but made the institute of slavery more abject. The same was true for the professed universality of principles, which transformed the general practice of favors into a scandal" (Schwarz 1977/2000, p. 12 – author's italics)<sup>9</sup>.

In this case, in Brazil (just to anticipate what will be better developed in the next item) the concept of ideology was also born differently, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1956/1973) perceived when they analyzed fascism and the inconsistency of the argument of "false consciousness" to think about a reality that had been transformed into an ideology of itself.

Here, we need to consider briefly the question of the favor, since this practice is directly related to the social slavocratic structure, as well as to subjective formation and ideological life of the country. Following the proposition put forward by Schwarz, the land monopoly, which occurred as a result of colonization in Brazil, generated three social classes: land-owners, slaves and freemen, who in fact were only formally free, since they were deeply dependent, both socially and materially, on the land owner, a dependence relationship that became a reality because of the practice of the favor. Even though, at this point we could also refer back to Machado de Assis. Schwarz remembers that in a concrete historical key it is possible to check how the

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<sup>9</sup> Returning to the Lacanian thesis argument that "Marx invented the symptom" it is possible to understand this better in the context of the European social structure: Žižek (1988, p. 139) recalls the famous article "Fetishism of commodities", by Karl Marx, to unveil the author's theoretical production: Marx's fetishism reveals an exception commodity that sustains (and denies) a universal discourse of freedom and equality – the worker – which through knowledge about added value, appears as a symptom: the struggle of the classes, where the repressed truth returns; a struggle that is sustained by the question of the value of work. The struggle was, therefore, inside the system, something the system produced: exception commodity / labor force. In the case of Brazil the logic was very different, which is the reason for the astuteness of Machado's critical awareness, as captured by Schwarz/Ab'Sáber: this is "a culture that was entirely structured, from its own nature to its relationships of direct violence between the classes and its up-dated insertion into the modern life of its time, on this slippery, double and divided norm that advanced psychoanalysis associated with the word *perversion*" (Ab'Sáber, 2007, p. 276). It should be remembered that this Freudian elaboration on fetishism only happened at the end of the 1920s with the article "Fetishism" (Freud, 1927/1961) and later still at the end of the 1930s with the article "Splitting of the ego in the process of defence" (Freud, 1940). In other words, it would have only been in the interim period between the two world wars and with the rise of fascism that the Viennese psychoanalyst came face to face with the perverse moment of European social reality. Therefore, from the division between modernity-coloniality, these authors, who were also European, did not notice that the split, the division could also be present in the "invisibility" of European colonialism, and therefore in the very "perversion" of the colonizers, who were everywhere in the colonized countries, as Mignolo shows when he mentions a phrase from Bolívar, when referring to the Spanish conquest as "barbarities that the present age has rejected as tales, because they seem superior to human **perversity**" (apud Mignolo, 2005, p. 9 – my highlights).

practice of the favor affected the whole of our national life in its different forms and spheres, such as politics, administration, trade, industry, urban life and even those self-employed people engaged in the professions who, if in the European concept are the freest people possible, here they were totally dependent on favors. This was true in the case of the self-employed professional man, who depended on favors for carrying on his profession, or the small property owner, who needed to guarantee the security of his property, or even the employee who depended on employment. That is why Schwarz says that

**the favor is our almost universal condition** – and being more pleasant than the slavery nexus, the other relationship we inherited from the colony, it is understandable that writers have based their interpretation of Brazil on it, involuntarily disguising the violence that always reigned in the production sphere (Schwarz, 1977/2000, p. 16 – author’s highlights).

The practice of the granting favor is yet another fundamental element when it comes to understanding the formation of this “perverse” subjectivity, because although in this field brute force was not used, as it was in the relationship between the master and the slave, “the element of discretion, the fluid game of esteem and self-esteem in which the favor submits to material interest” also ruled... The favor involves the dependence of the person, the exception to the rule, interested culture, remuneration and personal services” (Schwarz, 1977/2000, p.17). Because of this, the favor is presented as being as incompatible with liberal ideas – autonomy, the universal nature of the law, impartial culture, work ethics – as slavery is.

However, as Schwarz well recalls, such liberal European ideas were formulated to refute the *Old Régime*, aimed at feudal privilege. The case of Brazil was something else: it was neither truly feudal, nor did it have a practice that was in line with liberal ideas. On the other hand, the relationship of Brazil’s dependence on the foreign market meant that the country fell fully within the logic of bourgeois economic reasoning. Such an

imperfect incorporation of a socio-political mode of self-understanding with liberal roots results in a second set of conditions: a sociability that requires a high level of self-irony, in which rules and rituals are not followed at their manifest face value as they have a latent opposing sense, which are then incorporated into ordinary social bonds. This is a subjectification for which the difference and alterability is also admittedly seen as a potential for *jouissance* (an intense pleasure which always threatens to spill over into being something unbearable to the subject) (Dunker, 2008, p. 231).

Returning to the pages of Machado de Assis, we shall see that it is clear from them how in Brazil, “the order of modernity was fostered on a *double and more radical* nature of divergence” (Ab’Sáber, 2007, p. 273), in other words, at the time when life locally was that of colonial backwardness, a situation that was likely to be perpetuated, there was also a search for inclusion in the modern social register that existed in European countries, either from an economic logic point of view, or from the imagination point of view of believing it was possible at the cultural level to experience the progressive ideas of the center. How, then, would a European bourgeois ideal, with its respective progressive forms, which were tense albeit regulated by a certain class struggle, be incorporated into a model in which there was a total absence of politics?<sup>10</sup>

Brazilian history makes clear how much its elite was always open to modern ideas from the center of the world, the natural result of its under-development, which was always understood as being “cultural backwardness”, and which led Brazil to see itself always reflected in someone else’s mirror; at this first moment in time, the European mirror. Even after the end of colonization, its specific nature as a colonized country was that of a market for supplying labor, but always with the promise that the colonizers and the colonized would be integrated into a universal political and economic model; this was integration whose history ended up showing that it took place at the consumption level – the consumption of everything from simple products to complex cultural goods. However, locally, this modernity was always available at the imaginary level for the delight of the elite, without compromising the archaic social structure. This was not a question, therefore, of something inscribed and regulated by the tense game of politics. On the contrary, this was something that was in the private domain, something that can be altered at will.

<sup>10</sup> Politics, according to Oliveira’s (2007a, p. 15) interpretation of Jacques Rancière, is a “complaint on the part of those who have no part and because of this they are constituted in dissension. In this sense, those who are involved with politics distinguish themselves by highlighting the movements of the other, the adversary, by imposing on them in a minimal way an agenda of questions about which and around which the conflict unfolds”. In Brazil, as Brandão recalls, the constitution of the “Brazilian nation”, unlike in other countries, did not rely on “the active participation of the subaltern classes, which in turn managed to acquire forces at the door of the new order and take their place at the table, albeit on the side...” Until now, this means the “existence of social groups with restricted possibilities or capacity for producing the institutions and values that would support their spiritual or political activity” (Brandão, 2007, p. 61).

But this non-introjection of a law that allowed ascension to a public sphere that was becoming established vis-à-vis the private whim, ended up modeling itself on an empty symbolic universe that revealed itself to be a weak, crippled and deficient, of which the character of Brás Cubas was an ideal type. Because, if on the one hand there was a relationship of absolute and unequal alterity with a foreign Other, internally what happened was that this alterity relationship was absent, in the sense that it was negated, the result of a symbolic structure in which there was no room for the other, on the contrary, what existed was its possession as an object of joy. That is why on the occasion of the launch of his article Tales Ab'Sáber argued that this perverse difference of ours, praised by another tradition of Brazilian social thinking as our exotic trace of cordiality, makes us see that, far from being a fact of civility, is in fact what “leads to suppression in the public arena... Because the cordial man is very interesting, but he prevents others from having objective rights. This cordiality is problematic. The affective space tends towards a favor and the latter towards control, which is oligarchic and personal” (Cariello, 2006).

### **Adorno's ideology and how it functions in Brazil**

The less they want the inherent social structure to change, the more they talk about social justice...  
Repressive egalitarianism, instead of the realization of true equality through the abolition of  
repression, is part and parcel of the fascist mentality..... (Adorno, 1951/2006, p. 182)

In the previous item the relationship between subjective “perverse” constitution and the concept of ideology in Adorno was presented. It needs to be remembered that Freud's development of the idea of fetishism only came about at the end of the 1920s, with his article “Fetishism” (1927) and even more so at the end of the 1930s (1940), with the article “Splitting of the ego in the process of defence”. In other words, it was only between the two world wars and with the rise of fascism that the Viennese psychoanalyst came face to face with the perverse moment of European social reality. It was as if Freud was faced with a new psychic structure, which, like the fetishist subject, functioned via a mechanism in which a part of it affirmed reality and the other part denied it. As we have also already mentioned, Freud prepared this theory of the division of the ego at the end of the 1930s to reveal a subject which, instead of incorporating the law, operated by actually inverting repression, thus revealing the perverse mechanism: the overlapping of two contradictory currents of mental life working to refuse a whole field of reality (Rosolato, 1967).

Returning now to the article “Ideology”, published originally in 1956 by Adorno and Horkheimer (1956/1973), but whose roots had already been glimpsed in the article by Adorno “Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda” (Adorno, 1951/2006), as well as in *Minima Moralia* (Adorno, 1951/1992), both originally published in 1951, it will be seen that, here also, the problem of subjective constitution in the transformation of the concept of ideology is central.

The main objective of the first article mentioned is to show how the concept of ideology as “false consciousness” no longer applied to the new historical context after the Second World War. For the authors, this bourgeois concept indicated that, at least at the idealized level but containing an element of rationality, there was still a belief in liberty with the realization of the formal equality of citizens. What was “false” in this ideology was that it was being presented as having been achieved, when exploitation of the labor force, for example, denied it. But there was the possibility of an ideological criticism that pointed to the non-realization of this bourgeois ideal, meaning that emancipation was possible.

However, anyone who was prepared to criticize the so-called ideology of national socialism in this way ended up being the victim of its disappointing ingenuousness... [since] it is symptomatic of a situation that no longer validly leads on from the definition of ideology as a false consciousness that is sufficient into itself. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 191)

Therefore, for these particular members of the Frankfurt School ideology is only possible in a social arena in which power relations occur that are not totally transparent and mediate, because then there would be an element of falseness in denying the universal ideal of freedom, equality, justice, etc, which in turn allows for criticism. This is not what happens in what the authors call the “intellectual wealth” of Nazism,

considering that it was constituted as the result of manipulation and as an instrument of power, which no one, not even its spokesmen, seriously thought merited credit or that it would be taken seriously. There was always the insinuation of resorting to brute force: try and use your reason and you'll soon see what happens to you. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 192).

According to the authors, in this case we are dealing with reality as the ideology of itself, in the sense that “ideology no longer guarantees anything, except that things are what they are” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 203) and that therefore they can be no different than they are.

But what made impressed these authors was the subjective adherence to this ideological transformation, since men saw its logic, even though they adapted to its lie. According to them, it was necessary to understand how society “produces men capable of reacting to these stimuli, of which they also feel a need...” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p.192). That is why Freud is resorted to in an attempt to try and understand what the authors called a “perverted social psychology” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1956/1973, p. 201), a concept that was developed in more depth in the article entitled “Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda”, in which Adorno admits that the secret of fascist propaganda is to take men for what they had become: deprived of autonomy and spontaneity, since they were already products of a totally perverted culture.

It is in this sense that Ab’Sáber states that Brazil might very well be this:

**place of perversion that is peculiar to the global system of feelings and domination**, that can only be thought of in terms of the European experience from the 1920s when capitalism finally broke away from all the compromise solutions and leaned openly towards destruction and fascism (Ab’Sáber, 2007, p. 276 – my highlights).

That is why it is here stated that, in taking the concept of ideology from the Frankfurt School authors, it is also possible to say that ideology in Brazil was already operating within the mold of the way that was captured by these authors in the second post-war period in Europe. In other words, our perverse subjectivity was already operating in the molds of a reality that was an ideology of itself.

If we return to the digression that Schwarz introduces about “favor” this becomes even clearer: according to the author, in post-colonial Brazil, where even the institutions were ruled by clientism, but proclaimed the forms of the bourgeois state,

of the ideology that had been – in other words, involuntary and well-founded on appearances – liberalism, for want of another term, passes the intentional pledge of a variety of influences that have nothing to do with anything. In legitimizing the arbitrary by means of some ‘rational’ reason the favored individual consciously ennobles himself and his benefactor, who in turn, in this era of the hegemony of reason, sees no reason to deny it... And there’s nothing better for making people and the society they form part of illustrious than the most illustrious ideas of the time, in this case European ideas. In this context, therefore, **ideologies do not describe reality, even in a false way**, and they do not move according to a law that is peculiar to them – that’s why we call them second degree (Schwarz, 1977/2000, p. 18 – my highlights).

In an Adornian way Schwarz admits that these ideas are so lacking in purpose that they stopped deceiving people.

What existed was a type of conscious self-deception between free men – slaves were excluded from this game – to the extent that the favor guaranteed the weakest link in this chain, to which it was not a slave, despite everything. In other words, practicing the favor established the effective link in the ideological life of the country, sweeping under the carpet the national shame of slavery and helping the nation forge its necessary illusion of modernity (Fontenelle, 2006), included in the international division of labor, as it already was. But here, the “ideas of the bourgeoisie, whose *sober grandeur* goes back to the public and rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment, take the function of... the adornment and mark of nobility” (Schwarz, 1977/2000, p. 19), which was evident in the way in which those who most delighted in the slavocratic system started copying the European life style –in their houses, customs, their national symbols and even in theory, making it possible to visualize once again the ideological Adornian operation that, in the interpretation of the Slovenian philosopher, Zizek, forges a subjectivity that knows but acts as though it does not know (Zizek, 1990).

But as Zizek would also say, the perverse person is the prisoner of the joy that escapes him, in this case the joy of a system to which the local feature was submitted: a system of exchanges that had already imposed on Brazil its place on the periphery of the international labor division, because if on the one hand there was a dependence on slave labor, on the other it equally depended on the foreign market and therefore, even if it was in a clumsy way, it had to dance to the tune of bourgeois economic logic. To a certain extent **local perversion helped maintain the European illusion about the possibility of having the highest bourgeois ideals**.

Taking a great leap forward in time and accepting a certain tradition of Brazilian social thinking, this condition of Brazil as a peripheral and perverse country remained after the slave period ended (1888) and throughout the whole of its industrialization process, when there was a “production revolution without a bourgeois revolution... the specific aspect of which was the ‘productive’ character of the backwardness, like a co-stakeholder in capitalist expansion”, and when the national industrial bourgeoisie preferred to make a pact with international capital in order to preserve local social domination (Oliveira, 2003, p. 131). This was the summary of the situation, as presented by one of the most prominent Brazilian sociologists, Francisco de Oliveira, thirty years after having written the book, “Critique of the Dualist Reason”, (Oliveira, 1972).



This ideology that needed no mask was perpetuated and became even more transparent after 1964, (the year in which the military coup occurred in Brazil, usually defined as the start of the dictatorship period that would last until the end of the 1970s, when political freedom returned) which, according to Oliveira, “is hard to compatibilize with the image of a bourgeois economic revolution, but is closer to its opposite, which is a counter-revolution. This is perhaps *its clear similarity with fascism*, which at heart is a combination of economic expansion and repression” (Oliveira, 2003, p.1 06 – my italics). It is no coincidence that in one of his recent texts the author recalls the temporal affinity between “Critique of the Dualist Reason” and “Ideas out of place”, a book by Roberto Schwarz, which was originally published in 1973. Both theoretical productions tried, according to Oliveira, to show that already at the beginning of the 1970s it was obvious how liberalism *a lá Brazil* was still favor-driven (Oliveira, 2007b). Schwarz also recalls that only at this time did a critical sensitivity to the rhetoric of modernization arise, because given the military coup it became more evident what had been illustrated in the pages of Machado: a “disilluded and bitter view of the Brazilian elite, who when things got tough accepted anything... this is where Machado de Assis is right up to date, when he shows that nothing that well-positioned people say is to be believed, even if their words are elegant” (Schwarz, 1999, p. 234-235).

### **Ideology and perversion in advanced capitalist societies: considerations in the form of a conclusion**

In the previous item it was clear how the ideology of Adorno, which was formulated on European soil only in the 1950s, had been widely operative in the Brazilian social structure since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 1900s. That is why it makes sense for Schwarz to say that “good Brazilian literature is more advanced or more unique than our historians and sociologists...”(Schwarz, 1999, p.232). But in this case it revealed itself to be more advanced than international theoretical production itself, because at the time when it is said that western societies became perverse (Roudinesco, 2007) (and that therefore fascism was not a simple deviation in direction, but indicated something that is inherent to the very structure of the capitalist system) and the ‘Brazilianization’ of the world<sup>11</sup> is also pointed out, it is as if the literature of Machado had been, *avant la lettre*, announcing the arrival of the capitalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Had it been?! The objective of this essay is not to develop this hypothesis, but only to point it out in the sense of showing how a possible link between subjectivity and perverse ideology is, to a certain extent, present in the proposition that certain authors put forward about the constitution of a perverse or cynical rationality in contemporary capitalist societies (Sloterdijk, 1987; Žizek, 1990; Roudinesco, 2007; Dejours, 2007).

Taking these authors as points of reference, philosopher and psychoanalysis academic, Vladimir Safatle, recognized that the notion of “dual normative structure” is “a bigger piece in the self-comprehension process of the rationalization system of peripheral countries and its canonic description was supplied by Roberto Schwarz”, not by chance a Brazilian author who has been widely quoted in this article. But Safatle’s challenge is precisely “to understand the conditions of its generalization in hegemonic life-forms in advanced capitalism” (Safatle, p.1 5). To do so the author, in the internal transformations of capitalism and in its “new spirit” (Boltansky; Chiapello, 1989), seeks the emergence of a life-form, “a socially-shared set of ranking systems and justification of conduct in the fields of work, desire and language” (Safatle, p. 12), that is guided by a cynical rationality “that appears to follow systems of norms and values that are inverted at the very moment they are applied; systems in which law and transgression are simultaneously declared to be imperatives” (Safatle, p. 15). It is at this level that, also according to the author, “**cynicism stands firm with the transformation of perversion and no longer of neurosis**, a necessary balance for our socialization processes. This result becomes necessary when we accept that the processes of socialization in contemporary life tend to no longer to involve the agency of contradictions through repression and constraint with their denial structures (*Verneinung*), but by acceptance of dual normative structures” (Safatle, p. 22; my highlights).

Safatle attributes this state of things to the transformation process of contemporary capitalism, especially as it moved from a production society to a consumption society, which among other things, brought with it imperatives of malleability and flexibilization in all aspects of social life. These imperatives are symptomatic of a new superego figure that determines conduct based on the logic of pure joy, the generator of a cynical relationship with normative criteria. According to the philosopher, this phenomenon tends to become hegemonic “in historical situations in which imperatives of unrestricted satisfaction need to coexist with normative expectations that aspire to universal validity” (Safatle, p. 139). It is from this relationship that dual normative structures arise, so present in perverse formations.

<sup>11</sup> The term ‘Brazilianization’ was coined by American journalist, Michael Lind (1995), indicating that the two cultures are separated not by race but by class. According to the author, such a characterization, which has been present in Brazil ever since it was founded, is also occurring in the USA today.

But Safatle also remembers that discussions about these “cynical or perverse” forms of subjectivity should not be restricted to a sociological diagnosis relating to the impasses of contemporary capitalism, because its roots are to be found in the perception that standards of normative rationality and valuing, which become confused with a certain history of philosophic modernity, have been exhausted...[since] modernity, because of its power for eroding traditional life forms, might open up the way to indecision and to the emptying of the social arena of all normative substantiality” (2008, p. 15-16).

It is at this juncture between modernity and capitalism that it is possible to seek clues for thinking about the paradox presented at the beginning of this article, which is, understanding in what way “advanced modernity” is today presenting forms of perverse subjectivity in the molds of the one dealt with in the analysis on the formation of subjectivity in Brazil.

According to Walter Mignolo, when modernity and capitalism appeared as indissociable items in the 16th century they were interpreted as European and not global phenomena, “in which the whole world participates, but with different positions of power” (Mignolo, p. 72). Such phenomena created “the axis that organized and continues to organize the colonial difference, the periphery as nature” (Mignolo, p.72). This “coloniality of power” started the phenomenon of the “dual consciousness”, a concept that “captures the dilemma of subjectivities formed in colonial difference, experiences of someone who lived and lives modernity in coloniality” (Du Bois, 1970, apud Mignolo, 2005, p. 78), of which the “perverse experience” of Brazilians, as described in this article, is representative, since such subjectivities are always dual and subaltern, in the interpretation of Mignolo. But “their local histories vary, because European history itself was changing in the process of forging itself in the expansion movement of the West”. Therefore today, this manifestation of subjectivities is not just on the margins of Empires (as in Latin America, but also in the very heart of the countries and continents that were or that are imperial powers, as a result of “massive migration movements to the United States and Europe” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 77).

Certainly, the perspective of modernity-coloniality, as developed by Walter Mignolo, is stimulating and pertinent to our search for understanding the paradox here presented. To reveal it, it is obviously necessary to explain better the tortuous path of the constitution of this modernity-coloniality, including examining the moment when “the authoritarianism of the United States after 1945 was extended to controlling international relations in a new form of colonialism, a colonialism without territoriality” (Mignolo, p. 99), which would remove Europe from being the central axis of the modernity that had been imagined and practiced up until then. Later, it would be necessary to understand the third stage, when this capitalism was being globalized and guided by the American logic that it would be a new “form of imperial globality, an economic-military ideological order that subordinates regions, peoples and economies worldwide” (Escobar, 2004-2007), and its crisis today, along with the Utopian exhaustion of the meaning of modernity. This is undoubtedly the historical backdrop that allows for the formulation of contemporary concepts, such as “social fascism” (Escobar, 2004), “the Brazilianization of the world” (Lind, 1995), “perverse capitalism” (Dejours, 2001), “perverse societies” (Roudinesco, 2007), and others that point in the opposite direction of Western capitalist modernity to the exhaustion of the capability of modernity to provide solutions for modern problems (Santos, 2002).

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman helps sustain this hypothesis when he shows how colonization and imperialist conquests only became possible thanks to

differential power continually reproduced by the complete inequality of ‘development’... resulting, in turn, from the modern way of life being restricted to a ‘privileged’ part of the planet... the situation may last as long as modernity remains a privilege. When it became the universal condition of humanity the effects of its planetary dominance arrived... because of this there are no more global solutions available for locally produced problems, or global outlets for local excesses... (Bauman, 2005, p. 12-13).

Certainly, the explanation helps us understand that if there was always a “fantasy of Brazil” (Souza, 1994), in which the criticism of our eternally being out of step with the progressive march of the world is embedded, **which the inversion of the ideological logic of modernity, as dealt with in this article, allows us to point out that Brazil, in its practice and reflections on critical thinking, really did anticipate the impossibilities of the universalization of the modern ideal that is found in Western societies that are considered to be the most developed.** These reflections have been taken up again by influential literature about modernity-coloniality, as the article has tried to emphasize. But this interpretation indicates only one critique of the process of the “coloniality of power” (Mignolo, 2005), and possible responses to this new historical movement that would force us to move “from the sociology of absences of subaltern knowledges to a politics of emergence of social movements” (Escobar, 2004). In the organizational area, for example, the article of Alcadipani (2010) points to the possibilities of such “local” responses in the field of business administration in Brazil.

Finally, if the “perverse” subjective constitution of the Brazilian is taken as the motto, in the sense of discoursing on a contemporary paradox of perverse societies, in doing so it is not the intention to admit that it may also be possible to analyze contemporary Brazil by taking categories of post-colonial Brazil. Certainly, categories like “favor” remain as heritage, but it is

necessary to take them only as the “seeds of State and the modern market” in Brazil “and not the mature configuration of these phenomena” (Souza, 2009, p. 107). This interpretation of Souza’s also intends to break with the “culturalist” interpretation of Brazil and to insist that if the forms of perversion in present-day Brazil have their seeds in these initial relationships with colonialism, slavery, independence and the culture of the “favor” it is no longer possible to separate them from the Brazil that became industrial, urban and “globalized”. So, Souza warns that the legitimation of inequality in contemporary Brazil is “reproduced on a daily basis by ‘modern’ and specifically ‘symbolic’ means, which are very different from the whip of the slave master or the personal power of the owner of land and people, whether these people are slave or free, black or white” (Souza, p.16). This final reference to Souza is provided in the sense of indicating the gigantic and fundamental leap that the author took in breaking with the culturalist logic in Brazil, which reinforced the “internal colonialism....the colonial difference exercised by the leaders of national construction” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 80), at the same time that it also offers important elements for discoursing on the contemporary logic of perversion, without ignoring its specific local aspects, when found in countries considered to have an advanced or “retarded” modernity.

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