

Almost – a short story of Brazil
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Throughout its history, Brazil has experienced incomplete stages of development. Initiated those processes, in the vast majority of times, they produced partial results, inconclusive deliveries and unfinished public infrastructure. Governments succeed each other and an apparent unwritten rule seems to position the ruler who enters not to finish what was initiated by another so that he can be the sole promoter of the generated welfare.

So why are we the nation where we almost complete projects? Since the colonization our philosophical and legal formation has been extractive and exploitative. Our wealth had the function of serving others in detriment of Brazil.

Brazil would also attract many other people such as the Dutch who ventured here through a private venture – the West India Company. They built cities, ports and forts in Pernambuco. Expelled from here they sailed north establishing various points of commerce and colonies and ended up buying an island they initially called New Amsterdam. Sold to the British it was renamed New York. New York was almost here.

Our independence ended up happening almost by chance, when a playboy prince rebels against his father and declares: "I will stay". Without planning or purpose, the new country starts with foreign debt to England. The next emperor takes on as a child and although more prepared to reign, floats between his innovative spirit and a court accustomed to privileges and leads the country in the wake of the industrial revolution, with almost a century in delay. At the end of the 19th century, we were one of the last nations in the world to give freedom to slaves, or almost so, as they were given formal freedom, but not the means or conditions of being truly free human beings. The end of the kingdom occurs with the deposition of the royal family and our 1st republic was almost republican, being in fact a succession of small empires, in terms and in moral stature.

In the 1930's a leader supposedly enlightened arises and ends up as a bloody and populist dictator. Reluctantly, Mr. Getulio Vargas went to war against the Nazi regime. Our "praçinhas" fought bravely and heroically against Hitler, guided by a dictatorship that was not very keen into this

confrontation. We got rid of the dictator, but almost, because he came back elected and as he tried to be a dictator again he turns into a ghost that haunts us till this day. Vargas' phrase "I get out of life and into history" represents the revenge of the cowardly suicide against the nation that no longer wanted him.

Once again democracy was established and we started a period of economic growth at "Chinese" rates. We transferred the capital to the middle of nowhere with an urban and an architecture which prioritized the form and not the function, an authoritarian city, limited to its time, that did not predict its future development.

We grew up and entered into the category of "developing country", that is, almost developed. We expanded the market, but without proper understanding of what a free market would be. Brazilian capitalism has solidified itself as a mercantilist club, where few companies have snapped big markets, with subsidies and protection. The political instability of the early 1960s led us to a dictatorship controlled by the Armed Forces with all the implications attached to it. An economic policy based on substitution of imports was adopted in order to exercise a pseudo national sovereignty. While Chile adopted a liberal economic model, despite the violence of that regime, we adopted a statist and centralized model. The military that took power to fight communism established a communist economic model.

Exhausted the model, the mistaken road taken resulted in corrosive inflation. The slow process of returning to democracy has not been completed, as the indirectly elected president Tancredo Neves, died at eve. José Sarney assumed making the same misguided economic decisions and plunging Brazil into a hiper inflation spiral. The "marajás hunter" Collor takes over promising undertake corruption and take Brazil into the twentieth century and ends up suffering an unprecedented impeachment. From almost modernity we return to the known scenario of economic and political crisis.

The unlikely president Itamar Franco finally manages to create and implement an effective economic restructuring plan. Fernando Henrique Cardoso assumes after him and begins, not because he is a true believer, but because he was obliged to make cash, a privatization plan, making the Brazilian state lighter and less costly. Walking rapidly towards a more free world led by Reagan and Thatcher, Cardoso is re-elected, but moves away

from the necessary political, labour, social security and fiscal reforms as they are abandoned and again we almost built a free economy.

In 2002, Lula and the left wins the presidential election and put into practice their plan of power seeking to establish a local taylor made version of Socialism. He almost made it, and I'm glad we didn't, otherwise we would have become another Venezuela. Tired of the arrogant, corrupt and incompetent left, the Brazilian middle class, the real workers and tax payers got tired and kicked Dilma and her group to the side lines of history. Well, some people still think it was a coup and that democracy was at stake, when it was quite the opposite. In common between the generals, Sarney, Cardoso, Lula and Dilma are the multitude of unfinished works, whether by fraudulent bids, bad projects or mediocre executions. The Car Wash operation started a new moment in Brazilian justice condemning and arresting businessmen, politicians and former President Lula. Well, almost, as the Supreme Court of Brazil maneuvered the law and released most of them just with a slap in the hand.

Jair Bolsonaro won the election in a fast media election process and took on office reflecting the hope and high expectation of his voters backed by a group of highly prepared ministers and secretaries, some of them with a solid liberal background. The first half of the government is almost completed and slowly the new gears started to move. But, once again, Bolsonaro took the easy path, with one of his sons caught in a shady business, he let the dark side of the congress rule and all the little progress made was soon enough to put major plans at rest. Hope versus reality puts us on the twilight zone of accomplishments.

Back to the initial question, why don't we complete all the steps of the changing processes or transformations? Is it because of our third-world, Latin American reality, or our self pity behavior? Are we so incapable that we can't have clear and objective views of the future? Why do we always almost get there?

I believe that one of the reasons could be the fear that, effectively, those transformations will be good and improve our lives. Success will force many people to review their positions and admitting mistakes is not a common practice for the Brazilian political and judiciary elite. The need for reforms in the country will negatively affect a few thousand Brazilians, beneficiaries of acquired rights - meaning granted privileges - but will

improve the lives of millions, including those who consider themselves affected. We will all live in a country with a healthier economy, with more disposable income, more businesses and greater freedom to undertake. It will be beneficial to everyone.

We are almost there again, looking ahead at another historic opportunity. Once again, we Brazilians will have the opportunity to give another direction to the nation. Will we achieve that? We can build a new reality. Or almost.