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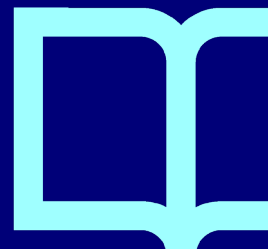
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The rhetoric of the Brazilian far-right, built in the streets: The case of Rio de Janeiro

Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic exploration of the construction of far-right rhetoric in Brazil. The work begins with events on the day of the elections of 2018, when Jair M. Bolsonaro won the presidency. To contextualise this scene, the work analyses how far-right rhetoric was articulated in the Brazilian public sphere from June 2013 until 2018, and specifically, in the State of Rio de Janeiro. The paper explains how anti-corruption and militarized rhetorics in the electoral campaign were fundamental in constructing far-right identity claims and collective mobilisation. As a conclusion, the paper shows the importance of these specific events in the construction of what became the ‘Bolsonarist rhetoric’, as part of a broader, international politics of disaffection.

Keywords: Brazil; political elections; far-right rhetoric; chains of equivalence; political anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

Sunday, October 28, 2018, was the day of the second round of presidential elections in Brazil. Over 147 million Brazilians were called to vote, to choose if the future president of the Republic would be Fernando Haddad, a stand-in for the former president Lula after he became ineligible,¹ or Captain Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a retired military officer described by his adversaries as ‘ultra-right’.

A long queue along the sidewalks to the polling station in Rio de Janeiro, people patiently waiting for their turns to vote. The moment was characterized by tension and uncertainty, a constant in what was an unusual campaign: the possibility that the extreme right might come to govern hung over the election for the first time in the history of their young democracy. Several people in the line wore the Brazilian national

soccer team's t-shirt, yellow and green, and others wore clothes with slogans like, 'My party is Brazil'. I approached those people who wore the colours of the Brazilian flag: 'In Brazil we like to come to vote with the national team shirt. My party is Brazil, and my candidate is Bolsonaro,' said a man waiting, a clear allusion to the patriotic and anti-partisan components of Bolsonarism.² The shirt represented a type of nationalism that would try to dissociate itself from political parties, despite the fact that national symbols had been associated with Bolsonaro's project. In the preceding month the country had increasingly become restless as the campaign produced violent polarization; that day, the voters gave the presidency of the Republic to the candidate Bolsonaro.

This paper begins with the result of the elections, describing scenes following the victory of Bolsonaro as part of my ethnographic research on the Brazilian far right. The account describes the symbols and phrases that characterized the campaign to give the reader an understanding of the rhetorical reality that emerged in the lead up to that historical moment.

To contextualise this event, the paper discusses how, starting especially from 2013, this political rhetoric was constructed, focusing on several key moments that crystallized the symbolism and political rhetoric of Bolsonarism. Specifically, political demonstrations in June 2013, in the lead up to the 2014 World Cup, prior to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, and linked to military intervention in Rio in 2018 all elaborated chains of equivalence (Laclau, 1995), that is, a series of institutionally neglected social demands became linked in public discourse. The paper argues that these moments constructed a specific discourse in the public sphere, specifically in the streets, which was fundamental in the birth of Bolsonarism as a specific political identity, but also as a part of a broader international rise in political disaffection on the right, leading to electoral success by extreme parties in a number of places.

VICTORY CELEBRATIONS ON THE PRESIDENT ELECT'S DOORSTEP

The climax occurred in the evening. I was on the enormous Lúcio Costa Avenue, between the beach of the wealthy neighborhood of Barra de Tijuca and the housing condominium where Jair Bolsonaro lived. Among the thousands of people gathered there were coconut trees. Around 6 p.m., a man shouted, '16 years waiting! Brazil above everything! God above everyone! Brazil is ours.' Thousands of supporters sprayed champagne in front of Bolsonaro's home.

The results were projected on a huge screen; it was already official. A dark-skinned man dressed as a paratrooper told me, '100% determined: Bolsonaro is president!' Everybody started waving flags, until a remarkable moment: the crowd in yellow and green began to chant the national anthem, euphorically, without background music. They felt they were the protagonists in a struggle. For the attendees it was the passage to a new era, sealed by singing the national anthem *a capella* under a sky coloured by fireworks. A vendor told me, cheerfully, 'In my whole life, I never sold so many Brazilian flags.' The symbolic elements representing patriotism and nationalism were evident everywhere.

I repeatedly heard people vilifying supporters of Bolsonaro's political adversary as "the enemy", a moral boundary construed during the political campaign: A man with long hair and a green cap exclaimed euphorically, for example, 'We are relieved. We have recovered Brazil. Communism ended. The Workers' Party never again, bandits' party, murderers' party, vagrants' party, associated with the dictatorships of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba...Garbage, human garbage.'

A young black man who walked shirtless, stickers from the Bolsonaro campaign on his body, exclaimed: 'Myth! Legend! Bolsonaro is the best president of Brazil! *Pam pampampam!*' He shouted as he mimed with his arms shooting a machine gun.

Another older man told me he was a businessman and enthused, "Communism is over. We want the best for the businessman and for the employee. We want the good of the world. It doesn't matter that the right is radical; what matters is that it is a right for the people.'

People continued dancing and recording with their mobiles until late at night. A military vehicle carried several people screaming and showing a cardboard figure of Lula in

prison. They also carried a huge cardboard rifle, representing Bolsonaro's defense of the right to bear arms. People took 'selfies' with the cardboard images. Between them stood a huge *pitxuleco*, an oversized inflatable doll representing Lula dressed as a prisoner, approximately five meters tall. People used it to playfully beat each other. A woman kicked the doll shouting with anger, 'Lula, thief, your place is prison!'

This collection of symbols, constructed in a violent and anti-Workers' Party (PT) vocabulary, but also festive and carnival-influenced, was symptomatic of a rite of transition to a new state in which Bolsonaro's voters felt they had 'regained Brazil.' The last ones to leave were the can collectors, who crushed empty beer cans with flip-flops to earn the can deposits. This event demonstrated the relationship between a euphoric celebration and the underlying violence of political polarization. National symbols were intertwined with far-right ideology in a public spectacle of defiance.

BEHIND THE MOBILIZATIONS OF 2013

Despite his 27 years as a federal deputy, Bolsonaro had successfully presented himself as an 'outsider' to the political system, as a 'man of the people'. For the first time in the young Brazilian democracy, a military man was the president, a former officer who had been controversial for a variety of reasons, including attacks on Afro-Brazilians, immigrants, women, and the LGTBQ community. The history of Bolsonaro's rhetoric had always been characterized by the use of violence and stigmatization in the construction of a "political enemy"

Bolsonaro had declared himself in favour of torture. During his political career, the new president of Brazil had also proposed on several occasions to close the National Congress and return political control to the military. In 1999, the then-deputy asserted that a Civil War would have to be initiated to change Brazil, since the vote did not matter, and that, 'At least 30,000 will have to be killed, starting with Fernando Henrique Cardoso,' the former president of Brazil for the Brazilian Social Democratic Party: 'Do not have the slightest doubt, I am in favour of a dictatorship, of an exceptional regime.' Bolsonaro aggressively defended the work of the Military Police, including after the 1992 Carandirú Massacre, when the Military Police entered Carandirú prison in São

Paulo and killed 111 prisoners who had started a rebellion. On this occasion, Bolsonaro insisted that, 'Few died; the police should have killed a thousand.'

Until then, Bolsonaro has been a federal deputy of the 'low clergy,' one of those considered peripheral who defended an aggressive minority politics. In 2018, however, his project – a militarized state that used violence against its own citizens – had won at the ballot box. To understand Bolsonaro's political ascendancy, this analysis first goes back to 2013, to what his supporters called the 'Brazilian spring,' when the conservative rhetoric, 'A new course for Brazil,' was first articulated.

Between 2013 and the victory of Bolsonaro in the presidential election, some sectors of the Brazilian population (mainly young people from the upper-middle classes, but also people of various ages and socio-economic backgrounds) staged a series of demonstrations that consolidated the conservative rhetoric that Bolsonaro would mobilize during the 2018 electoral campaign. The key public events that shaped this shift were, chronologically: economic demonstrations in June 2013, protests held during the 2014 World Cup, public demonstrations demanding the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2015, and the military intervention of 2018.

After the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985), a centre-left axis had dominated public space (Pinto, 2017), but from 2013, driven by social networks and telephone applications (Castells 2012; Zizek 2011), conservative protestors repeatedly flooded the streets. As we will explain, what began as a plural expression in 2013 by various sectors was acquiring a distorted form, until gradually the discontent of the conservative sectors was taking shape, channeling it into the bolsonarist project.

A series of demonstrations broke out in several Brazilian cities in June 2013. In that period, Rio de Janeiro was the symbol of a cosmopolitan and welcoming Brazil in the international context (Pujadas and Baptista, 2000). Various indicators showed the world the economic growth of Brazil, a country of 209 million inhabitants. The former capital of 6.3 million inhabitants was idealised for its natural and artistic beauty. Proud of itself, the city had been fundamental in constructing Brazilian national identity and in manufacturing national stories and characters, such as heroes and tricksters (*malandros*), as well as for the colours and artistry of its *carnaval*.

The harmonious vision of Rio de Janeiro as a distinctive ‘city-commodity’ (Kant de Lima et al., 2010) in which to invest and visit had been strengthened in previous years through various regional projects. In Rio, like so many other cities, the staging of mega-events was an attempt to symbolically redefine the Brazilian metropolis, transforming old and peripheral areas into landmarks of its distinctiveness on an international scale. Winning the right to host sporting events such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, the city saw the opportunity to renew itself, while concealing its deep conflicts and negotiations from outside scrutiny. Works such as the ‘Growth Acceleration Plan’(PAC), the Rapid Bus Transit system (BRT), the ‘Peacemaker Police Units’ (UPPs), new museums, and new metro lines investments in the structure of the city, sought to bridge long-standing social divides and redraw internal social frontiers. Through an aesthetic rhetoric that sought to redress social inequity, Rio de Janeiro leaders highlighted at the international level its project of reincorporating abandoned spaces into the ‘formal city’ (Cavalcanti, 2013).

Viewed from outside the country, this story of a joyful and harmonious Rio de Janeiro echoed the image of a cordial, welcoming Brazil, allegedly without racism and violence, promoted during the 1920s through the image of Zé Carioca.³ This local imaginary was extrapolated abroad to Brazil as a whole, and, by extension, to the government by the PT, led at the time by the charismatic president, Lula. This appeared to be a period of a ‘golden Brazil’, with an increase of 7.5% of GDP in 2010,⁴ in the midst of a world economic crisis which did not seem to affect the country. Buoyed by a fall in poverty rates, increased investment, and enormous influence in Latin America and the world, Brazil seemed ascendant.⁵

Perhaps because of this image abroad, the explosion of demonstrations surprised the international community. The harmonious portrait of an emerging Brazil, and Rio in particular, had camouflaged at the international level other internal stories being shaped in the local press and on social networks. These stories focused on a stubbornly high rate of violence, increasing every year. The stories were intertwined in what Ernesto

Laclau (2005) calls a 'chain of equivalences,' that is, a series of institutionally neglected social demands that became linked in public discourse.

By 2017, the number of homicides in Brazil had risen to 63,880 annually, an increase of more than the 37.5% over 2007. By the year of the demonstrations, 2013, Brazil had an average of 175 homicides per day, and a 20% increase in the lethality of policing.⁶ A 'public security crisis' had for years been associated with the 'favela problem' (Alvito and Zaluar, 2006), the existence of urban slums, and the population developed a general feeling of insecurity, malaise, and fear, which on numerous occasions led to calls for greater police presence and action.

Corruption scandals added to perceptions of violence and intensified insecurity, hatred, and resentment, which were directed at public institutions. These stories came with a third threat: a supposed project of cultural domination by the advancing left feared by conservatives. In recent years, Brazilians have revised their notion of the Brazilian 'national,' incorporating the grammar of multiculturalism into their political and public agenda. The 1988 Federal Constitution introduced the legal recognition of traditional identities and communities. These progressive social changes left the dominant class fearing that the remaining rights from the aristocratic, hierarchical, and colonial past were at risk.

THE GIANT "WAKE UP" IN 2013

In June 2013, a cycle of demonstrations spread to Brazil's major cities that seemed to be led by left-wing organisations. Begun a few months earlier in the city of Porto Alegre, the demonstrations first focused on the Free Pass Movement (MPL), a protest that called on the residents of larger cities to demonstrate against a 20-cent increase in the price of public transportation. Brazil was not directly affected by the global economic crisis at the time,⁷ and the leaders of the MPL tried to maintain a non-partisan movement specifically calling for a reduction in the price of public transport, demanding a 'zero fare.' However, partisan actors began to appropriate the demonstrations, with both the PT government and its critics seeking to use the MPL.

Thus, the MPL struggle became associated with protests against the PT government, in later protests taking on explicit *anti-petism* ('anti-PT-ism'). Seeing the diversion of their movement, once they achieved a reduction in the price of public transport, the MPL withdrew from the streets, leaving an enormous discursive void (Pinto, 2017).

This rhetorical vacuum allowed the Brazilian media to differentiate between 'vandals,' a category used mainly to refer to members of the 'Black Blocs,'⁸ and 'good citizens,' who demonstrated peacefully. Black Blocs appeared in Brazil in 2013, often protesting violently at the demonstrations against capitalism and its symbols, such as vandalising franchises of international companies.

Most protestors were young, with high levels of education and no previous partisan experience. They were motivated to participate in demonstrations by anger about corruption and concerns about health, education, public security, and the fight against violence.⁹ These collectives rejected political parties, reflected, as would continue until the election, in using T-shirts and posters indicating, 'My party is Brazil.' Other messages in this vein included, 'People together do not need a party,' 'Stop the robbery or we stop Brazil,' or the trenchant slogan, 'The giant woke up.' These slogans were intended to transcend party affiliation and allow people with diverse political affiliations to protest together against problems that transcended partisan loyalties.

The corruption scandal called 'mensalão' had left the Workers' Party profoundly exhausted and numerically depleted, as representatives resigned or were removed.¹⁰ The PT was condemned for payments that they made to congressional representatives from other parties in order to approve bills in the chamber. The demonstrations showed how the PT struggled to meet public demands or mobilize its militant bases. Instead, the mensalão scandal stained the party with the sense of corruption; the media continued to reinforce the direct association between corruption and the Workers' Party, without focusing equally on the corruption of other political parties. The PT failed to present a

persuasive argument in the protests, and the popularity of President Rousseff suffered, falling from 65% to 30% in just three months.¹¹

Thus, the rhetorical raw material emerged in 2013 that would be deployed in protests in subsequent years. These resentments and frustrations did not immediately coalesce into a coherent ideology despite a strong anti-establishment rhetoric, because the protestors expressed, interpreted, and signified their anger in a multitude of ways. The demonstrators were still developing their complaints and were not yet a coherent movement.

THE WORLD CUP, 2014

In the favela of Santa Marta, south of Rio de Janeiro, children played football barefoot in February, 2014, with a stuffed plastic bag. ‘Uncle, buy me a ball,’ they shouted.¹² The children trained enthusiastically. The tournament had been organized by the Popular Committee of the World Cup and the Olympic Games of Rio de Janeiro, a non-governmental organisation which sought to defend those affected by major sporting events. The tournament was part of a series of events held to protest the world championship that took place later in June. The organisation was critical of how the federal government, in collaboration with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), made huge investments in stadium construction throughout Brazil.¹³ Irregularities in the financing of the works began to be linked, as the World Cup became increasingly derided as ‘the most expensive event in history.’¹⁴

The Brazilian public also felt alienated by the high ticket prices announced for the event. Several other incidents, widely reported in the media, added to criticisms of the World Cup: in 2006, a group of Tupinambá indigenous people in Rio de Janeiro had occupied an area called the *Aldeia Maracanã* (‘Maracanã Village’), around Maracanã, the iconic football stadium. As the opening of the World Cup drew near, the state government removed the residents, strengthening the impression that the construction

and repair of stadiums was linked to the commercialisation and gentrification of the city, mainly affecting its popular classes (Freire, 2013). Mega sporting events, especially the World Cup, came to be considered synonymous with corruption, mismanagement, and elitism. FIFA justified demolitions, such as that of the Aldeia Maracanã, as necessary to building infrastructure that would be useful after the event, but many people felt that the historical and cultural heritage of Brazilian cities was at risk.¹⁵



Figure 1: Graffiti in the city of São Paulo criticizing the expenses associated with the World Cup. Artist: Paulo Ito

These events demonstrated once again the existing discontent with the material challenges of the country and the war against the "cultural elites", represented in the political class itself. Unlike in 2013, where discontent did not produce a coherent unifying criticism, in 2014, public anger crystalised around a concrete signifier: the World Cup. A new chain of rhetorical equivalences was constructed; to speak of the Cup also referred to the corruption and mismanagement of the PT government. This chain of equivalences was used by two opposing ideological factions, one on the extreme left and the other a more conservative *anti-petism* (Anti PT). Social networks

created diverse collectives that spread political discussion (principally on Facebook and Twitter). The best-known groups were the 'Popular Committee of Those Affected by the Cup,' the 'Popular Committee of the Cup,' and the group 'There's Not Going to Be a Cup.' This last group successfully articulated an attack on the social policies of the PT government, broadening their targets from the Cup to other PT policies, especially the popular housing project, 'My house, my life' (*Minha casa, minha vida*), and welfare programs of financial assistance to poor families, such as the 'Family Grant' (*Bolsa família*).¹⁶ One of the most interesting dimensions of this political rhetoric was the apparent disconnect or conversion of their demands: mobilised initially by resentments of the World Cup preparations, discontent shifted to focus on the social programs of the PT.

The criticisms of the PT converged to form anti-petism, a political movement which later became the backbone of Bolsonarism. This anti-PT rhetoric reminded even the left-wing sections of the population of their disappointments with a government that had not achieved the transformations it promised, with the hierarchization and professionalization of the party, and with the agreements and compromises to which the PT had submitted to maintain government, against the will of its supporters. Added to the resentment of the PT's clientelism was anger about the case of mensalão corruption, greatly aggravated by new cases of corruption in 2014 around the national oil company, Petrobras, and 'Operation Car Wash' (*Operação Lava-Jato*), the largest anti-corruption operation in Brazilian history. Dogged by repeated corruption scandals, the PT tried to insist that it was 'victimized' by the national press, the judiciary, and the increasingly organised right wing; however, groups to the left of the PT also attacked the party, depriving the PT of its strong base of support and of important allies. Criticisms and defections weakened party structures, undermining attempts to counter the emerging conservative rhetoric.

In this context, inspired by the demonstrations of 2013, protests were staged against the World Cup in 2014. Not as numerous as those in the previous year, these protests were still fundamental in articulating an anti-PT rhetoric, linked to the management of the Cup. That widespread rejection, broadcast across the country at the start of the World Cup when public attention was high, cemented the image of President Rousseff as a

symbol of political corruption and mismanagement. Arguably, it was the first obvious seed of popular rejection that would grow until, a year later, she was impeached.

The rhetoric of the contemporary Brazilian right was born in opposition to the PT, and the World Cup had organised its signs. Here was articulated a right-wing discourse that trivialized government violence, deployed aggressive symbols (such as the former president's naked image), sexualised political debate, and used violent terms such as images of 'garbage' and 'cleanliness' to call for a 'sanitizing' of the PT from the country. The tactics of the right included circulating memes and dominating spaces through sound: screams, whistles, and banging pots and pans marked the anti-petist response to any manifestation of the PT, mainly embodied in Dilma and Lula.

Protestors took to the streets in several cities, expressions of a new anti-petist militant coalition that continued to develop during the 2014 presidential elections. Although Rousseff was narrowly re-elected over conservative candidate Aécio Neves, Brazil experienced a new type of militant, active in public space and across social networks. This militant was conservative, upper-middle class, and used an anti-petist rhetoric honed with the criticism of the World Cup.¹⁷

THE IMPEACHMENT OF DILMA ROUSSEFF, 2015

Following the 2014 elections, the country was deeply divided. Brazil's national flag began to be explicitly associated with the anti-petist right. Despite its victory in the elections, the PT did not control public debate. Anti-petism dominated the key channels of public discussion, such as the powerful television networks and social media, but it did not control parliamentary politics. Many people considered the PT government illegitimate because they believed accusations of fraud at the polls.

As public outrage over the alleged fraud increased, more Brazilians demanded the impeachment of President Rousseff. Public anger only needed a legitimate charge to force through the change of government, which was obtained through the allegation in

Congress of 'dodgy accounting'.¹⁸In March 2015, massive demonstrations began again throughout the country. This time, the message was clear and unified: protestors called for Dilma Rousseff's impeachment.

The first difference I perceived in the streets in 2015 was that the demonstrators were wearing the colours of the national flag: green and yellow. Their slogans and chants were well formed, and in the demonstrations, no trace remained of the non-conservative collectives that had participated in demonstrations in previous years, like the left-wing groups critical of the PT and the Black Blocs. These demonstrations institutionalized anti-petism, not only as a political rhetoric, but as collective social practice of the right. The language used in this context was warlike, aggressive, and strengthened boundaries of political identification. Despite the liberal economic positions of the organizers and moral-religious concepts from evangelical activists, anti-petism anchored the identity of the 'new right'. The protests showed its power to mobilise people who did not identify with the left or progressivism (Solano, 2016).

The 2015 demonstrations were spatially decentralised, moving from historical zones and central urban precincts, where protests had occurred in 2013, to upper-middle-class neighbourhoods, bringing the demonstrations closer to the groups that attended. This dynamic continued until the 2018 elections, when the political gatherings of Bolsonaro's supporters in Rio de Janeiro concentrated on Copacabana and Barra da Tijuca, high status upper-middle-class neighbourhoods, rather than the city's older downtown area.

The 2015 and 2016 demonstrations included a cultural project: constructing symbolic associations and chains of rhetorical equivalences that underpinned anti-petism. For this project, the image of 'The struggle against communism' was revived; in the demonstrations for impeachment, posters proclaimed, 'Our flag will never be red,'¹⁹'Stop the Marxist doctrine,' and 'Brazil will never be Cuba.' This theme was related to other long-standing cultural projects that preceded the demonstrations, such as the liberal right-wing groups 'Brazil Free Movement' (*Movimento Brasil Livre*, -MBL) or 'Come to the Street Movement' (*Movimento Vem Para Rua*). These groups had hung

on to key concepts such as the danger of become a ‘communist’ country like Venezuela and a fear of Bolivarism, represented by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

The narrative forged in the anti-petism movement called for the intervention of the military in Congress to, as one slogan demanded, ‘put order in the house.’ Anti-petitists insisted that the PT had broken the social contract of democracy and that the army was the best actor to re-establish order and restore democracy. Older images of the Brazilian army and anti-communism were explicitly represented in these demonstrations, and slogans emerged linking the demonstrators with soldiers in a divine crusade, such as, ‘We are going with the strength of God,’ a theme that resonated especially with the expanding community of Evangelical Christians. The symbolic links contributed a Christian moral substance to anti-petism and clearly defined an enemy: the PT was synonymous with corruption, not just political, but also moral and even theological.

Finally, Rousseff was impeached and replaced by Michelle Temer in April, 2016.²⁰ In the elite neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro, her departure was loudly celebrated. In Congress, Bolsonaro, then a deputy, voted in favour of impeaching and dedicated his vote to the officer who had tortured Rousseff during the military dictatorship, pronouncing: ‘In memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ulstra, Dilma Rousseff’s nightmare, my vote is yes!’ From their homes, the anti-petitists watched Bolsonaro’s political movements with interest. Until that time, the anti-petist movement had a clear enemy and a cultural project, but they lacked a charismatic leader capable of channelling their demands, representing them, and presenting himself (or herself) as a unifying voice capable of confronting the ‘petistas’ and the PT leader, former President Lula. Bolsonaro emerged as a candidate to assume this role.

MILITARIZATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF JAIR MESSIAS BOLSONARO

Although a defence of military intervention was part of most demonstrations, militarism became especially pronounced after, on February 16, 2018, President Temer declared a military intervention in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Public perception that it was spiralling out of control led the Federal Government to take extreme measures to counteract violence in Rio de Janeiro. The president compared organised crime in the city with a metastasis spreading throughout the country, so he decreed that public security institutions be headed by a military general.

Federal strategies, including the use of the army, undermined the local and international reputation of the city: rather than Rio de Janeiro as the 'Marvelous City' capable of hosting mega sport events, the declaration suggested that city streets had descended into chaos. The declaration crystallized a broader rhetoric of fear; although this image existed previously, with the declaration, the fear of interpersonal violence acquired federal institutional legitimacy. The declaration allowed the right wing to express its preference for severe order openly and normalized the violence of its rhetoric, to support without reservation a harsher, militarised state.

Previously reluctant to remind people of its association with historical dictatorships, the renewed right could openly defend militarism because of the perception that Rio de Janeiro was a city out of control. The anti-petist movement expressed a nostalgia for the 'order of the past', reinterpreting the period of military dictatorship as one of prosperity and security, in which people remembered having lived according to the motto on the Brazilian flag: in a regime of 'Order and Progress.' The new right's sympathizers expressed gratitude to the military for this period of prosperity, rejecting the importance of the human rights violations denounced during the military regime. The perception that society was growing disorderly and dangerous, especially Rio de Janeiro, allowed the right to reinterpret the period of military rule and call for a return to repressive policies that promised greater personal safety.

This veneration for the military also allowed sectors of the population less loyal to democratic principles, often organized through social networks, to defend, if necessary, military intervention in the National Congress, press censorship, interference in the unions, and prevention of public demonstrations (of the left, and especially the PT). All

this came together under one theme they repeated: a need to 'put order in the house.' The metaphor of the house assumed that Brazil was bygone enormous family, and potentially that it required a paternal-authoritarian figure capable of 'putting order'. Given the militarism and nostalgia for the dictatorship emerging in the imaginary of the right, this figure should also be military.

Although, as has been indicated, the military element became increasingly relevant in the construction of the rhetoric of the extreme right, this event represented a crystallization in public discourse. The militarization of the city of Rio de Janeiro was accompanied by the consolidation of a media story in which the violent elements were legitimized as a form of conflict resolution in the "marvelous city". It was from this moment that a militarized discourse, capable of bringing together various sectors of society, began to be consolidated. The military discourse, channeled through Bolsonaro, had not had any material consequences in the events previously mentioned, such as in Rousseff's impeachment or in the various mobilizations since 2013. Thus, this key event gives it centrality in the way of constructing the "Bolsonarist rhetoric"

CONCLUSIONS – CHAINS OF EQUIVALENCE IN THE FAR-RIGHT

With the convergence of public rhetoric on the right, the ground was laid for Jair Bolsonaro, a Captain in Brazil's military reserve. He was ideally positioned to capitalize on the symbolic rhetoric that had emerged, running for the presidency of Brazil with retired General Hamilton Mourão as his vice-presidential candidate. Their campaign during the formal electoral period, which began in August 2018, tapped into the popular discontent of the anti-petist movement: the 'Bolsonarist project' stepped into a rhetorical stream which preceded it.



Image: Donald Trump and Bolsonaro share a poster during the Brazilian campaign.

The events studied serve as key moments in which the demands of a new political identity block were built. This does not mean that the process of construction of the Bolsonaroist rhetoric was not influenced by diverse spaces, such as the virtual ones.

Nevertheless, we have focused on understanding how collective disaffection had key moments in the consolidation of Bolsonist rhetoric.

These key moments were designing a series of chains of equivalence of the shared demands between the different sectors. Since they were potentially incompatible demands between the material interests of each of the sectors, Bolsonism began to crystallize the language we have analyzed, in which violent symbols, referring to nationalism, emerge with force, and a meaning is constructed before the very symbol that Bolsonaro represents.

His political rise coincided with a contemporary global crisis that generated diverse forms of emotional adherence to leaders such as Bolsonaro in Brazil, but also Donald Trump in the United States, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Narendra Modi in India, or Marine Le Pen in France, as well as support for Brexit in the UK. This Brazilian example is part of an international emergence of expressions of disaffection with the establishment and political-economic conditions, with specific consequences in semi-peripheral countries such as Brazil.

These world leaders, in spite of belonging to diverse societies and political cultures shared the form of channeling the demands into a violent, anti-establishment rhetoric. This construction had a strong presence in the physical and virtual public arena, and was capable of building chains of equivalence with their diverse demands. They thus gave relevance to the use of the symbols, of their leaders and the construction of a language of their own as a form of a new collective political identity.

A comparison between these cases will be a rich way to understand the particularities but also the common elements of this phenomenon. The common elements among these movements, however, should not blind us to the ways that each case builds on emerging local rhetorics of the so-called "far-right"

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NOTES

On March 4, 2018, the former president of Brazil, Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva ('Lula'), founder of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), presented himself to the Federal Police of São Paulo to be arrested. In a partisan process, he was sentenced to 12 years and one month in prison for passive corruption and money laundering as part of 'Operation Car Wash'

² Throughout the paper the concept 'Bolsonarism' refers to the political-ideological project shared by various sectors of the population that converged around the figure of Jair Bolsonaro.

³ Zé Carioca is a character created by Walt Disney in 1942. A parrot that introduced Donald Duck to Brazil, Zé offered an image of a cordial, beautiful, cheerful Brazil, where samba, capoeira, celebration, and *malandragem* (naughtiness) were mixed.

⁴ Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

⁵ In 2008, the group of so-called 'BRICS' (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the latter added in 2011) signed an agreement creating a block of emerging national economies as an institutionalised geopolitical strategy.

⁶ Data obtained from the *Brazilian Public Security Annual 2018*.

⁷ Brazil's economic recession began in mid-2014, when the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell from one year to the next by 3.8%, and in 2015, by 3.6%. By 2017, over 14 million Brazilians were unemployed, or 13.7% of the population (Source: IBGE).

⁸ Black Blocs appeared in the 1980s in Germany, and first took centre stage in Brazil at the 2013 demonstrations, dressing in black with their faces covered to conceal their identities from the police. They engaged in violence, called themselves anarchists, and used demonstrations as a stage to confront capitalism and its symbols. Esther Solano, Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp), has done numerous studies on the Black Bloc collective and its manifestations in Brazil, such as her book *Masked: The True Story of the Black Bloc Supporters* (2014).

⁹ Data obtained from research conducted on June 20, 2013, on the profile of demonstrators in various cities by the company Kantar Ibope Media, until 2018 known as Ibope (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics).

¹⁰ Starting in 2005, investigations were carried out into payments that the PT made to other congressmen, called by the media the *mensalão*, a neologism from the word for ‘monthly payment.’ In 2012, investigations concluded with the condemnation by the Federal Supreme Court of some of the leadership of the PT.

¹¹Datafolha Research Institute (2016).

¹² Information extracted from ethnographic research carried out for my Masters at the Federal University of Fluminense (UFF- 2013-2015).

¹³Globoesporte.com

¹⁴ The Rio de Janeiro State Court of Audit detected irregularities in the financing of the Maracanã Stadium works. The denunciations were extended to other stadium projects, implicating the main concessionaire company, the multinational Odebrecht, in a broad corruption scheme linked to ‘Operation Car Wash’.

¹⁵ The pressure exerted by the residents of Aldeia Maracanã, and other collectives, prevented the demolition of the Indian Museum building, and the promise to transform the building into an indigenous Culture Reference Center for the start of the 2016 Olympic Games. By the middle of 2019, this promise was still unfulfilled.

¹⁶ Projects more representative of the social policies promoted by PT governments than the international sporting events that were the initial catalyst for the group’s formation.

¹⁷ The classification of the lower, middle, emerging middle, and upper classes was carried out according to the indicators established by the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV).

¹⁸ In September 2015, the president of the Federal Chamber, Luiz Eduardo Cunha (PMDB), of Dilma Rousseff's coalition, accepted the formal accusation of a crime of fiscal irresponsibility that ended the Impeachment of the president. A year later, Cunha was disqualified from the post.

¹⁹ The flag of the PT was red and its symbol a star.

²⁰ Michelle Temer was part of the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) Despite voting in favour of impeachment, he had until that time been vice-president under Dilma Rousseff, as they were part of the same coalition.

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