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POPULAR SOVEREIGNTIES UNDER PERIPHERAL CONDITIONS

Gabriel Tupinambá



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Author: **Gabriel Tupinambá**

Senior Researcher, Alameda Institute.

E-mail: gabriel.tupinamba@alameda.institute

Abstract

This paper examines the contemporary proliferation of sovereignty claims — by states, by non-state armed and corporate actors, and by popular movements — as symptoms of a single structural transformation rather than as political confusion. Reading four commissioned studies of Brazilian struggles (on the dismantling of the nation-state form, the courier movement and the crisis of trade unionism, territorial and food-sovereignty struggles, and the construction of Teia dos Povos), it argues that they converge on a shared diagnosis: the current crisis is not the onset of disorder but the end of an exceptional historical arrangement. The paper reconstructs the tradition that has long anticipated this outcome — the “peripherization thesis” running from René Zavaleta Mercado and Roberto Schwarz through Francisco de Oliveira and Paulo Arantes to Thiago Canettieri’s “peripheric condition” — according to which the periphery reveals capitalism’s most adequate operational logic, now generalizing across the system as a whole. It then identifies a limit internal to this tradition: powerful as a diagnostic, it lacks a language for the new political forms emerging under these conditions. Drawing on the framework of the *Common Space of Organizations* (CSO) — the three social logics of value, property, and affinity, and their alignment or misalignment — the paper reframes peripherization as a constructive social form rather than a deficit, and treats modernity as the local, temporary, and costly special case. On this basis it proposes reading popular sovereignty as self-determination: the capacity of movements to subordinate competing logics to collective decision without the institutional mediations that once shielded them.

Keywords

Peripherization; popular sovereignty; social movements; Brazilian critical theory

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§1. Introduction

This working paper is a contribution to the *After Order* project¹, a research initiative of the Alameda Institute investigating the contemporary dispute for sovereignty in a fragmented world. Departing from the hypothesis that we may not be living through a temporary interregnum between stable orders, but rather in a durable condition of recurring crisis — a time after stable orders — the project examines how sovereignty is being claimed, redistributed, and contested across inter-state relations, within nation-states, and beyond them altogether. Two correlated figures orient its investigations: on one side, the rise of *non-state sovereigns* — corporations operating within autonomous economic zones, platform monopolies, entrepreneurs of violence, paramilitaries, and criminal organizations that increasingly wield more effective power than states themselves to determine what happens in territories and communities; on the other, the condition of *non-sovereign states and peoples* — polities and communities, primarily but not exclusively in the Global South, whose capacity to direct their own politics has been eroded by mechanisms of economic dependence, geopolitical subordination, colonial and racial domination, and the neoliberal transfer of authority to markets.

From this diagnosis, *After Order* has organized itself into five interconnected research streams, each addressing a different terrain on which sovereignty is being reconfigured — from the afterlives of neoliberalism and the rise of digital sovereigns, to the authoritarian politics of disorder and the conditions of states and peoples whose sovereignty remains constrained by colonial and economic domination. This working paper contributes to the fifth sub-project — *New Popular Sovereignities* — which engages with social movements, particularly in Brazil, to understand and learn from their different efforts whether it is possible to identify, within the same fragmenting terrain, political ideas and experiments through which peoples, communities, and working class movements are reclaiming sovereignty on other terms.

As part of the Popular Sovereignities stream, Alameda organized the *Tastes of Freedom* festival in 2025,² in partnership with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and with Terra de Preto in the south of Bahia, Brazil. The festival brought together more than ten

¹ The *After Order* project is funded by the Open Society Foundations. Further information about the project, its research streams, and its outputs is available at www.alameda.institute/after-order.

² See Rafique Reis full report on the Tastes of Freedom Festival here: [Tastes of Freedom - Report](#)

communities in Jitaúna, Bahia, to exchange experiences and discuss the new challenges these different land occupations, quilombos and agricultural communities face in the current conjuncture. Conversations during the festival inevitably converged around a recurring problem: how to secure past victories — such as the land occupations themselves — and how to advance different popular causes in a moment where we can no longer trust the law or other guarantees by the state to secure these conquests; a moment in which new right-wing forces are emerging and establishing themselves both within the state apparatus and outside it, as separate political actors who organize invasions, assassinations, and other forms of confrontation with popular forces in land struggles. It was also discussed how even explicitly left-wing measures — such as facilitation of credit or the ongoing mobilization of popular forces in defence of new rights and new representation in the state — have often turned against the movements themselves, insofar as they created a dependency on state mechanisms that, as they reveal themselves ever more frail and unstable, also collapse the conquests that were achieved through these partnerships, leaving occupations, social movements, quilombola peoples, and indigenous peoples again with fewer resources to secure their struggles.

Under these conditions, there emerged the need to rethink the basis of these struggles and to secure the necessary power to advance their politics through new ideas on sovereignty — sovereignty not necessarily as collective engagement with a national project, nor even sovereignty in the sense of coming together to secure the fair application of already-existing laws, but in a more autonomous sense, where the guarantee of access to the immediate conditions of subsistence and the reproduction of life are seen as necessary conditions for the effective pursuit of political aims. It is from this inversion — sovereignty as the material precondition of politics rather than as its juridical expression — that the popular sovereignty research stream takes its bearings.

Motivated by this debate, Alameda commissioned four theoretical interventions that engage with the question of sovereignty — both at the macro international level and at the immediate political dimension of social movements — and explore these questions in different directions. The first, by Maikel da Silveira,³ examines how the multiplication of uses of the term “sovereignty” in contemporary political discourse — across figures as

³ Maikel da Silveira, “Sovereignities,” *After Order project*, unpublished 2026.

disparate as Lula, Trump, and the security analysts who justify military interventions in Brazilian favelas — can be read not as a symptom of political confusion but as an effect of the structural dismantling of a specific historical alignment between capital, state, and nation. The second, by Renzo Comolatti, Victor Hugo Silva, Thiago Penna, and Pedro Perrone,⁴ analyzes the recent cycles of delivery courier mobilizations in Brazil — the *breques* — in order to reconstruct a history of Brazilian trade unionism from the perspective of how the consolidation of the labor movement under state mediation separated two political dimensions that had previously been unified: workers' *autonomy*, understood as the capacity for separation from subordinating structures, and workers' *sovereignty*, understood as the capacity to build the infrastructures that sustain struggle over time. The third, by Kássia Pedrosa, Rafael Saldanha, and Rafael Albuquerque,⁵ turns to the history of territorial struggles in Brazil, showing how the specificity of colonial and slave-based accumulation produced a dual tradition of resistance — one that operated within the collective resources of wage workers, and another that contested the separation of peoples from their means of subsistence as such, resisting the commodification of labor. The fourth contribution, by Rafique Reis,⁶ offers a political profile of the militant Neto Onirê Sankara, of the MST and Teia dos Povos, as a way of presenting what he describes as a “radical environmentalism of the peoples” — a perspective that reframes territorial struggle as the task of building interdependent sovereignties across heterogeneous communities.

Taken together, these four contributions raise a cluster of questions that the present paper attempts to systematize. How should we understand the contemporary proliferation of claims to sovereignty, not only as rhetorical appropriations but as symptoms of real structural transformation? How should we read the impasses of the contemporary forms of popular struggle — the exhaustion of the *breque*, the fragility of territorial victories, the seeming incapacity of movements to convert moments of intense mobilization into durable political power — not as isolated tactical failures but as indications of a shared historical condition? And how should we think about the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty themselves, once we can no longer presuppose the institutional mediations that once gave them a relatively stable meaning?

⁴ Renzo Comolatti, Victor Hugo Silva, Thiago Penna, and Pedro Perrone, “The Infrastructure of Refusal: Workers’ autonomy and sovereignty in the struggle of delivery couriers,” *After Order project*, unpublished 2026.

⁵ Kássia Pedrosa, Rafael Saldanha, and Rafael Albuquerque, “Territory, care and food sovereignty: perspectives on autonomy in the struggle for territory,” *After Order project*, unpublished 2026.

⁶ Rafique N. Reis, “Connecting communities, planting food, and building popular autonomy: MST, Teia dos Povos, and the struggle for land and territory from the perspective of Neto Onirê Sankara,” *After Order project*, unpublished 2026.

Our wager in what follows is that these four contributions — despite the very different terrains they examine — converge on a shared diagnosis. All of them read the current crisis of the nation-state, and of the political instruments historically associated with working-class and popular struggle, not as the onset of a historical disorder but as the *dismantling of an exceptional historical arrangement*. And all of them, in different ways, find themselves confronting the same practical problem: how to reconstruct the basis of popular power under conditions where the institutional mediations that once shielded movements from the full force of capitalist accumulation are no longer available.

This similarity reflects, as we shall try to show, a historical tendency that has been named and theorized, for several decades now, within a specific tradition of critical thought — the so-called “peripherization thesis,” developed most fully in Brazilian critical theory but with important antecedents and parallels in the broader Latin American tradition. The structure of this paper follows the logic of this diagnosis and of its implications for political thought. After presenting how the four commissioned contributions suggest a reading of the contemporary crisis as the dismantling of the nation-state paradigm of sovereignty, we turn to the theoretical tradition — from René Zavaleta Mercado, through Paulo Arantes, to Thiago Canetti’s systematization of the “peripheric condition” — that allows us to read this dismantling as the generalization of social forms that have always characterized capitalism at its peripheries.

Once we have a clear grasp of what the peripherization thesis entails, we turn our attention to a potential difficulty internal to this theoretical tradition: its tendency, when pushed to its conclusions, to close off the horizon of radical politics, leaving us with powerful diagnostic tools but without a language for the new political forms that are in fact emerging under these new social conditions. This serves as a motivation to introduce the theoretical apparatus developed by the communist collective Common Space of Organizations⁷. Reconstructing the basic tenets of their particular approach to peripheral capitalism, we propose a way to connect this powerful diagnosis to the political power of experiments such as the Web of the Peoples and the delivery app strikes.

⁷ The Common Space of Organizations (CSO) is a communist collective dedicated to the investigation and composition of political struggles. Although the collective has been developing its theoretical and organizational work for over ten years, it has operated under different names throughout this period — previously as the Circle of Studies of Idea and Ideology (CSII) and the Subset of Theoretical Practice (STP) — before consolidating its current form as CSO. Its framework is developed most fully in the book *Investigate, Compose, Continue* (www.espacocomum.org) and in Gabriel Tupinambá and Yuan Yao’s *Phenomenology of Capital* (Adjunctions, 2026). Further information about the collective’s publications, seminars, and ongoing investigations can be found at www.espacocomum.org and theoreticalpractice.com.

§2. Four investigations into contemporary sovereignties

Despite the diversity of their objects — from the philosophy of history to the ethnography of courier mobilizations — the four texts commissioned by Alameda share a common point of departure. Each of them, from its particular angle, encounters a variant of the same structural observation: what once made sovereignty thinkable as a relatively unified concept — a subject, a people, a state, exercising self-determination within a bounded territory — no longer holds. The question that animates all four contributions is not whether this dissolution is real, on which they are unanimous, but what exactly has been dissolved, and whether what emerges in its wake should be read as crisis, as decomposition, or as the revelation of a deeper historical condition.

The decomposition of the nation-state model

Maikel da Silveira's contribution, titled *Sovereignities*, begins with a multiple juxtaposition: the invocation of sovereignty by Donald Trump in defense of American tariff policy, by Lula in one of his recent addresses to the Brazilian nation on the need for economic self-determination, and by the logic of military intervention in Brazilian favelas, where the state asserts its monopoly on violence in territories it otherwise abandons. That the same word can be mobilized across such radically different political projects is, for Silveira, not a sign of conceptual confusion but a symptom of structural decomposition. Drawing on Kojin Karatani's theory of modes of exchange, Silveira proposes that what has come apart is a specific historical alignment between three relatively autonomous logics of social organization: capital (organized through commodity exchange), the state (organized through plunder and redistribution), and the nation (organized through reciprocity and the sentiment of belonging).⁸ In capitalism, these three modes form what Karatani calls a "Borromean knot" — a structure in which each component compensates for the crises of the others: the state redistributes to contain the inequality generated by the market; the nation provides the sense of belonging that buffers the legitimacy crises of the state; and so on.

⁸ Silveira draws here on Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (Duke University Press, 2014).

Silveira's key insight is that this trinomial worked — to the extent that it ever did — only during exceptional historical periods and contexts. The postwar “golden age” of the capitalist center, characterized by the combination of economic growth and the implementation of social rights, was one such period: a moment in which the alignment between capital, state, and nation was sustained, in part, by the imperialist exploitation of the periphery, which made it possible to maintain the domestic conditions for a functional welfare state.⁹ That alignment is now visibly breaking down: capital increasingly operates without needing the state to organize accumulation; the state can no longer absorb and redistribute enough to legitimize itself; and the nation, as a sentiment of reciprocity capable of holding together a diverse population, fragments into competing identity claims and reactionary appeals to lost sovereignty.

What follows from this decomposition is the multiplication of sovereignty claims that Silveira documents. Each political actor mobilizes one or more of the three logics against the crises produced by the others. Some invoke national sovereignty as a nostalgic appeal to a state that once protected them (Lula's rhetoric). Others invoke it as a justification for imperial assertion (Trump's tariffs). Still others dispense with the national form altogether, claiming sovereignty through the direct exercise of violence (narco-paramilitaries, parallel states). Silveira names these “desires for sovereignty” — sovereignties that “sometimes oppose each other, sometimes overlap, sometimes articulate themselves in a context where what ultimately reigns supreme is capital,” and that “operate within the limits of the Borromean knot formed by capital, state, and nation, and have no intention of leaving it.”¹⁰

But it is in the closing questions of his text that Silveira points toward the horizon that concerns us here. Can this multiplication of sovereignties really be seen as an anomaly, or does it make more sense to think that the postwar alignment — rather than the current disorder — was in fact the exception? And most importantly: what does popular sovereignty look like when it cannot find its form and means of expression in the nation-state structure?¹¹

⁹ On the relationship between the postwar alignment at the center and imperialist exploitation of the periphery, see Fernando Novais, *Portugal e Brasil na Crise do Antigo Sistema Colonial* (1777–1808) (Hucitec, 1979), and Francisco de Oliveira, *Crítica à razão dualista / O ornitorrinco* (Boitempo, 2003).

¹⁰ Silveira, “Sovereignties,” §4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, closing section.

The separation of autonomy and sovereignty in the labor movement

This crisis of sovereignty is perhaps felt most acutely in the domain of labor struggles. The contribution by Comolatti, Silva, Penna, and Perrone takes as its object the recent cycles of delivery courier mobilizations in Brazil — the *breques* — but it uses them to reconstruct a much longer political history, tracking how the consolidation of Brazilian trade unionism under the corporatist state ultimately separated two fundamental political dimensions of workers' power that, in earlier periods, had been more unified.

The authors distinguish between *autonomy* — the capacity to act apart from the institutions that organize work and life: state, capital, unions, churches — and *sovereignty* — the capacity to collectively determine one's own course and sustain that determination over time through shared material infrastructures.¹² In the early decades of the twentieth century, before the Vargas era, workers' associations in Brazil combined both functions: mutual-aid societies, anarchist unions, and other forms of popular self-organization served simultaneously as instruments of refusal and as material bases for the reproduction of struggle. What the Vargas corporatist system accomplished, through the creation of official unions, the labor code (CLT), and the Ministry of Labor, was the institutional absorption of the *sovereignty* dimension — the collective capacity to sustain decisions — into the state apparatus, while leaving *autonomy* — the capacity for refusal and disruption — largely in the hands of workers themselves. The union could sustain a strike; only the state, through its legal protections and redistributive mechanisms, could sustain the conditions under which workers could reproduce their lives while fighting and through whatever legal victories they secured.

The historical effect of this arrangement was to make workers' autonomy structurally dependent on a sovereignty that was no longer their own. As long as the corporatist system held — and as long as the progressive variants of this system, from the PT-era social policies to the more combative new-unionism of the 1980s, maintained some version of this coupling — the separation was manageable. But when this institutional infrastructure enters into crisis — when the mandatory union tax is abolished, when

¹² Comolatti, Silva, Penna, and Perrone, "The Infrastructure of Refusal," §3.

when this institutional infrastructure enters into crisis — when the mandatory union tax is abolished, when informal labor exceeds formal employment, when the gig economy produces a workforce that never had access to official union structures in the first place — what collapses is not only a particular organizational form, the combative trade union, but the entire coupling between workers' capacity to refuse and their capacity to endure.

The courier *breques* dramatize this decoupling. The mobilizations of 2020 and 2025 demonstrated an impressive capacity for disruption: thousands of couriers, coordinating through WhatsApp, shutting down deliveries across entire metropolitan regions. But each time, the movement proved unable to sustain the field of force generated by the mobilization. The companies could simply wait: "the true cost of refusal does not lie in saying yes or no at the negotiation table, but in being unable to sustain the field of force generated by the mobilization."¹³ What the couriers lack is not the will to refuse, nor the capacity for collective action, but the *infrastructure* that would allow refusal to acquire duration — the material conditions that would make it possible to remain mobilized after the crowd disperses, to hold an autonomous position without time, income, or energy. Something that, in the current context of dismantling of labor rights and state power, regular trade unions would not be able to offer them anyway.

What *The Infrastructure of Refusal* shows is that some of the most important impasses of labor movements today do not stem from some ideological failure — as if they lack radical programs, revolutionary ambitions or anything similar — but rather from the organizational burden that falls on their collective action once a certain historical arrangement, mediated by the nation-state, collapses. Such historical collapse, as the authors note, "does not break with a past of inclusion; rather, it returns the working class to the historical position it never really left: that of an autonomous, informal, racialized majority that has always fought outside the state's guarantees."¹⁴

Territorial struggles and the property-form

If the crisis of state-mediated sovereignty poses a specific challenge for labor struggles, the contribution by Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque shows us that territorial struggles

¹³ Ibid., §1.

¹⁴ Ibid., §4.

in Brazil have always confronted another version of this same challenge — one that, in many ways, highlights the limits and challenges of workers' organizations against capital.

Their text, *Territory, care and food sovereignty: perspectives on autonomy in the struggle for territory* begins by noting a crucial historical specificity of the Brazilian case. In European history, the enclosure of the commons and the creation of a propertyless class of laborers presupposed a prior regime of property relations that could be violently reorganized. In colonial Brazil, the situation was different: indigenous peoples did not have a proprietary relation with the land, and the abundance of territory meant that even the colonial project could not fully enclose the means of production that it had to control in order to produce a dispossessed population. The property-form itself had to be *imposed*, and since land could not be made captive through juridical means alone — there was always more land beyond the colonial reach — it was people who had to be made captive instead. As José de Souza Martins writes, in a sharp formula the authors mobilize: “if, under the land grant regime, that of free land, the worker had to be captive, under a regime of free labour, the land had to be captive.”¹⁵

This historical condition gave rise to a dual tradition of resistance. One tradition, which the authors associate with the labor movement in a broad sense, operates within the social order produced by colonization and capitalist development, seeking to improve the terms of inclusion — better wages, more rights, greater representation — while looking to break away with this system from within. The other tradition, which the authors, drawing on the work of the militant intellectuals Erahsto Felício and Joelson Ferreira, call the “political tradition of the peoples,” act to contest the very separation that the property-form effects — the separation of land from life, of production from reproduction, of the individual from the community. These struggles, which are as old as the arrival of Europeans in these shores, include centuries of resistance against commodification, through

¹⁵ José de Souza Martins, *O cativo da terra* (Hucitec, 1986), cited in Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque, “Territory, care and food sovereignty,” §1.

quilombos, indigenous land *reconquistas*, all the way to the contemporary Teia dos Povos, and what they have in common is that they “do not separate the means of production from the individuals, because they refuse the property-form as a limiting boundary.”¹⁶

This refusal has a consequence that goes beyond the question of land ownership. If territory is not reducible to property, then the sovereignty of a territory cannot be reducible to juridical control over a bounded space. It involves, first of all, a new way to look at one’s relation to the land, as both a symbolic space as well as a source of rhythms and determinations that we must subordinate to and negotiate with. The authors examine how, what looks from the outside as a resistance against the commodification of land and labor becomes, within a territory, a very different social space: as production and reproduction are entangled, a series of divisions that are characteristic of modern societies disappear: care work, the role of children, the very conception of nature changes — evidently filtered by different traditions and cultural histories, themselves developed within this different relation to land, production and nature.

Perhaps one of the most counter-intuitive aspects of this organizational shift discussed in the text is the insight that, in this context, autonomy and sovereignty are not a matter of independence and control. As the authors argue, in most territories that resist commodification, autonomy implies a form of *dependence* to material conditions, while sovereignty implies a form of *interdependence* across communities: a territory is not a self-sufficient enclave but a node in a network of dependencies — on water, on seeds, on climate, on other territories — that cannot be fenced. Food sovereignty, for example, is not the capacity to produce everything a community needs within its own borders but the capacity to sustain relations of exchange and mutual aid that do not pass through the market or the state, reinforcing the resistance against commodification in a double movement of refusing and enduring.

Grounding popular sovereignty

The fourth contribution, *Connecting communities, planting food, and building popular autonomy: MST, Teia dos Povos, and the struggle for land and territory from the perspective*

¹⁶ Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque, “Territory, care and food sovereignty,” §4

of *Neto Onirê Sankara*, by Rafique Reis, extends this logic by presenting, through the political trajectory of Neto, an organizational form that attempts to put this insight into practice. Where the other three texts document the dismantling of historical arrangements and the impasses that follow, Reis's profile of Neto reveals a political intelligence that has already drawn the consequences of this dismantling and is working to build something on the terrain it has exposed.

Neto's trajectory is itself instructive. Raised in the urban periphery, he returned to the countryside as a teenager to join the Carlos Marighella Settlement — an MST occupation in southern Bahia founded in 1999 under conditions of intense repression, eviction orders, and paramilitary violence. The formative experience was not merely one of resistance but of collective construction: assemblies where every member of the community — "cats, dogs, parrots, boys, girls, everyone," as Neto puts it — participated in decisions about the daily organization of life, from the chicken that escaped into a neighbor's yard to the planning of harvests and the coordination of self-defense. It was within this structure that Neto came to a conclusion that would orient his later political work: "only we can solve our problems. The collective is capable of resolving its demands. Its fear is overcome by collective strength." Sovereignty, in this account, is not a juridical abstraction but a practical achievement — the capacity of a community to sustain its own decisions over time through shared material means. In Neto's words: "my rebelliousness is directly linked to my autonomy. If I am able to store food for a year, I can be rebellious for a year."¹⁷

But for Neto, securing the means of resistance is not itself sufficient. A central motif in Reis's portrait is Neto's insistence that the movement must not only defend what it has but actively build and advance. This is the strategic significance he assigns to food sovereignty: it is not merely the ability to feed oneself — it is the organizational engine through which a community builds its collective capacity:

"In order to produce food, we need to have land, we need to have a place to live. But in order to fight, we need to have food stored. [...] To produce a farm without machinery infrastructure, the most efficient tool is collective action, and to have this collectivity, there must be a sense of community."

¹⁷ Neto Onirê Sankara, *Formação Política #3: Autonomia desde o Território* (2021), cited in Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque, §4.

Food sovereignty, in this formulation, is the link between subsistence and political power: producing food collectively requires organizing labor, which requires community, which requires the very bonds of solidarity and mutual obligation that make political action possible. Sovereignty is not just the result of political organization, but also its material precondition and its daily exercise.

It is from this practical insight that Neto's engagement with the Teia dos Povos acquires its larger significance. The Teia — a network of articulation encompassing MST settlements, quilombola communities, indigenous territories, and urban periphery organizations — proposes not a unified movement under a single program but a "web" whose strength lies in the diversity of its nodes and the density of the connections between them. Its formulation of sovereignty is explicitly plural: *Por Terra e Território*, a book written by Joelson Ferreira and Erahsto Felício, identifies at least six dimensions of sovereignty — water, food, energy, labor, education, and self-defense — each of which must be constructed through collective work and none of which can be guaranteed by the state alone. As Neto puts it: "Teia does not propose unanimity or uniformity, because it is in our differences that we fight. It is a well-defined tactical alliance: we are different, we are in different territories, but we have the same enemies and the same goals."

Building on the Web of the Peoples experience, and combining it with the long history of radical agrarian struggles, Neto articulated what he calls a "radical environmentalism of the peoples", which associates the localized construction of sovereignty back to a larger strategic horizon. For Neto, there is no possibility of protecting nature without freeing the land from capitalist exploitation, in this process, it is the communities who steward the land through non-commodity relations who become, by that very fact, a privileged political actor, as guardians not only of their own autonomy but of the conditions of life in general. A tree that is planted, a river that is preserved, an agroecological farm that replaces monoculture — these are not merely local achievements of particular communities. They are contributions to the reproduction of planetary conditions of survival. In Neto's vision, this gives territorial peoples — peasants, indigenous communities, quilombolas — a claim to a universal political point of view that has traditionally been reserved for industrial workers as the subjects of anti-capitalist struggle. The radical environmentalism of the peoples is, in this sense, both a practical program — occupy the land of those who are destroying the conditions of life, turn it over to agroecological production — and an authorization to care

for the earth beyond the fences of one's own territory, linking the struggle for land to urban workers' struggles and to the struggle for the continuity of life itself.

A shared diagnosis

The four texts, read together, compose a single diagnostic arc. *Sovereignties* provides the structural backdrop: the Borromean knot of capital, state, and nation that sustained the classical paradigm of sovereignty is unraveling. *The Infrastructure of Refusal* then focuses on what this unraveling means from the inside of the labor movement: a separation between the capacity to refuse and the capacity to endure that leaves workers powerful in the moment of disruption but fragile in its aftermath. *Territory, care and food sovereignty* shows that, from the standpoint of territorial struggles, the dependency on state mediations that the labor movement now mourns was always a vulnerability — one that a different tradition of struggle, the “struggles of the peoples,” has contested from the beginning. And Reis's profile of Neto Onirê Sankara shows what a political practice looks like that has already drawn the consequences of this analysis: the construction of interdependent sovereignties that do not depend on, and do not wait for, the state to intermediate and store popular power.

What we shall now try to show is that these underlying commonalities are not accidental — they reflect a shared structural condition that a specific tradition of critical thought has been naming and theorizing for several decades: the condition of *peripherization*.

§3. Capitalism from a peripheral point of view

The diagnosis offered by Silveira in his contribution — that the current crisis of the nation-state should be read not as the onset of disorder but as the end of an exceptional period — is far from an isolated gesture. It belongs to a theoretical tradition, developed largely but not exclusively in Brazil, which has been arguing for decades that what appears from the perspective of the capitalist center as a degradation of social and political forms is, from the perspective of its peripheries, a generalization of conditions that have always been constitutive of modern capitalist accumulation. This tradition, which has come to be known

constitutive of modern capitalist accumulation. This tradition, which has come to be known as “peripheric condition” or “peripherization thesis,” provides us with a unified framework for interpreting a wide array of symptoms that otherwise seem to pull in different directions: the dismantling of the trade-union form, the persistence of land struggles, the proliferation of non-state sovereigns, the erosion of state mediations, and the growing sense that what were once exceptional modes of capitalist operation are now becoming general features of social life.¹⁸

The thesis takes quite distinct forms for different authors, but they share a basic theoretical commitment, which was already present in dependence theory: the refusal to treat the periphery of capitalism as a backward or incomplete version of the core social formations. Rather than positing a linear temporality in which developed capitalist countries represent the future toward which the periphery is slowly moving, or even a site of imperialist/counter-imperialist struggle, the peripherization thesis proposes that we effectively invert the vector of historical analysis. In a world marked by the exhaustion of the mechanisms of social integration that characterized the capitalist center during its exceptional twentieth-century moment, what was once peculiar to the fringes of the system now offers the most accurate model of its dominant tendencies. As Roberto Schwarz put it already in 1987, in a formulation that would come to anchor much of the subsequent Brazilian critical tradition: “in place of the much-desired Europeanization or Americanization of Latin America, what we are witnessing is the Latin-Americanization of the central cultures.”¹⁹

One of the earliest — and often undiscussed — conceptual contributions to this line of thought comes from the Bolivian Marxist René Zavaleta Mercado. Examining the social formations of the Andean region, and in dialogue with the political experience of the Bolivian working and indigenous movements of the 1970s and early 1980s, Zavaleta coined the term *sociedad abigarrada* — imperfectly rendered into English as “motley

¹⁸ The refusal to treat the periphery as a backward or incomplete version of the center already animates the dependency theory tradition from Ruy Mauro Marini to Francisco de Oliveira. For a useful overview of the earlier tradition, see Francisco de Oliveira, *Crítica à razão dualista / O ornitorrinco* (Boitempo, 2003). What the authors we discuss here add to this earlier tradition is an argument about the direction of historical transformation: rather than showing that the periphery operates under its own logics of super-exploitation, they argue that these logics are now becoming the general condition of the system as a whole.

¹⁹ Roberto Schwarz, *Que horas são?* (Companhia das Letras, 1987), p. 36.

society” or “variegated society” — to name a formation in which different modes of production, different temporalities of social reproduction, and different systems of political authority coexist without being subsumed under a single organizing principle.²⁰ In describing Bolivia as an *abigarrada* formation, Zavaleta was not merely observing cultural diversity. He was naming a condition in which multiple social logics — each carrying its own temporality, its own normative order, its own material base — are superimposed on the same territory without any of them achieving the capacity to synthesize the others into a coherent whole.²¹ The state apparatus in such a formation is what Zavaleta calls an *Estado aparente* — an “apparent state” — a political power juridically sovereign over a territory but without organic relation with the populations it claims to govern and sometimes without the means to effectively impose this purported sovereign claim.²²

The significance of Zavaleta’s concept for our argument lies in how it forces us to rethink the relation between capitalism and heterogeneity. For most of the twentieth century, the Marxist tradition tended to assume that capitalism would progressively subsume all other social forms into its own logic, producing, over time, a homogeneous social space organized by the value form. Zavaleta’s claim is not that this subsumption fails in the periphery but that, in the periphery, capitalist domination operates without needing to produce such homogeneity — indeed, often by actively benefiting from the preservation of heterogeneous social spaces that can be alternately exploited and abandoned as circumstances demand. Social heterogeneity, from this perspective, is not a residue of incomplete modernization but a constitutive feature of peripheral capitalist formations. It is precisely this conceptual inversion — heterogeneity as structure rather than as developmental lag — that provides the theoretical vocabulary on which subsequent formulations of the peripherization thesis would build.

²⁰ Zavaleta develops the concept across several works, most systematically in *Las masas en noviembre* (1983) and the posthumous *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* (1986). For English-language discussions, see Luis Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local* (Muela del Diablo, 2002), and the critical edition edited by Anne Freeland, *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia* (Seagull Books, 2018). For a Portuguese-language introduction, see Rodrigo Santaella Gonçalves, “Autodeterminação das massas em uma sociedade ‘abigarrada’,” *REBELA* 2, no. 1 (2012).

²¹ “If Bolivia is said to be an *abigarrada* formation, it is because in it economic epochs have been superimposed without combining too much, as if feudalism belonged to one culture and capitalism to another and yet they occurred on the same stage [...] true temporal densities mixed together not only among themselves in the most varied ways, but also with the particularism of each region, because here each valley is a homeland, in a compound in which each people dresses, sings, eats, and produces in its own particular way, and they speak different languages and accents without any of them being able to call itself, for even an instant, the universal language of all.” Zavaleta Mercado, *Las masas en noviembre* (Juventud, 1983), p. 16.

²² The concept of the *Estado aparente* is developed in Zavaleta (1983) and systematized by Luis Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local* (2002), p. 306.

It is the philosopher Paulo Arantes who, beginning with his essay *The Brazilian Fracture of the World* (2004) and developed most fully in the essays collected in *O novo tempo do mundo* (2014), gives this insight its most forceful historical and philosophical articulation.²³

Arantes's starting point is the observation that the critical tradition of the twentieth century presupposed a historical time structured by what he calls the "temporalization of history": a progressive movement in which the contradictions of the present were expected to push historical development forward, toward a future that still promised the possibility of a radically different social order. What distinguishes Arantes's analysis from other diagnostics of "the end of history" or "presentism" is that he does not treat the exhaustion of this progressive expectation as the interruption of an otherwise functioning modernity. On the contrary: he reads its decline as a consummation of tendencies that were present in modern capitalism from the beginning — tendencies that appeared first in its peripheries because it was there that capitalist accumulation never relied on the mediations of progress, development, and political inclusion that characterized the central formations.

The crisis-as-government that Europe and North America now face is therefore less a deviation from the path of development than a "brazilianization" of central cultures — a phrase that, in Arantes's hands, ceases to be a metaphor and becomes a structural thesis about the direction of contemporary capitalist transformation. Reconstructing the different diagnoses of a "third-worldization" of large capitalist metropolises — increasingly confronted with irreparable social fractures — Arantes proposes that the laboratory of the techniques of social management most appropriate to contemporary capitalism is to be found in the peripheral social formations, and that these techniques are expanding toward the center as its own historical configuration exhausts itself. The peripheral social formation, to use a Hegelian turn of phrase, gives the truth of developed societies because it is there that the techniques of control and exploitation of labor most appropriate to contemporary capitalist development are actually formed.

Arantes's argument is extended and systematized in Thiago Canetti's *A condição*

²³ Paulo Arantes, "A fratura brasileira do mundo," in *Zero à esquerda* (Conrad, 2004); Paulo Arantes, *O novo tempo do mundo e outros estudos sobre a era da emergência* (Boitempo, 2014). For a detailed reconstruction of the argument and its Hegelian presuppositions, see Gabriel Tupinambá, "A thinker at the periphery of history: the peripheric Hegelianism of Paulo Arantes," *Revista Porto Alegre*.

periférica (2020), which develops what the author terms the “becoming-periphereic” of the world.²⁴ If Arantes identifies the historical and philosophical direction of the process, Canettieri provides its spatial and economic anatomy, leading him to the conclusion that the structural features that define peripheral social formations — the incomplete commodification of labor, the overlap of legal and extra-legal property regimes, the centrality of violence as a mediator of social relations, the permanent precariousness of everyday life — are not secondary effects of a capitalism that works properly elsewhere. They are, rather, the most adequate expression of what capital actually requires in order to reproduce itself. As the labor society that was the hallmark of central capitalist modernity enters into its protracted crisis, the “periphereic form” becomes the criterion of sociability for capitalism as a whole.

The symptoms of this shift are abundant, and they transcend the traditional boundary between center and periphery: the return of Victorian-style slums in London, the growth of homeless encampments in the heart of Paris, the explosion of poverty in Germany, the disorderly precariousness of gig labor everywhere. In Canettieri’s reading, the periphereic condition does not simply “extend” from the periphery to the center; it reveals the periphereic logic as internal to capital itself. The “center” was never anything other than a temporary and exceptional configuration that depended on the intensive exploitation of the peripheries for its own apparent stability. As that exploitation reaches its limits — as the possibilities of externalization narrow — the periphereic condition returns, not as an invader from the outside but as a truth that was always already constitutive of capitalist sociality. “We are witnessing,” writes Canettieri, “an inflection of the moment of the planetarization of capital. The world market that Marx had in mind has finally unfolded to such an extent that it begins to face its own monsters: its internal limit, calling into question its capacity for externalization.”²⁵

It is important to note that, while we have presented the peripherization thesis through its most developed Latin American articulations, the core insight — that the periphery reveals structural features of capitalism that the center’s exceptional conditions have obscured — has been independently formulated across a wide range of critical traditions.

²⁴ Thiago Canettieri, *A condição periférica: uma crítica da economia política do espaço em paralaxe* (Consequência, 2020).

²⁵ Canettieri (2020), p. 141.

In the African context, we find an analogous “turn of the screw” as the one between dependence theory and the peripherization thesis, taking place. For example, works like Walter Rodney’s classic *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) had already established that European development and African underdevelopment are not separate histories but two sides of a single process. And so the effect of a work such as Jean and John Comaroff’s *Theory from the South* (2012) is also that of pushing the “uneven and combined” framework further, as they argue that it is Africa, not Europe, that now provides the most adequate model for understanding the direction of contemporary social transformation — that “Euro-America is evolving toward Africa,” not the other way around.²⁶ Tracking the development of another set of Marxist ideas, Harry Harootunian’s *Marx After Marx* (2015) reconstructs how Japanese, Chinese, and Indian Marxists — from the debates of the 1920s and 1930s on the persistence of feudalism within capitalist development, through Jairus Banaji’s recovery of formal subsumption in the Indian context — arrived independently at a remarkably convergent conclusion: that the coexistence of archaic and modern social forms within capitalist production is not a sign of incomplete development but a general feature of how capital actually operates, and that what was exported to the periphery as “backwardness” was in reality capital’s own law of uneven development, concealed within its core formations.²⁷

Within the developed capitalist countries themselves, the fracture between metropolitan centers and their own internal peripheries has become a central object of social and political analysis. In France, Christophe Guilluy’s work on “peripheral France” documents how globalization has reproduced within a single national territory the same cleavage between a protected, dynamic core and an abandoned, precarious margin that dependency theorists once described as a feature of the international division of labor.²⁸

²⁶ Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), p. 1. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle-L’Ouverture, 1972). See also Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017), particularly his analysis of the “becoming-Black of the world.”

²⁷ Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2015). See especially chs. 5–7 on the Japanese historiographical debates and ch. 8 on Banaji’s intervention in Indian Marxism. Harootunian’s central claim — that formal subsumption is not a transitional stage but the general rule of capitalist development — runs parallel to the peripherization thesis, even if it arrives at this conclusion through the history of Marxist thought rather than through the analysis of contemporary social formations.

²⁸ Christophe Guilluy, *Twilight of the Elites: Prosperity, the Periphery, and the Future of France* (Yale University Press, 2019). Guilluy’s concept of “peripheral France” describes a territory that accounts for a majority of the working-class population but remains invisible to metropolitan elites and to the statistical categories that organize public policy.

The working class, silently expelled from the major cities by real estate prices and the restructuring of the labor market, finds itself in a condition that resonates — in its precariousness, its invisibility to state policy, and its political volatility — with the peripheral forms described by the traditions we have been discussing. These similarities, arising from intellectual traditions that have not always been in explicit dialogue with one another, suggest that the peripherization thesis names something that exceeds any particular regional experience: a structural tendency of contemporary capitalism that manifests itself, with different intensities and different local colorations, across the global system as a whole. What binds this broader constellation together — and what justifies our treating it as a coherent tradition — is a shared theoretical commitment that breaks with two dominant narratives of twentieth-century critical thought. On the one hand, the peripherization thesis rejects the developmentalist assumption, shared by liberal modernization theory and a significant portion of the Marxist tradition, that the periphery names a temporal lag that will be overcome through the expansion of capitalist development. On the other hand, it equally rejects the opposite assumption, present in certain strands of dependency theory and world-systems analysis, that the periphery can be understood simply as the exploited underside of a fundamentally center-driven process. The peripherization thesis claims, against both positions, that the periphery is where capitalism has always revealed its most adequate operational logic — and that, as the exceptional postwar configuration of the capitalist center dissolves, this logic is becoming the general condition of the system as a whole.

Read from this perspective, the dismantling of the nation-state that Maikel da Silveira identifies, the crisis of trade unionism that Comolatti, Silva, Penna, and Perrone describe, the persistence of territorial struggles that Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque analyze, and the construction of *Teia dos Povos* and the “radical environmentalism of the peoples” that Reis documents through Neto Onirê Sankara — all these phenomena cease to appear as disconnected symptoms. They are, rather, so many indices of a single structural transformation: the generalization of the peripheric form as the dominant logic of capitalist social reproduction in our historical moment. For the purposes of a research stream dedicated to popular sovereignties, this framework legitimizes our initial hypothesis that movements forged under peripheral conditions may be in a privileged position to anticipate the challenges that political movements elsewhere are beginning to face, and it invites us to take seriously the idea that the strategic lessons of Brazilian, Latin American,

and broadly peripheral social movements may have something to teach political traditions elsewhere that are only now beginning to confront the dissolution of the mediations — the trade union, the welfare state, the progressive nation — that once shielded them from the full force of peripheric capitalism.

The peripherization thesis, as we have reconstructed it, offers a powerful unified framework for reading the phenomena described in the four commissioned texts. It explains why the nation-state paradigm of sovereignty is being dismantled, why the trade-union form is in crisis, why territorial struggles persist, and why these apparently disparate processes can be seen as part of a similar structural feature.

And yet there is a difficulty internal to this tradition, and specially to its intellectual and political reception, that we must engage with now. In simple terms, the issue is that since most of our theoretical resources for analyzing social reality were either developed or established under premisses that the general structure of capitalism was the one presented in core countries, we often take the theoretical stance of treating this particular moment as an orderly and structured one, and the rise of these peripheral features as an increase in disorder and chaos. This leads us, ultimately, to the paradoxical situation of concluding that capitalism is showing its true colors at the same time that we have no theoretical clarity over what is going on. And when we lack the means to analyse a conjuncture more structurally, we tend to personalize intentions, lose our capacity to distinguish what aspects of the new situation stem from its underlying features and which are the product of active political forces, as well as our capacity to evaluate which political processes are effectively challenging this new predicament and which are working within its confines.

Maikel da Silveira's text is already an attempt to counteract this tendency, through his mobilization of Karatani's theory. Following a certain tradition within world-systems theory, Karatani begins by assuming that capitalism is a polymorphous social formation, made up of a mixture of structures. This allows him to distinguish the cases where these "modes of intercourse", as he calls them, reinforce one another, and cases where they operate with greater autonomy and internal conflict, even if still ultimately reproducing the fundamental tenets of capitalist accumulation and domination. What might look like an overly theoretical step back from the particular situations Silveira is analyzing is in fact a necessary detour, back to the problem of the theoretical framework we will employ to navigate these different claims to sovereignty today. Without it, one might simply conclude that this polysemy is the

product of a social form in disarray and learn nothing about structural changes we are witnessing today. A similar impetus is at stake in *The Infrastructure of Refusal*, which again challenges the idea that we are confronted today merely with a “formless” working class, that therefore is only capable of equally formless revolts. The text is capable of identifying specific challenges that contemporary workers’ movements face precisely because it avoids treating the social terrain as a chaotic and disordered one, but one where components no longer reinforce one another — state, communities, capital-labor relations — in the same way, requiring new organizational solutions. Without a framework capable of treating peripheric capitalism as a native and well-behaved structure, it is therefore impossible to produce both deeper critical analysis as well as rigorous assessments of political power. If no theory of sovereignty remains “after order”, then no account of popular sovereignty will be possible as well.

§4. Peripherization as a constructive theory

To move past this impasse, we need a more precise account of what the peripheric condition actually is — one that could not only tell the story of the rise and fall of the nation-state as one of exception, against the backdrop of peripheral capitalism, but that could reconstruct this exceptional arrangement as a particular case of a broader structure.

This is the contribution we draw from the work of the Common Space of Organizations (CSO), a communist collective whose theoretical framework offers a way to reformulate the peripherization thesis in terms that are not only diagnostic but also politically productive.²⁹

Working alongside, and from within, contemporary social movements in Brazil and elsewhere — courier mobilizations, urban occupations, communist collectives, agrarian struggles — CSO developed a conceptual apparatus capable of registering the heterogeneity of contemporary struggles without flattening their differences into a uniform

²⁹ The framework summarized in this section draws primarily on *Investigate, Compose, Continue* (available at www.espacocomum.org), which presents the collective’s analysis in accessible terms, and on Gabriel Tupinambá and Yuan Yao’s *Phenomenology of Capital* (Adjunctions, 2026), which formalizes the conceptual architecture in detail.

model. Our purpose in mobilizing this framework here is not to expound it in detail but to draw on the resources it offers for the specific theoretical task we have identified: giving the peripheric condition the kind of structural specification that the tradition we have surveyed lacks.

The point of departure that CSO shares with Silveira's contribution is a claim about the structure of capitalist social formations. Following a tradition that runs through Polanyi, Wallerstein, and most fully Karatani, CSO holds that capitalism is not organized by a single dominant logic onto which all other dimensions of social life can be reduced as derivative or "superstructural." It is a composite formation, articulating three relatively autonomous logics that operate simultaneously on the same terrain — each carrying its own internal dynamics, each capable of organizing social life on its own terms, each combining with the others, in concrete formations, into the specific configurations that constitute distinct historical worlds.

CSO names these three logics those of value, property, and affinity. The logic of value organizes social life through commodity exchange, subordinating human activity to the production of value. Its normative structure is that of impersonal tendencies — the pressures of competition, price, and profitability — rather than laws or customs; its hierarchical form is that of social classes; its collective expression is the market, a space in which relations between people take the form of relations between things. The logic of property organizes social life through hierarchical allocation and juridical order. Its normative structure is that of laws; its hierarchical form is that of status; its collective expression is the state. The logic of affinity organizes social life through communitarian reciprocity — through bonds of kinship, mutual aid, recognition, and shared identity. Its normative structure is that of customs and rules; its hierarchical form is that of honor or recognition; its collective expression is the community in its many forms.

Logic	Organizes social life through	Normative structure	Hierarchical form	Collective expression
Value	Commodity exchange	Tendencies	Social classes	Market
Property	Hierarchical allocation and juridical order	Laws	Status	State
Affinity	Communitarian reciprocity	Customs and rules	Honor / recognition	Community

These three logics are not levels of a single system arranged hierarchically — the economic base, the political superstructure, the cultural sphere of certain Marxist traditions. They are distinct forms of social organization, each with its own consistency requirements, each capable of building stable structures from the raw material of social life. In any concrete situation — a workplace, a household, a neighborhood, a land occupation, a strike — all three are present. What differs across social formations is how they are articulated to one another and which of them comes to dominate the others.

But how do we define dominance then? Two complementary characterizations give it concrete content. From one angle, a logic is dominant when it organizes most of the social fabric — when its connections are responsible for most of the integration that holds the formation together: there is no capitalism without private property, without white supremacy and other forms of segregation, without the heteronormative organization of social reproduction; yet it is through the logic of value that the entire world economy is interconnected³⁰. The other two logics are present and necessary, but value's reach is what determines integration across the capitalist formation as a whole. From another angle, dominance can be specified by the number of reinforced layers of each logic's internal architecture. CSO calls this "organizational depth": the number of irreducible levels of internal structure that a logic has built through its own operations, where each level addresses a problem the previous level could not resolve, and absorbs deviations through its own self-correcting mechanisms. Under capitalism, the logic of value has built a remarkably deep internal hierarchy — the commodity form, the money form, the credit system, the mechanism of competition, the circuit of accumulation — and this depth is what allows it to reach so deep and wide into the globe. Property, in modern juridical orders, has its own depth, organized through the layered hierarchy of contract, court, sovereign, and constitution; but this depth is shallower than value's, since most of these structures regulate dynamics that are the product of capital's own dynamics. Affinity, or community building, under capitalism, often has very little intrinsic depth at all, having been actively dismantled by enclosure, colonization, and commodification.

³⁰ CSO. The full passage runs: "there is no capitalism without private property, without white supremacy, and without heteronormativity ensuring social reproduction — yet it is through the logic of value that the entire world economy is interconnected."

A logic with greater organizational depth has more levels of internal structure to absorb perturbations, more mechanisms for maintaining its coherence, and therefore greater capacity to extend its consistency requirements across the social fabric without being disrupted by the operations of other logics. Conversely, a logic with little depth depends on others for its stable operation, and its forms collapse if the dominant logic withdraws its support. We can then define the following: a logic's depth is *intrinsic* when it is sustained by the logic's own internal operations and its depth is *scaffolded* when its forms are produced and stabilized not by its own internal mechanisms but by higher-order structures of the dominant logic that fixate them in place. The distinction has empirical consequences: intrinsic depth survives the instabilities of other logics, while scaffolded depth collapses.

The triad nation—state—capital that organizes Karatani's analysis, and that Silveira mobilizes in his contribution, can now be read with greater precision. Under capitalist modernity, capital is dominant in both senses we have specified: its connections integrate the social fabric, and its internal architecture has the most levels of self-sustaining structure. The state, as it appears in modernity, has some intrinsic depth in the logic of property — the layered hierarchy of contract, court, sovereign, and constitution is a genuine compositional achievement — but its concrete operation depends heavily on the logic of value, which allows it to forego direct violent coercion and rely on economic coercion to sustain its own structures. It is value's circuits that produce the tax base, the monetary system, and the productive economy that make the modern state a viable apparatus, and many of the state's central operations — regulation of credit, organization of labor markets, management of currencies — presuppose value's deeper hierarchy. The state, on this account, is not a purely scaffolded structure, it has some organizational depth — layers of hierarchy that are internally dependent — but its capacity to function as the integrative apparatus that gave it its modern political form deeply depends on its alignment with capital.

The nation, by contrast, is a paradigmatic case of a scaffolded form. There is no autonomous process within the logic of affinity that produces the form of the nation: the nation is, strangely enough, a first-order affinity structure, a common ground or bounded "we," but it is constructed from higher-order property and value determinations that precede it. This is why it is called an "imagined community": we can't decompose it into smaller units that make up a nation — smaller and larger forms of community, from family, to different peoples, to humanity as such — are quite independent of the nation-form, which

often clashes with these other determinations. National belonging is sustained by the legal infrastructure of the state and the economic infrastructure of the market; if those withdraw, the nation has little autonomous communal depth to fall back on. The point is not that nations are unreal — they are obviously powerful social forms — but that their social reality is mostly borrowed. A useful test of the difference is to ask what would actually be destroyed by the disappearance of the structure in question: if a nation were to dissolve, the languages, religious belongings, regional and ethnic identifications, customs, and family ties it appears to host would, in the main, persist — sustained by their own separate internal organizations.

With this in mind, CSO's framework defines the difference between *aligned* and *misaligned* social spaces. Alignment names the configuration in which the depth of subordinate logics is primarily scaffolded by the dominant one — in which value, property, and affinity reinforce one another under value's hierarchy, in which the modern worker is at once a proletarian (value), a citizen (property), and a national subject (affinity), and in which these three positions support one another's reproduction. CSO calls this configuration *modernity*, and it is the configuration in which the figure of the worker can appear as the natural form of the "modern political subject". Misalignment names the configuration in which the three logics no longer support one another in this way — in which subordinate logics retain intrinsic depth that is not coordinated by the dominant one, in which value continues to organize commodity production but does not, on its own, integrate the conditions of social reproduction with the legal regimes that govern property and the communal forms that sustain identity. This is the fundamental social structure of the "peripheral condition".

This also means that peripheral capitalism is indeed the general social form — after all, social misalignment is not the exceptional case. There are more ways for different social logics to build relative autonomy than there are for them to cohere into a single structure. We can reach this conclusion purely from a combinatorial and structural perspective, but we can also reason from the more immediate structure of capitalism itself. Capital requires as commodities certain things that it does not itself produce: labor, land, and money — what Polanyi called fictive commodities.³¹ Labor is reproduced through the logic of affinity

³¹ The concept of the fictive commodity is developed in Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1944). CSO's extension of Polanyi is to read the structural impossibility of fully commodifying labor, land, and money as a claim about the necessary coexistence of multiple social logics within capitalism itself, rather than as a sociological observation about the disruptive effects of market expansion.

(kinship, care, community); land is organized through the logic of property (enclosures, titles, legal regimes, customary rights); money is monopolized and regulated through state means that no commercial mechanism can create on its own. For these to circulate as commodities, they must be subordinated to the logic of value — but they cannot be entirely produced through it. As CSO writes:

"These commodities must undergo a specific type of process in order to exist as value-bearing commodities: they must be fenced off, their community ties broken, so that they can then be presented on the market. [...] If this happens, then capitalism must necessarily operate in a misaligned manner somewhere."³²

And this is evidently confirmed by the correlation between extractivism and misalignment: the very same spaces where capital requires commodification of land and labor to expand, we consistently find social misalignment between its three constitutive logics. The aligned condition is therefore not a neutral baseline but a parasite on misalignment: the alignment of the metropolitan worker is ultimately purchased by the misalignment of the colonized periphery, where the work of subordinating land and people to the property and value forms is continuously, and violently, carried out.

Subordinate logics, under misalignment, retain real organizational depth — and that depth is not, by default, a threat to capital's reproduction. Very often it is precisely what makes that reproduction possible under conditions where the dominant logic alone cannot sustain coherence. A solidarity network reproduces labor power below the cost of formal welfare; a parallel property regimes — sustained by "parallel states" — moves commodities through informal channels; a religious or ethnic community holds together a population that the labor market alone could not have integrated. Autonomous subordinate structures can do work that capital itself benefits from, without thereby ceasing to be autonomous. What capital requires is not the absence of intrinsic depth in subordinate logics but its containment within thresholds compatible with its own reproduction.

The geographical structure that the peripherization thesis describes also acquires precise content within this framework. Aligned spaces correspond to what the dependency tradition

³² *Investigate, Compose, Continue*, ch. 8. The passage continues: "It is no coincidence that it has always operated in this way in places where it has concentrated the massive enclosure of land and people, that is, in the colonies."

called the capitalist center; misaligned spaces correspond to its peripheries. Life on the peripheries of capitalism, as CSO puts it, is and always has been misaligned: "the periphery is where we constantly need to alternate which form of organization we should prioritize."³³ Securing some work may require going against the law and against community ideals; fighting for rights puts economic survival at risk; defending family or community runs against economic interests. This is not a description of disorder but of life under a structured situation in which the three logics do not converge under a unified institutional form, and in which their tensions appear in the lived texture of social life rather than being smoothed away by the scaffolding of modernity.

If modernization is the historical process through which industrial progress would produce an aligned and integrated social organization, *peripherization* is the reverse process: the greater the expansion of the domain of capital, the more misalignment it produces, and the more it benefits from this. As authors like Oliveira, Arantes and Canettieri have shown, peripheric form is not a residue of incomplete modernization but the spontaneous tendency of capital itself, when freed from the costly work of constructing the alignment between value, property, and affinity that would make subordinate logics scaffolded forms of its own reproduction. As CSO puts it: "the logic of value and capital becomes much more 'pure' when it does not have to be compatible with just one form of law and one general form of community."

This is the constructive claim that the framework allows us to make, and it is what distinguishes it from earlier formulations of the peripherization thesis. The mainstream of twentieth-century social theory took the aligned formation as the model of "society" itself and treated peripheric conditions as deviations to be measured against it — incomplete, underdeveloped, archaic, anomic. Earlier formulations of the peripherization thesis inverted this hierarchy without fully abandoning its terms: the periphery was now the truth of capitalism, but the present was still read as the degradation of an otherwise well-formed model, and registered as a crisis. The framework we have introduced makes a further step.

³³ *Investigate, Compose, Continue*, ch. 9. The full passage continues: "often, in order to secure some work, we need to go against the law and against our own community ideals; to fight for rights, we need to put our economic survival at risk; to defend our families and communities, we need to go against our economic interests. Nowhere in the world do people work as hard as in the periphery, but paradoxically, everyone is always striving to become a worker, as if this status were never real enough."

It treats misalignment as the general structure of capitalist social life and alignment as a special case, derivable within the framework as the specific configuration in which subordinate logics are scaffolded by the dominant one. Modernity, on this account, is not the norm against which peripheric conditions appear as failure or as truth: it is a specific, local, and temporary arrangement, sustained by specific historical conditions — chief among them the imperial and colonial extraction that allowed the metropolitan core to externalize the cost of producing alignment elsewhere. The end of this exceptional arrangement is not the end of capitalist social structure but the surfacing of its general form.

§5. Popular sovereignty as self-determination

The discussion of new sovereignties opened in this paper with Silveira's contribution, and we are now in a position to take up the question he posed there with the conceptual resources we have since assembled. Silveira observed that the proliferation of sovereignty claims in contemporary politics — Lula appealing to national self-determination against US tariffs, Trump invoking sovereignty as the justification for imperial assertion, paramilitary forces in Brazilian peripheries claiming the prerogatives of the state through direct violence — could not be dismissed as a symptom of political confusion. Behind the polysemy lay a structural transformation: the dismantling of the alignment between capital, state, and nation that had once given sovereignty its appearance of unity. The framework we have introduced makes this transformation more precise. Sovereignty appeared as a unified concept during a specific historical interval — the configuration in which the three logics of value, property, and affinity were mutually scaffolded under a single institutional expression — and what is dispersing today is not sovereignty as such but a *historically specific* “scaffolding” of power. This framework also lets us read the variability we observe with greater nuance. Capital's relation to its sovereign mediations is not constant. In aligned formations, capital benefits from a state that monopolizes violence and the legal regulation of property and from a nation that scaffolds the affinity dimension of social reproduction; the state appears here as the sovereign intermediary that keeps competing forces at bay, and its claims to sovereignty appear continuous with the interests of national capital and the working population. Under misaligned conditions, however, capital's requirements shift.

The work of producing fictive commodities — the violent labor of subordinating land, labor, and money to commodification — proceeds more efficiently when other forms of property and community are allowed to advance on their own, beyond the reach of formal legality, often through actors that the state nominally sets out to suppress. Here the state's relation to sovereignty becomes distinctly more ambiguous, as it mobilizes claims to sovereign control over its territory while simultaneously authorizing, tolerating, or even cultivating parallel actors whose authority over particular zones — favelas, mining frontiers, agricultural borderlands, refugee corridors, autonomous economic zones — exceeds its own. The result is a sovereignty that may align with national interests in some respects and appear largely indifferent to them in others. None of this is intelligible if we presume that property claims, themselves ultimately founded on the threat of organized violence, can only consolidate in one way, under one state per territory. It becomes intelligible the moment we accept that capital's reproduction does not require this consolidation, and frequently benefits from its absence.

There is a particularly telling figure of this ambiguity in the contemporary mobilization of "terrorism" as the privileged enemy of sovereign states — a figure briefly mentioned by Silveira. The injunction to rally around state authority against terrorist threats — domestic or foreign, real or imagined — appears at first as a classical sovereign claim: only the state can protect the population, only the legitimate monopoly of violence stands between civility and barbarism. But the idea of "terror", from the context of the French Revolution all the way to the "terror-ists" of the present, considered historically, has always been associated to the refusal of the state's intermediation of conflicts — to those who suspend the rules of civil contestation in pursuit of an end that the state cannot or will not concede. And many of the actors named as terrorists today were themselves produced by core states acting through proxies in peripheral zones of strategic interest, only to discover that these proxies, once given the freedom to operate beyond ordinary legality, acquired forms of "organizational depth" that became independent of and sometimes hostile to their original sponsors.³⁴ The expanding witch hunt against terrorists everywhere, with its attendant

³⁴ On the political concept of terror as the suspension of civil mediation in pursuit of ends the existing order will not concede, see Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 2000), particularly chapters 1–4 on the structural relation between terror, civil war, and counterrevolution. On the historical production of contemporary terrorist actors through core-state proxy operations in peripheral zones, the canonical reference is Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Pantheon, 2004), which traces how Cold War proxy strategies — most notably in Afghanistan, but also in Nicaragua, Angola, and elsewhere — produced militant networks whose subsequent organizational depth became independent of, and frequently hostile to, the states that originally cultivated them. As Mamdani puts the structural point: "during the Cold War, state terror has been parent to non-state terror."

expansion of surveillance powers and emergency provisions, proceeds with a hysterical insistence that itself testifies to the historical redoubling and dispersion of the state-form across a field of actors it can no longer fully contain³⁵. Sovereignty under misalignment is, we might say, what is most strenuously asserted at the moment its singularity is least guaranteed.

All of this forces a more fundamental question: what is sovereignty, conceptually, once we cease to assume it must take the nation-state-form? The modern theoretical tradition — from Bodin through Hobbes to the doctrines of constitutional sovereignty that secured the modern democratic state — was developed in close dialogue with the consolidation of European nation-states, and as a consequence it identifies sovereignty almost entirely with the prerogatives of state power: indivisible, supreme, exercised over a bounded territory, expressed in the figure of a sovereign who recognizes no superior. Within the framework we have been developing, this tradition can itself be read as a form of theoretical alignment with a historically specific configuration. The European theorists assumed that the state, and the broader capital-nation-state complex, were the only serious mediations of collective political life, and that, consequentially, any real attempt to organize people at scale would ultimately take on these same forms. If we put this assumption aside — as the dispersal of sovereignty claims under misalignment effectively forces us to do — we begin to see that there is a fundamental difference between the problem of *political self-determination* and the problem of the state.

A useful way to register this difference is to notice that no one, in any serious sense, asks whether capital is a sovereign force. Capital's power, however overwhelming, is the power to organize commodity production and to subordinate human activity to the imperative of valorization; it is the power of *class domination*, not of class sovereignty³⁶. When the courier in São Paulo or the agribusiness laborer in Bahia speaks of capital, they speak of an

³⁵ This is what Canetti calls the "militia-form" in his recent *Brasil-Catástrofe* (Consequência, 2023)

³⁶ On the difference between domination and sovereignty as forms of social power, see CSO's discussion of the relation between the logic of property and the category of the subject: "to be a subject is to be recognized by a property regime either as a limiting part — a sovereign who makes the laws — or as a limited part — a subject who is subject to the laws. The promise of the modern state and its political system is precisely that every individual could occupy both places, which is obviously impossible in a colonial and hierarchical social formation." Capital, by contrast, organizes neither sovereigns nor subjects in this sense — it organizes the asymmetric extraction of value through the mute compulsion of economic relations, and the question of self-determination simply does not arise within its operations.

asymmetric power that determines the conditions of their lives without consulting them — not of something in which their self-determination is reflected. The demand for sovereignty, by contrast, is a demand for self-determination: for the capacity of a political subject to give shape to the conditions under which it exists. What modernity accomplished, with its specific alignment of capital, state, and nation, was the monopolization of this demand by the state-form. In its national-democratic moment, the state offered to be the institutional vehicle through which a people's self-determination would be expressed and secured. The dismantling of this alignment dismantles, with it, the credibility of the monopoly — but it does not dismantle the underlying demand. What it exposes is precisely that self-determination is a more general problem than the state-form was equipped to handle.

The four contributions, read together, allow us to specify what self-determination actually requires when it is no longer assumed to coincide with the state-form. First of all, all of them treat workers, couriers, peasants, quilombolas, and indigenous peoples not as dispossessed populations awaiting political integration but as positive political actors capable of designing and collectively building their own mediations. The dominant tradition of thinking about peripheral populations — including a significant portion of the Latin American left — has tended to read actors at the “margins” of society as objects of state policy: vulnerable subjects who require redistributive intervention, marginalized populations who must be brought back into citizenship, dispossessed groups whose political horizon is the recovery of rights they have been denied. From this standpoint, the political question is always how to make the state better serve them or how to find some popular leadership that more people can rally around. What we can gather from the different political struggles analysed in Alameda's commissions, once we adopt an adequate theoretical framework, is that these different movements are already inventing and securing political mediations of their own, often better suited to their conditions than the current institutional forms on offer.

From this perspective, we can reconsider a series of key dimensions of modern political theory. From the standpoint of the Western modern political tradition, the refusal to engage with established mediations and political instruments — voting, trade unions, etc — is generally seen as an ambivalent gesture: if no clear demands are placed, if no venue for negotiation is offered, then these forms of popular revolt remain empty, and could be manipulated and ultimately captured by reactionary forces. It follows that they are either

poorly formed or ill-intentioned, if they refuse the only possible political mediations. Even political analysts that recognize, on paper, that the “general will” is the source of sovereign power and that there has been a long history of legitimate autonomous workers’ revolts, become restless before a popular upheaval that does not address itself today to the state and other recognizable political intermediaries.

But the *breques* analyzed in *The Infrastructure of Refusal*, the history of territorial struggles presented in *Territory, care and food sovereignty*, as well as Neto Onirê Sankara’s ideas, all point to a different reading, where the refusal to engage, the desire for deeper autonomy, signals a very concrete political path, one that might appear less intelligible precisely because its demands and problems are not addressed to the same interlocutors and mediators as before. As we have seen, it is from within the interiority of these processes that their own challenges acquire form, as they grapple with questions of material endurance, building articulations and paths for securing greater self-determination.

A particularly important example of this is the concept of *rearguard party*, articulated by the courier driver, militant, and intellectual Paulo Galo and discussed in *The Infrastructure of Refusal*. Galo’s insight is that the *breques* generate a real political power that the existing union forms cannot sustain, and that what is needed is not a vanguard party that directs this power from above but a “rearguard party” capable of holding the gesture of refusal long enough for the conditions of self-determination to emerge from within it³⁷. The waiting-zone breakfasts, the courier “families,” the itinerant strikes that move from city to city, the solidarity fundraisers — these are not auxiliary infrastructures but the substance of what political mediation looks like when it is being built from below by workers who shape it themselves, according to their real circumstances and means. The rearguard names the patient work through which refusal acquires the duration in which something other than mere refusal can be composed — the passage from autonomy to sovereignty, in the authors’ terms.

³⁷ Comolatti, Silva, Penna, and Perrone, “The Infrastructure of Refusal,” §5. Galo’s full formulation runs: “What we call a vanguard party is a patchwork quilt, and what we understand as a priority at this moment is a rearguard party — one capable of ensuring that workers who labor 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 hours a day can participate in the decisions that the struggle demands, rather than being merely moved and directed in a process whose origins and destination they often cannot even grasp.” The authors gloss this in the closing section of their text: “The rearguard, in this sense, is not the opposite of the front line, but its condition — just as in war, where logistical lines sustain the activity at the front. It is the space where refusal gains duration and autonomy, in the common, rediscovers its sovereignty.”

This brings us back to Web of the Peoples and the political vocabulary that Neto Onirê Sankara has elaborated in dialogue with Erahsto Felício, Joelson Ferreira, and the broader tradition of Brazilian territorial struggles. Here sovereignty is treated explicitly as a complex process of self-determination, with multiple dimensions. First, sovereignty rests on the material capacity to support autonomy: storing food, securing water, maintaining seed banks, building self-defense capacity, organizing the energy and educational infrastructures that make a community's life its own. The six sovereignties enumerated by Ferreira and Felício — water, food, energy, labor, education, and self-defense — name the dimensions in which this material capacity must be constructed³⁸. Second, this material capacity does not pursue self-sufficiency but actively builds interdependence with other communities and political actors, on the recognition that securing autonomy in any one dimension always requires articulation with others³⁹. And third, this practice of articulated self-determination — precisely because it is not constrained by the boundaries of the state or the imperatives of capital — extends naturally to the planetary scale, in what Felício and Sankara have called a "radical environmentalism of the peoples." The communities who steward the land through non-commodity relations are, in this account, not local actors defending local interests but bearers of a universal claim about the conditions of life on earth: protecting one's own land from capital's destructive dynamics is, structurally, the same act as protecting everyone's land, since the destruction operates as a single system regardless of where it strikes⁴⁰.

³⁸ Joelson Nascimento Ferreira and Erahsto Felício, *Por Terra e Território: Caminho da Revolução dos Povos no Brasil* (Teia dos Povos, 2019). On the practical articulation of these six dimensions, see also Sankara's formulation, cited in Reis, "Connecting communities, planting food, and building popular autonomy," §3: "In order to produce food, we need to have land, we need to have a place to live. But in order to fight, we need to have food stored. [...] To produce a farm without machinery infrastructure, the most efficient tool is collective action, and to have this collectivity, there must be a sense of community."

³⁹ Reis, "Connecting communities, planting food, and building popular autonomy," §4. Sankara: "Teia does not propose unanimity or uniformity, because it is in our differences that we fight. It is a well-defined tactical alliance: we are different, we are in different territories, but we have the same enemies and the same goals." See also Pedrosa, Saldanha, and Albuquerque, §5: "the process of achieving sovereignty is linked to recognizing the relations of interdependency that compose a territory."

⁴⁰ In *A people's radical environmentalism*, still unpublished, they write: "The radical environmentalism of peoples in struggle can be understood by the clear realisation that there is no possibility of protecting nature without freeing the land from the yoke of capitalist exploitation, which in the countryside presents itself as agribusiness. The forests, the waters, the minerals — all of this is on and under the land. Allowing it to continue to be exploited as a commodity means that the essential elements for maintaining life will also be exploited. There is no room for conciliation. The struggle is for land and territory in order to maintain living conditions on this planet for all beings."

What Galo's rearguard and Neto's radical environmentalism suggest, taken together, is the form of popular sovereignty that becomes thinkable once we accept that the nation-state-form has lost its monopoly on the demand for self-determination not so much because it is being attacked by "non-state sovereigns" — which ultimately remain committed to the dominance of capital's most fundamental dynamics — but because it is no longer capable of securing the monopoly on the "general will", so to speak.

This is why popular sovereignty today is plural rather than a single path: it is composed across multiple dimensions of social reproduction, each of which requires its own organizational depth and none of which can be guaranteed by any single institutional form. It must be articulated and its strength lies in the density of the connections between heterogeneous nodes — settlements, quilombos, indigenous territories, urban occupations, courier networks — rather than in the closure of a fenced perimeter. It is constructive rather than purely defensive: each act of refusal carries within it the seed of a positive composition, and the political task is to provide the material conditions under which that composition can develop. And it is universal rather than local: precisely because it is freed from the state-form, it has the capacity to scale to the planetary register without dissolving into abstract appeal, since under the extractivist expansion that accompanies peripheral capitalism the protection of any community's conditions of life is, quite practically, the protection of conditions of life as such.

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