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***O Que Nao Dá, Chupa:***  
**The Male-to-Female “Homosexual” As The Star of Brazil’s**  
**Economic Boom**  
**(early draft)**

by Diego Costa, University of Southern California

Two of Brazil’s most re-occurring platitudes about itself are that Brazil is the country of the future, and that God is Brazilian. It would be of little surprise, then, that both fantasies -- one of divine kinship, the other of deferred salvation -- would merge so symbiotically when Brazil’s fetishized potential seems to finally find opportunities for materialization. Today, after all, Brazil is able to make previously unimaginable claims about how close it is to that utopian dictum stitched across its flag, and until recently, a perverse reminder of the gap between the fantasy of the State and the state of the State: “Order and Progress.” The thread used as raw material to keep the dream of the nation alive, in Brazil and elsewhere, has been, of course, the figure of the homosexual. Weaving heterosexuality away as negative homosexuality through painstaking quotidian iteration, the *viado*, or faggot, has served as yardstick for the construction of the normative Brazilian citizen as much as the concept of woman has functioned as necessary launching pad for the construction of the always already male Subject. If “the woman does not exist,” as Lacan reminds us, does the homosexual? Brazil’s recent bout with socio-economical “progress” seems to suggest that its Homosexual didn’t exist, as long as we predicate existence with public visibility. Yet this presence-absence *condition* of the Brazilian homosexual -- the same *viado* who guarantees the legitimacy of the heterosexist State through his constant annihilation and disavowal – takes center stage as that country experiences what it once could only imagine: 20 million people pulled out of poverty in the Lula years (2002-2010); the election of its first female (and rumored lesbian) president, Dilma Rousseff, in 2010; winning the rights to host the Olympics in 2016 and FIFA’s World Cup in 2014; the occupation of the Rio de Janeiro favelas by the police and the Army in 2010; and the ruling by the Brazilian Supreme court that same-sex couples are legally entitled to civil unions in 2011.

Dragged out of its silent labor, underpinning the making and gendering of the Nation, the Brazilian homosexual may appear as both shrapnel of this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Brazilian “revolution,” an unintended consequence borne out of belated paradigm shifts. Yet, this very homosexual, who functioned so diligently as the glue that holds the fragile pieces of heterosexuality together when Brazil’s progress was mere regurgitation of delicious impossibilities, is of course going to “come out” as the star of Brazil’s zeitgeist of good luck and presumably progressive politics. And like all stars, the Brazilian homosexual will be adulated, humiliated, misunderstood, scrutinized, made into both diva and clown, a victim of rumor, libel, vicious gossip and a trigger for tremendous anxiety. In other words, the outing of the Brazilian homosexual, his overdue entrance into public discourse as consequential and constitutive of newly found Brazilian “progress,” outs the status quo of gender/race/nation/class/what-have-you as sham.

We know that moral panic has a tendency to escalate around sexual and social

deviancy in moments of crisis. The supposed sexual threat coming from someone else has been mapped onto Jewish men, black men, gay men and sex psychopaths depending on where in history we look. As queer theorist Joseph J. Fischel reminds us, the construction of the perversion of the Other and its prompt demonization have served as a kind of joker card to achieve a panoply of projects, from regulating the sexuality of newly urbanized white girls to re-sanctifying the heterosexual nuclear family, from stifling the sexuality of children to cutting welfare<sup>i</sup>. But could the opposite be true? Could moral panic struggle to live in times of socio-economic prosperity? Which bodies will we elect, if not the homosexual's, as bearer for our projected perversions and failures in times of prosperity? Can the homosexual survive its simultaneous public stoning and compassion-filled *coup de theatre* of tolerance performed by the neo-liberal State? And how to make sense of the everyday, a Brazilian everyday so predicated on the denigration of anything queer, when, suddenly, like an apparition, the homosexual materializes itself as human? If the de facto and symbolic condition of the Brazilian queer has been that of garbage on which the not-too-miscegenated and gender-conformant heterosexual stands and builds the nation how will *normativity* survive? We know it will, as it has an incredible knack for endurance. It will manage, mapping its anxieties onto other available figures who will be constructed if not easily available. In the United States, Fischel argues, the "sex offender" took the place of the homosexual when he was no longer fair game as repository for depravity in the hopes of preserving a social order that is always already ruined." "In the mean time the homosexual and the transsexual in Brazil do double duty as both amusing figures that point at the direction of a properly civilized future, in which the Brazilian Gay can be imagined as the American Gay, clean and matrimonial, and innately abject objects, like the more Brazilian notion of the "Geni." As the popular Chico Buarque song about the neighborhood whore that everyone loves to privately fuck and publicly degrade goes:

*"Let's throw stones at Geni  
She was made to be beaten up  
She is great for spitting at  
She goes with anybody  
Geni, that damned woman"*

The marginal becoming central in moments like this shouldn't come as a surprise. In fact, the marginal here has always been central as the evil Other that constitutes the pure Self. Homophobia is imbricated not only in the general ways that the gendered subject constitutes itself in Brazil, but inculcated in children as a necessary duty to be explicitly performed every day. This can take place as "harmless" asides, jokes and "terms of endearment" between buddies who may shout to each other across the gym, the workplace, the bakery or the public square "Hey, faggot!" (as if to reassert the likeness between two normative subjects) or, for the more thoroughly invested, as violence toward a Other, elected to serve as the negative that holds the normative self up in its privileged position (from playground bullying to assassinations).

Ironically, then, the homosexual, poses such a great threat to the social order, yet it needs to be invented and re-invented daily for that social order to exist. Those embodying the threat have had to make due in fear, in privacy, and/or under the aegis of

the open secret of the Brazilian code of top-ness, in which one is allowed to engage in *acts* of queerness without begetting a queer *identity* so long as one is the top, never the bottom. Lacking a serious counter-argument that “the media” would actually take up as legitimate substance, the homosexual popped up in popular soap operas here and there through the 90s and early 00s mostly to be killed off due to popular demand. Queerness in popular culture remained largely (mis-)represented, when it was allowed to leave its invisible-visible labor of underpinning “Order and Progress,” as pathology, hilarious stereotypes, grotesque entertainment and, with luck, possibly redeemable shame.

For those of us in self-exile, then, it felt like nothing short of surreal to watch as the Brazilian Supreme Court judges, one by one, unanimously, ruled same-sex civil unions legal. Not only that, they did so with the rhetorical sophistication we have come to expect from poetically-inclined passionate leaders, of whatever cause, who the Americans would certainly qualify, in schmaltzy cheerfulness, as being “on the right side of History.” What was happening here? How was a country built on the daily public, and private, re-iterations of homophobic anxiety undoing itself on live television? Who would have to leave the room to make space for the homosexual? Or, rather, as at least a brand of Queer Theory knows too well, which homosexual was going to be allowed in the room? Either way, the very fact that Brazilians were deciding, before this homosexual’s very eyes, to make room for *any* homosexual seemed violently oneiric. What’s the catch?

While it may have felt like an unexpected twist in a Brazilian narrative so firmly anchored in the homophobification of its citizens, the Supreme Court’s decision was part of the ongoing socio-political environment, or *moment*, which I have discussed. This moment included two main figures of discontent bent on spreading panic (congressman Jair Bolsonaro and congresswoman Myrian Rios) and two newly minted transsexual celebrities who quickly became ubiquitous talk show fodder (self-disclosed pre-op former prostitute and Internet sensation Luisa Marilac and self-disclosed post-op former prostitute and Big Brother Brazil contestant Ariadna).

Congressman Jair Bolsonaro has become *the* face of anti-gay rights extremism in Brazil. He is dismissed by some as ignorant homophobic fool but hailed by others as heroic citizen trying to keep the Brazilian family from contamination by the homosexual agenda and its alley, the liberal media. Bolsonaro seems happy to play the part, omnipresent content for the same media he deems co-conspirator in the harmful process of humanization of the homosexual. He was recently investigated in racism charges for having said, in response to a question by black singer Preta Gil on a TV show, that his sons wouldn’t be caught dead dating a black person because they were well educated by him. Since homophobia isn’t illegal in Brazil, yet racism is, Bolsonaro quickly went on record to say he had misunderstood the question, and that, in fact, he meant to say his sons wouldn’t be caught dead dating someone from the same sex because he educated them well. The day Bolsonaro was acquitted from the racism charges, one of his sons, also a politician, celebrated it by writing on his Twitter feed: “Chupa Viadada,” or “Suck it, faggots.” Brazil’s silent code of top-ness as legitimate heterosexuality is clearly evident here, as the demand for the homosexual in the homophobic’s imaginary to suck his dick constitutes an act of homophobia, not homosexuality. When asked to explain how he felt about his son’s homophobic (yet homosexual?) tweet, Bolsonaro, the father, said he was confused because homosexuals want the right to call one another “fags” yet

they get bitchy when heterosexuals do it.

Bolsonaro was also involved in the “gay kit” debacle this year, in which the federal government was developing anti-homophobia material (in print and in video form) to educate kids in High School about identity, diversity and difference. Bolsonaro’s staunch opposition to the educational program, backed by the church’s dissemination of panic and misunderstanding helped the “gay kit,” as it ended up being referred to (it’s not just in America that liberals lose the war on grammar), to be pulled from production. In fact, the stick the broke the camel’s back was a very ironic backdoor deal involving president Dilma Rousseff’s chief of staff at the time, Antonio Palocci, also rumored to be gay, in which the evangelical opposition presumably agreed not to press charges against Palocci’s alleged financial irregularities if the “gay kit” was pulled.

Pigbacking on Bolsonaro’s rhetoric of panic and yearning for “social and sexual simplicity and fixed absolutes of right and wrong,” congresswoman Myrian Rios, a failed actress and former Playboy bunny, jumped on the bandwagon of the homosexual versus the family<sup>iii</sup>. In a YouTube video that recently went viral, Rios appears before the Rio de Janeiro Legislative Assembly conflating homosexuality and pedophilia – how retro. She builds a curious argument through some blindingly elitist arguments, tying in class, race and sexuality all in one brutally homophobic anecdote. Speaking against a law that would make the firing of employees based on sexual orientation illegal she warns the public that if this law, PEC23/7, passed we wouldn’t be able to fire our own nannies if they turned out to be lesbians! And if they turned out to be lesbians, which we would know by looking at them and recognizing the empirical signs of this “choice,” as Rios puts it, they could very possibly, then, sexually molest our children. “I am not a prejudiced person and I do not discriminate” is how she opens her speech. It doesn’t take a critical theorist to realize that whenever someone says that what follows is a barrage of prejudiced and discriminating assumptions. In her twisted logic “if we are all equal before the Law, I should also have the right not to want a certain employee in my company if that’s my will.” In a very condescending tone, Rios continues: “Excuse me, but the same right that my nanny has to be a lesbian, I have to not want her to babysit my daughters. The rights are the same!” Concluding her hypothetical anecdote, Rios would be legally prohibited from firing the imaginary nanny, if this law passes, which could, “only God knows,” lead to the imaginary nanny “committing pedophilia” with the imaginary daughters.

Creating a tautological relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia is, of course, the oldest trick in the book. This familiar rhetoric groups together the named and unaccounted-for multiplicity of human desire and human subjects in similar ways that legislative enactments of slave trade times did, associating slaves with beasts, animals of any kind, stock, furniture, plates, books, etc.<sup>iv</sup> These distortions that the hegemony seizes as its unlawful prerogative, as Hortense J. Spillers would put it, are here played out in the form of reverse psychology, the promotion of panic, the reiteration as the innocence of children, homosexuality as a choice (therefore justifiably punishable) and throwing in “what only God knows” for good measure. But mostly, it reasserts the fantasy of the Other as the repository of perversions that “we” could never have. Safely bound in the discrete body of the homosexual, or the lesbian nanny, this egregious thing called non-normative sexuality or non-reproductive pleasure, is projected out of the realm of the possible for those who properly disavow it. Ignoring the “fact” that the astounding majority of pedophilic acts come from members of the child’s family, the same family

desperately trying to create some sort of anti-homosexual über-condom to protect it from an increasingly über-homosexual world, Rios assumes violence as only inhabitable in the Other. In his writings on apartheid, Derrida writes that it, like all racisms, “tends to pass segregation off as natural – and as the very law of the origin.” As problematic as it is to create parallels between issues surrounding race and sexual orientation (as if they were ever discretely different issues), the pseudo-concession Rios makes in her speech about the lesbian nanny’s homosexuality being a “choice” borne out of her free will, she seems to inaugurate a line of argument akin to apartheid’s justifications of keeping what is different at a distance (“The rights are the same!”). Derrida argues that apartheid is a “system of marks” that “outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off border.” He continues: “(...) there’s no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word.”<sup>v</sup>

Luisa Marilac, the transsexual Internet sensation who recently became ubiquitous presence on Brazilian TV, including face-to-face arguments with congressman Jair Bolsonaro, must be right when she blames him for the stabbings and deaths of LGBTs (sorry, we are not in queer territory just yet) all over the country. Marilac, who came to prominence with a video she posted on YouTube of her bikini-clad self enjoying a drink in her apartment building’s swimming pool has helped disseminate, perhaps unwittingly, something of a counter-language to the language of purity versus perversion carried on by politicians Bolsonaro and Rios. Marilac’s viral popularity derives from the kind of campy attitude and gay lingo that has spread across media platforms in Brazil: from Twitter hashtags to very gender-conformant female Brazilian TV hosts dropping a gay slang repeatedly. It would perhaps be unreasonable to say that drag queen speak could “speak back” to normativizing language in the same grounds, with the same force. Yet one shouldn’t underestimate the power of queer irony, especially when it seeps into, and yes, contaminates, language-at-large. There is always a degree of symbolic intervention performed by these nodes of contact between normative and non-normative bodies, languages and attitudes. Even with its insurmountable normativizing force, the heterosexist Symbolic cannot get out unharmed from these inadvertent queer incisions.

Ariadna, another transsexual omnipresent on Brazilian television as of late, has a less clownish attitude than the purposely vulgar Marilac, who has said on live TV that “men, when they don’t wanna get fucked, they wanna suck, honey.” Ariadna, who frequents the same TV studios as Marilac, performs a slightly different function in this ambiguous tug of war between heterosexual normativity making a spectacle out of queer grotesquerie and queer grotesquerie exposing the contradictions and absurdities of the heterosexually normative. The extremely “passable” Ariadna plays both the transsexual who transcends into desirable womanhood on TV (“taxi drivers call my dad ‘father-in-law’ now,” she claims), the repository for perversions previously deemed unredeemable, and that liminal space between good-enough-to-be-desired object and still-too-queer-to-be-desired object. In the few times that television presenters and producers allow her to be agent, however, when she is not being probed about “what it feels like to be born in the wrong body” or whether it is dishonest for her not to come out as transsexual to a straight guy who takes as “the real deal,” Ariadna reminds us, as Audre Lorde (who would have thought), that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. And yet, the master’s tools is all Ariadna still has, for right now.<sup>vi</sup>

“We are all children of God,” claims Ariadna, to the compassion-filled cheers of

the audience in a recent episode of a nightly TV show called *Superpop*. She was told by producers that the show tonight is all about her, yet they surprised her with the presence on stage of congressman Jair Bolsonaro himself. She refuses to go onstage at first, claiming that just like he has the right to denigrate LGBTs she has the right not to want to be in the same room as him (“It’s the same right!”). One of the recurrent guests on the show, Felipe Campos, who plays the well-dressed eloquent gay not so eloquently, starts out a cheer with the audience for Ariadna to “come out” onstage. They keep cutting back and forth from a silent and calmly seated Bolsonaro on stage and Ariadna being interviewed by the show’s host Luciana Gimenez, otherwise known for having had a baby by Mick Jagger in 1999. Gimenez tries to convince Ariadna that she would never allow trashy television to take place even though that’s precisely what the show is about. She tries to convince Ariadna to go onstage because it’s no use extolling the legitimacy of gays (“we are all children of God”) to someone who already agrees with her, so she see being thrown into the lion’s den with congressman Bolsonaro as a kind of civic duty or something. Ariadna eventually relinquishes and announces she is about to go on stage, even though her agent doesn’t think that’s a good idea, we hear.

When Ariadna finally enters the stage, looking like a normatively heterosexual female star, she shakes hands with every other guest, including Bolsonaro, “to be polite,” she says. The interaction is more civil than expected mostly because Ariadna is sitting in the middle of the stage assuming a position between an *Inside The Actor’s Studio*’s guest actress and one of Charcot’s Salpêtrière patients. It’s all about her indeed. Gimenez grills her on the “nature” or her condition like a guru who will extract “the truth” from this strangely queer subject. Ariadna confirms not only the framing of the questions, with all of its pathologizing and essentialist assumptions about human sexuality and the body (Merleau-Ponty and Foucault are both rolling in their graves), but promptly “educates” the audience in her gender dysphoria: it’s a matching of the body with the soul, she says. “Sexual re-assignment surgery,” a prominent Brazilian journalist, tweets: “I’m gonna Google it!”. While the set-up seems to be masked in an aura of pedagogical entertainment and candid answers about celebrity sex (from the horse’s mouth), it’s clear that the point of this farce is to ask ourselves: *would you do her or not?*

Faced with this creature, who just a few years ago would have been considered an unredeemable freak, Brazilian audiences are put in the delicate position of making sense of so many new terms, concepts and existential novelties. All of which, or most, they aren’t supposed to simply lash against in order to reassert their position as normal. In conflating homosexuality with transexuality and further solidifying the notion of an even split between “body and soul,” accepting her being as undone wrongness, reducing the homosexual-as-a-class to a botched heterosexual we mustn’t kill, Ariadna, whose only privilege in this chaotic epistemological mess is her lived experience, gets etched further into the same old position she occupied back when those 20 million people Lula pulled out of poverty were still unable to pay for their vehicle in 3,000 installments. Except that now the homosexual isn’t so much stoned, but pitied, and promptly rewarded as human for not being responsible for his condition, which, *now we see* -- now that he has entered public discourse, our living rooms, our speech, our wet dreams? – nobody would choose. Let them live.





<sup>i</sup> Joseph J. Fischel, "Transcendent Homosexuals and Dangerous Sex Offenders: Sexual Harm and Freedom in the Judicial Imaginary," *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* (Spring 2010).

<sup>ii</sup> Fischel, p. 34.

<sup>iii</sup> Fischel, 41.

<sup>iv</sup> Hortense J. Spillers provides us with this list of associations in giving a 1798 Maryland legislative enactment as an example, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Counteremory: The "American" Connection. (Summer, 1987), p. 89.

<sup>v</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Racism's Last Word," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in 'Race.' *Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 331.

<sup>vi</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984), 110-113.