

Living (Il)legalities in Brazil: Practices, Narratives and Institutions in a Country on the Edge
Brandellero, Sara; Pardue, Derek; Wink, Georg. New York: Routledge, 2020 179pp

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What is the line that separates illegality from legality? How does one define it? In Brazil's case, a senator can hide approximately U\$6 thousand dollars in his underwear and be untouchable; the names of the president's sons can appear in an assassination investigations, and they will not be held accountable. At the same time, authorities can arrest a Black man as a terrorist for having cleaning products. The line can be hard to draw.

In *Living (Il)legalities in Brazil: Practices, Narratives and Institutions in a Country on the edge*, editors Sara Brandellero, Derek Pardue, and Georg Wink (2020) bring together a series of works with the intention of understanding not only where and how this line appears, but also its mobility according to multiple factors such as race, class, gender, and political status. In this sense, the book presents the dichotomy between what happens under public eyes versus what happens behind closed doors.

The book's two parts reflect upon the representation and critiques of dilemmas such as legal-illegal or moral-immoral through analyses of cultural manifestations and art forms. Considering the Brazilian tradition of resistance through cultural manifestations, choosing to engage in a cultural analysis of political participation is more than logical.

Brandellero, Pardue, and Wink stated in their introductory text that different political analysts present Brazil as a newborn democracy, mainly because of its history of several *coups d'état* since the Republic proclamation of 1889. I compliment their reflection by saying that this unrest started centuries earlier, with the invasion of indigenous land and the genocide and enslavement of Indigenous and Black people in Brazil. Colonization is the main reason why a small percentage of Brazilians feel entitled to power, believing they can break any laws to keep their privileges.

Among the book's chapters, we Jean Willys' (2020) detailed description of how since the Republic's proclamation, definitions of (Il)legalities may vary according to the interests of those in power. His chapter *Borders of (il)legality* presents facts that demonstrate how the law does not apply to everybody in Brazil. As the author highlights, the closer a person is to being a white-male-heterosexual-cisgender-wealthy-Christian, the greater their chances of going unpunished for crimes. Willys presents the fabrication of fake news that preceded the electoral process in 2018, including former President Lula da Silva's imprisonment as an example of unpunished crimes.



Daniel Hirata's *The Government of Street Vending* complements Willys' approach. The persecution of street vendors demonstrates that while some bodies are unimputable depending on the circumstances, others are not. As Hirata claims, the reality of informal markets in Brazil's street presents a panorama of the job market and its definitions of formality and informality. The presence of street vendors demonstrates the Brazilian working class's ability to find occupations and make a living for their family despite the formal job market's oscillations. In this sense, regulations control those who have financial autonomy and those who do not. Besides, even though they are an important part of the Brazilian economy, street vendors' criminalization demonstrates whose bodies are allowed in Brazil's public space. Traditionally occupied by Black and Indigenous bodies, Brazil's streets have been under surveillance since the "vagrancy law." Not coincidentally, Black bodies make up the majority of those in informal employment, and most of those running when you hear a voice saying "olha o rapa!!"

The idea of a Black presence in urban spaces is also topic of debate in Igor Machado and Derek Pardue's chapter. Well known for his studies of Brazilian hip-hop's impact in the peripheral areas of Sao Paulo, Pardue's previous work contributes to the discussion around contemporary migration in Brazil. Questioning the myth of Brazilian hospitality in *Migrant Refugee Spatialities Lived and Legislated in São Paulo*, Machado and Pardue's work reflects how a country where there was once financing and facilitating immigration is now rejecting modern immigrants. The peculiar thing about contemporary migration in Brazil is that it is more closely shaped around the type of bodies arriving in Brazil through this new migratory flow than around the issue of immigration itself. As an anti-Black country, Brazil welcomes white immigrants but despises Black and other immigrants of color. In this sense, xenophobia and racism motivate the violence that reaches African and Caribbean immigrants in Brazil.

Georg Wink explains to the readers a particular characteristic of the Brazilian population. In his text *Jeitinho Revisited*, the author engages with Brazilians' ability to trick the system and get things done easier, although not always ethical. The Brazilian *jeitinho* – meaning finding a loophole – can refer to anything as simple as fixing an electric installation without paying an electrician or paying your driver's license evaluator so he will not fail you in your test. The "malandragem"² demonstrates that morality in Brazilian society has a time and a place. But not everyone is authorized to fix things with the *jeitinho*. Depending on who you are, engaging in this behavior can either have lethal consequences or no consequences at all. The recent impeachment of Brazil's first female President, Dilma Rouseff, convicted of an infringement that months later was made legal by the same Congress and Senate that convicted her, also comes under this category.

¹ Hey, run – the inspectors are coming

² Using a persuasive "swag" to take advantage on people



Dilma Roussef's impeachment is also one of the themes in Márcia Tiburi's *Political Sexology*. Tiburi points to how politicians used sex as a weapon during both the impeachment process and Bolsonaro's campaign. The author explains how political parties shared fake news with sensitive topics, including sexual abuse, pedophilia, rape, and homophobia, to win the electoral process. Tiburi highlights the excessive control of sexuality from right-wing politicians associated with Bolsonaro, including Human Rights Minister Damara Alves. The State's regulation of gender and sexuality reflects the glaring presence of evangelical politicians in Brazil's Congress and Bolsonaro's closer team, including his ministers. Throughout his campaign, Bolsonaro's discourses involved morality, God, and family, convincing many Brazilians to elect him as God's choice. His followers don't dare to question his authority, as if challenging him would mean resisting divine orders.

After situating the reader with the broader characteristics of (Il)legalities in Brazil, the second part of the book creates a dialogue around cultural production and performance and how artists have been using their artform to protest and narrate this duality.

Alexander S. Dent recovers the story of the punk movement in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s. The generation born during the military dictatorship started to fight for freedom of expression. Within this narrative, Dent explores conflicts between the youth and the police. As a cultural manifestation whose participants were mostly white middle class and upper-middle-class, the idea of police brutality was considered unimaginable. However, the confrontation between state agents and punk youth almost always resulted in violence. The lyrics of famous punk-rock bands, such as Ratos de Porao, reflected the need to defy the police and the State. However, as we say, "Brazil is not for beginners," and nowadays, many of those who were part of the punk-rock movement and other youth movements against censorship are loudly supporting the rightist politicians in power.

Gabriel Feltran's work presents another cultural manifestation that started at the end of the military dictatorship: Brazilian hip hop. The author engages with the ideologies behind Racionais MC's lyrics, one of Brazil's main rap groups. A predominantly Black cultural manifestation, rap music became an instrument for anti-racism resistance. Through their rhymes, Racionais narrate the impacts of racism, poverty, state abandonment, and exclusion in the peripheries of Sao Paulo. Feltran chooses *To Ouvindo Alguem Me Chamar* (I can hear someone calling) to showcase the tightrope between legality and illegality in Brazil's poor communities. Racionais allude to the lack of opportunities in the poor peripheral areas in their rap, driving youths down a destructive path, creating a character that generates empathy, despite his wrong actions. Feltran also engages with a trickster named Sidney Lourenço, who used the narrative present in the lyrics to visit evangelical churches, providing his fake testimony as if he were Guina (the character) and how Jesus changed his criminal ways. In reality, he was not part of Racionais MC's, nor was Mano Brown's friend. Sidney was just someone who found an easy way to make money.

My concern with Feltran's analysis relates to a critique of criminality in the poor communities of Brazil, which takes place without considering racism, classism, state abandonment, and family relations in poor Black neighborhoods. The analysis does not contemplate our reality nor bring new lights to a debate usually observed through the lens of an economic and intellectual elite. Second, it presents an analysis of the lyrics without situating the 24-year-old song within Racionais broader work as a whole. Even members of Racionais have affirmed that this type of narrative is not among their top priorities, as the reality of Sao Paulo's peripheral areas has changed over these past three decades. To the artists, a criminal narrative, even if is fictional, is not productive anymore, especially considering that police TV shows have stigmatized our communities enough.

In her chapter, *Kafka, and lawfare in Brazil*, Stephanie Dennison approaches Maria Ramos' movie *The Trial*. *The Trial* is a backstage documentary on President Dilma's impeachment trial. Capturing the moment Brazil's new democracy fell apart, the documentary points out politicians' reactions and the atmosphere in Brasilia during the process. Despite its clear positionality against the *coup d'état*, the project still intended to hear both sides of the dispute. For Dennison, Maria Ramos' work reflects a new way of creating documentaries around politics in Brazil. The piece was able to capture the reactions and expressions of each person observed or interviewed. The author also explains how the documentary brought visibility to Brazilian productions, and how its aesthetics impacted foreign critiques and audiences.

Sara Brandellero analyzes Kleber Mendonca Filho's film *Neighbouring Sounds*. Her critique compares the aesthetics of the production to other Brazilian movies that reached a similar international audience. Brandellero highlights a couple of noteworthy Brazilian expressions, such as 'everything happens behind the curtains' (*por baixo dos panos*) or 'at night all cats are brown' (*todos os gatos sao pardos*). In the dark, anything can happen, and we cannot distinguish between them. In this sense, right or wrong can also go undefined, and the notion of morality can also fluctuate. Brandellero presents the contradictions between, on the one hand, land ownership, and on the other, the formation of militias to protect private property.

Something to Declare by Claire Williams returns to the analysis of immigration as a field where the notions of (Il)legalities are very dubious. The author explores the idea of illegal immigration in Brazilian literature. Her work takes a different direction from that of Machado and Pardue's work. She observes the experiences of Brazilian expatriates migrating to Europe during the period before Lula's mandate. Williams shares specific details of the characters, which becomes crucial to understanding immigrant profiles through the intersections of race, class, and gender. Most of the migrants analyzed by the author were white members of the Brazilian elite who are accustomed to their privilege. The contradictions of this experience are even more perceptible when thinking about the difficulties and humiliations that individuals face when migrating, which are very similar to how

Brazilian elites treat their domestic workers, demonstrating that unfair treatment is acceptable under certain circumstances.

The book closes with Lucia Sa's text, *Painting Racism*, where anti-racist denunciations are again the main topic approached. Analyzing the work of two Indigenous artists of the amazon region, Sa presents indigenous engagement in activism. The two artists transform their artwork into tools of resistance against the oppression of Indigenous peoples in Brazil. Through her discussion, the author observes how artistic productions mirror the impacts of colonization and ongoing indigenous genocide. An unbailable crime, racism is also part of the sphere where the crimes are almost always negotiable and can go unpunished.

In conclusion, *Living (Il)legalities* is a book that offers exciting intersectional analyses of race, class, gender, and sexuality when observing (Il)legalities in Brazil. The book is a manual to understanding aspects of Brazil that have shaped the country. It also situates international readers within cultural traits that otherwise could be imperceptible. This book is crucial for those trying to make sense of Brazilian society and its trickster characteristics.