

The Palgrave Handbook on Right-Wing Populism and Otherness in Global Perspective

Edited by
Rui Alexandre Novais
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Global Political Sociology

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Rui Alexandre Novais · Rogério Christofoletti
Editors

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Introduction: Meta-Othering? Right-Wing Populism Globally Capitalizing on Exclusionary Antagonisms and Moral Divides

Rui Alexandre Novais and Rogério Christofoletti

While othering and populism have long been popular global topics in academia, they have mostly been discussed separately in scholarly books. *The Palgrave Handbook on Right-Wing Populism and Otherness in Global Perspective* is a unique addition to the literature. To our knowledge, there has been no previous book that focuses on the relationship between othering and right-wing populism on both conceptual and empirical levels. Othering is a recurrent strategy associated with right-wing populist identification and the portrayal of individuals or social groups as distant, deviant or alien, although it is not a new tactic and is not exclusive to right-wing populists (Brons, 2015; Egelhofer et al., 2021; Krämer

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et al., 2021; Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016; Wodak, 2015). Likewise, right-wing populists frequently use denial and blame avoidance tactics to shift responsibility or avoid criticism by scapegoating others for unmerited blame and adverse treatment (Béland & Waddan, 2021; Boin et al., 2009; Bovens et al., 1999; Drabeck & Quarantelli, 2008; Entman, 1993; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Hameleers et al., 2017, 2018; Hinterleitner, 2017; Hinterleitner & Sager, 2015; Hood, 2011; Hood et al., 2009, 2016; Iyengar, 1994; Krämer, 2018; Kuipers & Brändström, 2020; Leong & Howlett, 2017; Mortensen, 2012; Novais & Araújo, 2022; Novais & Leite, 2024; Panievsky, 2021; Vis, 2016; Weaver, 1986).

But in addition to highlighting how narratives and practices that emphasize differences are fundamental components of populist discourses and attitudes, *The Palgrave Handbook on Right-Wing Populism and Otherness in Global Perspective* also aims to argue that there is a kind of "meta-othering" of exclusionary conflicts and moral divisions as a controversial distinguishing characteristic of the recent surge in right-wing populist politicians across various locations worldwide. It does this by examining the performative aspects and discursive practices in the rhetoric and actions of right-wing populists as they shape their political identities by adeptly using "floating" or "empty" signifiers (Laclau, 1996, 2005). Right-wing populist leaders often use vague and ambiguous universal ideals to promote their agendas. They have the flexibility to manipulate these conceptualizations to suit their agendas, making them context-specific or malleable. This allows them to conveniently choose and implement the ideals that best serve their purposes (Biancalana & Mazzoleni, 2020; Lamour & Varga, 2020; Osuna, 2024; Palonen, 2018; Wodak, 2015).

Aware of the chameleonic ideational characteristic and gradational nature of right-wing populism manifested in national and regional peculiarities—"depending on [who] it is mobilizing against" (Canovan, 1999, p. 4)—this book seeks to uncover a common thread or pattern within the various forms of meta-othering as communicated by right-wing populists from the Global North and South. Additionally, these leaders often seek to normalize and mainstream their divisive discourses, sometimes harnessing the power of legacy media. They achieve this by identifying a set of ideological enemies and emphasizing moral divides. Furthermore, their exclusionary claims are often articulated through populist discursive elements, such as a Manichean view of the world, which polarizes the

"pure people" against the "corrupt elite", as well as vilifying dangerous out-groups as betrayers of the people's sovereignty (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Laclau, 1996).

More concretely, it sheds light on how right-wing populists employ two parallel distinct forms of otherization or attributing relative inferiority and alienness to in-groups and out-groups globally. In constructing their projects and (incomplete) identities established by alterity and otherness, right-wing populists frequently resort to a couple of distinct ways of relating to *self* and *others* to persuade and garner future supporters and convey a particular interpretation and understanding of social reality.

On the one hand, by othering "upward" the in-groups of the elites or the establishment and those associated with the elites the moral dimension is reflected in the populists' blaming discourses constitutive of and constituted by their antagonistic depiction of the elite (Canovan, 1999; De Cleen, 2019; Laclau, 2005; Mayring, 2019; Mudde, 2004; Osuna, 2021; Ostiguy, 2017; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014; Wodak, 2021).This vertical othering targets both domestic individuals and groups of elites or "internal outsiders" political players operating "within the polity structure" - the government and/or the opposition (or both), the state other formal institutions of liberal democracy like the courts, regulatory agencies, intelligence services - and "external outsiders"such as international or supra-national institutions (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Novais, 2023; Novais & Araújo, 2022). The elite banner also lumps together different foes besides the political government or the opposition and those associated with them, such as non-governmental organizations, the prevailing social and cultural norms of correctness and civility governing personal interactions and democratic institutions of political life in representative democracy (Christofoletti & Oliveira, 2022; Novais & Araújo, 2022; Novais & Leite, 2024; Novais & Lind, 2024; Osuna, 2021). Driven by the "arrogance of ignorance" or a deep-seated hatred of intellectuals and all those with progressive values, such an elite delimitation is further strategically enlarged to include other unelected leaders from the economic and cultural sectors (academia, culture or the media) along (Bhat et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2021; Egelhofer et al., 2021; Fawzi & Krämer, 2021; Krämer, 2018; Macaraig & Hameleers, 2022; Meeks, 2020; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Novais & Araújo, 2022; Van Dalen, 2021; Wodak, 2015).

On the other hand, and concomitantly, the success of right-wing populism is partly driven by the practice of "othering 'downward', which

involves demeaning and scapegoating certain out-groups or excluded "external outsiders". Indeed, a rather similar antagonistic Manichean interpretation of reality underpins the discursive construction of vulnerable and marginalized populations such as immigrants and members of ethnonational, racial or religious groups, as well as other minorities related to gender identity and sexual orientation groups (Brubaker, 2020; Sauer, 2024). Although riding upon the same "logic of difference", the horizontal othering contrasts with the vertical one not only in terms of the distinct exploitative undeserving enemies targeted, but also for being by majoritarianism complemented with institutionalized social and political inequality, racism, nationalism, nativism, securitization, homophobia and anti-multiculturalism or cultural differentialism, among others (Dietze & Roth, 2020; Heiskanen, 2020; Krämer et al., 2021; McSwiney & Sengul, 2024; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sauer, 2024; Sponholz & Christofoletti, 2019).

Moreover, *The Palgrave Handbook on Right-Wing Populism and Otherness in Global Perspective* is selective not only in its concentration on theory and empirical application, but also in its focus on recent real-world expressions of the right-wing populist meta-otherization. Likewise, the book adds multiplicity to the analysis by covering contemporary expressions of right-wing populist perspectives on othering, with the empirical research involving individual case studies or cross-national comparisons. It thoroughly examines different aspects of right-wing populist othering and combines existing research with new approaches and findings on emerging or new forms of these political actors' tactics to justify, strengthen or instrumentalize othering narratives and claims. In the process, the book offers a geographically comprehensive portfolio of manifestations of right-wing populism othering that encompasses as many diverse cases and variations around the world, and as much from the Global South as possible.

Another important feature of this Handbook regards the endeavors in bringing together a wide range of viewpoints and examples from different disciplines and theoretical approaches. Indeed, it aims to break down disciplinary boundaries between communication, political science, history and sociology as an important aspect and distinctive feature of the book in living up to the distinctive interdisciplinary facet of Global Political Sociology Series.

The enthusiastic response to our call brought with it some interesting editorial challenges. Naturally, the first was to select texts that would

not only contribute to the theoretical debates on right-wing populism othering, but would also help to compose a diverse and balanced mosaic of the topic. The next challenge was to organize these chapters to highlight perspectives, emphasize meanings and offer an enjoyable and educational reading experience. The editorial challenges were mitigated by the fact that we were fortunate to have so many contributions of high academic quality and from authors who have been developing studies that are both thought-provoking and necessary for understanding our tumultuous times.

These efforts yielded a Handbook with twenty-one chapters, written by thirty-seven authors and divided into two parts. The parts express distinct but complementary strategies for constructing otherness. In the first part, eleven chapters present scenarios, characters and episodes that illustrate how the political elites of the extreme right emerge and constitute themselves as radiating centers of power. The strategies and discourses of self-legitimization are on the scene, extolling their practices at the cost of accusing their tormentors and their values. Today's highly polarized societies function as laboratories for these leaders and their groups, engaged in moral crusades and cultural disputes and armed with their profiles on all social networks, terrains that survive and thrive through permanent conflict, high emotional tension and symbolic exchanges that are simultaneously simplifying and flammable.

In the first chapter of this first half of the book, Massuchin and Orso analyze how Brazil reconfigures international discourse to strengthen an atmosphere of the extreme right, adapted to its own characteristics. The authors point out that the country is porous to external debates and that, historically, it imports elements and models from other territories, continually assimilating them. In their analysis, they identify four local peculiarities for the reinterpretation of what the extreme right calls "Brazil's enemies", and knowing each one will give readers a better understanding of this political dynamic that is both fleeting and engaging.

Buitrago, in turn, addresses the case of right-wing populists in Germany before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapter shows how the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)—a far-right party—was a key player among right-wing populists in that country in normalizing a discourse based on the adversarial logic of Self versus Other, resorting above all to the use and manipulation of emotions. The strategy of labeling the enemy in order to reaffirm oneself is observed again, this time by Ruiz-Méndez and Hurtado and now in the Mexican context. The

authors argue that the policies of former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador could be understood as belonging to right-wing populism, since in his communication, he sought not only to delegitimize his antagonists but also to exclude them from the democratic game. The construction of otherness is observed in the text based on the theory of post-Marxist Ernesto Laclau (1935–2014) and the semantic analysis of the performative signifiers that define the antagonistic other.

For Varão, Boselli and Ferreira, otherness can be understood from multiple perspectives, although always as a question of identity, with nuances that range from the absence of identification to absolute identification. The authors point out that the objective of defeating the enemy gains more strength when populist leaders get closer to each other, inspire each other, generating a mirroring effect of discourses and attitudes. The chapter shows this movement, investigating similarities and differences in the gestures of Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump on Twitter/X as they try to define who their enemies are in the political arena.

Recuero and Soares keep their eyes on the same digital platform, focusing their attention on the 2022 Brazilian electoral campaign. Immersed in the intense political polarization, the authors sought to understand "how does the other half tweet?" To this end, they identified how the teams of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Jair Bolsonaro mobilized and legitimized the idea of "otherness" as part of their speeches, how the construction of this "other" reinforced the polarized environment, and how this idea is linked to populism in the local context.

The political scenario in Brazil has become more radical after ideas from the past were reactivated by agents of the present. This is what Machuy argues in her chapter, when she evaluates the evolution of conservative discourse and identifies elements that constitute the coup d'état that led to the military dictatorship in 1964. According to the author, the construction of the image of the "evil communist" was reactivated and gained freshness with the books of Carlos Brilhante Ustra (1932–2015)—a notorious military torturer—and Olavo de Carvalho (1947–2022)—a controversial media inflammatory—in addition to the speeches of Jair Bolsonaro. In all of these texts, the author recognizes structuring elements of anti-communist and anti-leftist discourses, to name the most obvious.

The chapter by Ferraz and Gambaro shows, once again, that it is not enough to simply brand the enemy. It is also necessary to spread an ideology that, at the same time, isolates the adversary and builds

a viable alternative vision. To this end, the authors examine podcasts produced by Brasil Paralelo, a Brazilian media company aligned with far-right discourse that has been instrumental in sustaining the extremist utopia of the right in Brazil. The results show the construction of a "cultural front" formed to oppose democratic values with a discourse in favor of a liberal-conservative regime.

In parallel with the alternative media of the far-right, mainstream media has also helped to normalize conservative discourse in the country, argue Guerreiro, Guazina and Le Cam. According to the authors, journalistic media gave national public visibility to politicians like Bolsonaro, who were previously known in a restricted way, as his discourse aligned with the interests of media groups. In the chapter, this media populism is demonstrated based on the analysis of ten years of news published by two of the largest Brazilian newspapers, which contributed to highlighting and legitimizing Bolsonaro's extremist thinking and thus (intentionally or not) contributing to the normalization of otherness on the political agenda.

Novais shows another side of the Brazilian mainstream media: the one that resisted Bolsonaro's attacks and aggressions against journalists—a strategy of hostility that aimed to undermine legitimacy and silence critical news coverage. The chapter brings together some of the individual and institutional responses of the press to external attacks by the political elite to protect its professionals in the face of threats and ways to circumvent government embargoes on the provision of information during the Covid-19 pandemic. Such strategies, in addition to defending the institutional myth of quality journalism from the various political-cultural risks and associated threats posed by Bolsonaro, also served to reinforce external perception and reaffirm its institutional legitimacy in society.

Smee captures a little-explored nuance of the visual construction of political otherness: the use of superhero images by the far right to reinforce its position as guardians of moral limits and combatants of evil, its opposite. The analysis is based on the appearance of costumed people in street demonstrations in Brazil, who mimic and reinterpret these fantastic characters, and describes how this resource reinforces the binary mentality of right-wing extremism.

Concluding the first part of this book, Resende and Freire address how populists use the rhetoric of otherness to be reelected and remain in power. Looking into Viktor Orbán's election in 2018, the authors argue

that successful populists use Othering rhetoric to create real—or imaginary—existential threats to the "people" based on narratives of crisis that creates anxieties and insecurities in the electorate. They show how Orbán employed a rhetoric strategy based on the (re)production of a populist logic predicted on an antagonistic divide in the social body that puts the "people" in opposition to the "elites" and any different "Other". In short, they engage in Othering practices in order to mobilize popular support to remain in power and hence build their own legitimacy of protector of the nation in peril.

The second part of this book complements the panorama we want to present, as it shows a movement that seeks to crush other layers of society, generally considered outsiders and marginalized. They are scapegoats that feed the binary logic that fills the lungs of the extreme right. They are developments of the conservative extremist playbook that seems to strengthen as it demeans and attacks its opponents, often leaving realpolitik aside to triumph on social media, in the streets or at the polls.

In the first chapter of the second half of this book, Rzepnikowska and Duda-Mikulin investigate the intricate constructions of otherness, made by right-wing populists, on the border between Poland and Belarus. Some aspects make the Polish case particularly rich for such analyses: its strategic geographic location, a growing history of immigration, and being governed by PiS—the Law and Justice Party, a nationalist, conservative and populist party. The authors draw attention to another characteristic: ethnicity, religion and gender have been decisive in the formation of otherness in that country. It is not new that ethnic-religious distinctions are invoked to construct the figure of the local enemy, a device used by the right-wing elite to define its own position of power, the authors state. Migration is one of the favorite themes of right-wing extremism because it is a phenomenon that can mobilize feelings and inflame discourses.

In Lucchesi's chapter, the sinking of an immigrant boat in 2023, in the Calabria region, will provoke the circulation of discourses that allow us to glimpse the many strategies of discursive construction of otherness. The author analyzes pieces of communication from the Italian government and identifies movements that attest to how populists have changed the image of the people who lost their lives to the responsibilities of "others" in such a complex issue full of historical, political and sentimental conditioning factors.

Although the work of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) does not provide specific theories of communication and otherness in politics, the philosopher inspires us to think about these themes. Sakarya draws on contemporary German thought—especially Jürgen Habermas—to present a reading in which the open construction of the "I" in political action as discourse provides the tools to communicate otherness in its otherness. Sakarya tests his interpretation by analyzing the conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, where the populist right considers them as enemies.

From Spain, Peres-Neto reveals how Vox—the main far-right party—saw the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to spread Sinophobia and other hate speech. Using social media, Vox not only spread disinformation about China and its role in the origin and spread of Sars-coronavirus-2, but also spread alarmist and moral panic content, fueling hatred and chaos. For the author, this episode shows once again how digital platforms have failed in Europe to contain hate speech and disinformation, helping to amplify racism against migrants and undermining the foundations of democracy and a culture of peace.

Prior and Andrade argue that the emergence of the radical right in the Portuguese Parliament in 2019—with the Chega party—ended the so-called Portuguese impermeability to reactionary populism. In his chapter, the author explains the nature of the party and its role in the debate on the rise of European far-right populism, emphasizing discursive strategies of polarization between "us and "them", and supporting actions related to the identity of the native people to exclude groups that do not share the identity and values of the "pure people". Xenophobia and Islamophobia are the basis of the discourse of André Ventura and his allies.

Back in Brazil, Domingues and de Paula explain a noisy aspect of Bolsonarism on social media: the antagonism against the artistic class. The authors show how state funding of artistic and cultural activities began to be questioned and criticized by the far right, which mobilized discursive strategies based on hatred, anti-intellectualism and resentment of social niches. In dispute would be public sentiments, aesthetic agendas, the direction of public policies and the forms of political governance.

The following two chapters signal shadows and ghosts on the horizon, at least in the Iberian Peninsula. Cervi, Tejedor and Puca focus on the demonization of feminists by the far right of Vox in Spain. According to the authors, feminists are targeted by the party because they represent deviant women who do not conform to the reductive social roles

imposed by the conservative part of society. Therefore, they are reconfigured as "witches", demonic beings that need to be confronted, since the movements for women's rights sound like an imminent threat to collective survival.

Cunha takes stock of the dimensions that led to the expansion of populist ideas in Portugal, in particular the identification of an Other, expressed in many forms of alterity. For the author, the results of the recent elections in the country point to a growing fragmentation of the political scene, which can result in a provocative conclusion: alterity and the condition of the Other will always continue to be elements that define us.

Iacomini concludes this book by demonstrating how the idealization of the past and the religious dimension as identity factors contribute to alterity, explaining how the adhesion of evangelical groups to Jair Bolsonaro's support base resulted in an association of Israeli religious symbols with the imaginary of national conservatism. At least two factors would contribute to this phenomenon: the persistent messianism of the popular classes, rooted in Iberian mysticism, and the North American origins of Brazilian Pentecostalism. The result is the imagined construction of a monarchical, religious, politically centralized, capitalist country, also marked by the worldviews of the United States. For the author, the establishment of an "Israel of God" in Brazil—based on biblical prophecy—allows part of the Brazilian population to aspire to a happy future, in contrast to a reality of underdevelopment.

From Turkey to Spain, via Germany and Portugal; from Brazil to Poland, via Italy and Mexico; in Russia or Belarus, everywhere, right-wing extremist forces are coming together to present themselves as a political alternative to voters. The grammar used by individuals and groups is slightly varied, but has a common core that is described at length in the following pages. This book delves into the concept of creating a flexible "meta-us" to make the exclusionary tactics of right-wing populism seem normal. It focuses on the practices of setting boundaries and shaping discussions about "enemies", both "upwards" and "downwards" and across various targets, which serve to divide "us" from "them". It offers a comprehensive overview of how right-wing populism takes advantage of exclusionary conflicts and moral rifts on a global scale. We aim for readers to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges of studying the nuanced processes of othering by right-wing populism on a global scale. But above all, may these same pages renew the air and hope

in democratic pacts and in the human capacity to seek collective solutions to complex issues; and may these solutions be peaceful, balanced and see in the other not just an enemy, but a fellow human being with whom it is possible to coexist.

Enjoy your reading!

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Othering 'Upward' the In-Groups of the Elites or the Establishment and Those Associated with the Elites

The Enemies of Brazil: Transnational Repertoires and National Elements in the Construction of Far-Right Targets

Michele Goulart Massuchin and Maíra Orso

Introduction

Radical political groups and far-right ideology transcend national boundaries in contemporary politics (Caiani & Císař, 2018; Froio & Ganesh, 2019). The research about far-right politicians, political radical movements, and political parties has identified this phenomenon in several countries in the past 20 years (Álvarez-Benavides & Aguilar, 2020; Ben-David & Matamoroz-Fernández, 2016; Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Ernst et al., 2017; Giordano, 2014; Moreno-Almeida & Gerbaudo, 2021; Rocha, 2021), with a surge in the activities of right-wing groups and their increased visibility in institutional political spheres.

These organizations have been expanding their influence through the online environment (Caiani & Parenti, 2013). This represents a significant shift insofar as discourses and messages are disseminated and gain traction due to the vast possibilities offered by the internet, including

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websites, social digital networks, and instant messaging apps (Aladro-Vico & Requeijo-Rey, 2020; Chagas, 2022; Darmstadt et al., 2019). Hence, we may assert that the online landscape has played a pivotal role in enabling the transnationalization of far-right movements (Froio & Ganesh, 2019).

In Brazil, numerous studies point to the emergence, since 2013, of organizations with a radical repertoire centered on misinformation, hate speech, astroturfing, and humor within the online environment (Chagas, 2022; Gomes & Dourado, 2019; Recuero et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2023). However, it's worth noting that certain particular traits—which have received less attention in international research contexts—have drawn attention. Although the process of transnationalization enables the transfer of strategies across borders, connecting groups from diverse countries and global regions, there are also repertoires that exhibit localized nuances (Moreno-Almeida & Gerbaudo, 2021). Consequently, the objective of this chapter is to delve into the distinct traits of the repertoire of the Brazilian far-right, with a particular focus on how they identify their "enemies".

Through an examination of transnational and strictly local repertoires, this chapter puts forth four distinct characteristics that characterize the Brazilian far-right in their reshaping and redefining of adversaries within the national context: (a) regional xenophobia; (b) hate speech directed at Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT in the Portuguese acronym); (c) downplaying public health recommendations in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic; (d) attacks against the media combined with strategic use of the journalistic discourse. We examined these attributes by observing and analyzing the actions of various groups, encompassing political parties, social movements, and politicians, with a specific emphasis on their activities on social networks such as Twitter and WhatsApp.

The Transnationalization of Far-Right Discourse Within the Global and Online Landscape

The consolidation and startling political traction of far-right movements in the twenty-first century (Blee, 2007) have spurred research into how these groups shape and develop their repertoires. This has led to the emergence of a worldwide phenomenon, diverging from its fringe status in twentieth-century politics (Mudde, 2022). This shift has since paved

the way for an activism with a remarkable capacity to rapidly gain online popularity and embrace innovative communication methods that empower actors advocating explicitly anti-democratic and anti-inclusive agendas (Maly, 2018).

Various platforms are employed to disseminate content (Ben-David & Matamoroz-Fernández, 2016; Darmstadt et al., 2019) and, while these groups can be very diverse, they share a common set of traits, agendas, and characteristics (Mudde, 2022). In a global context, these repertoires establish transnational connections, extending their reach to diverse regions around the world. In essence, they transcend borders and illustrate the existence of an expansive network of right-wing activism that thrives within the online environment.

Froio and Ganesh (2019) explored the transnationalization of far-right discourse on Twitter and demonstrated how the repertoire of activism in various countries incorporates certain specific narratives. Narratives surrounding anti-immigration sentiments and nativist interpretations of the economy resonate with transnational audiences in countries such as France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom (Froio & Ganesh, 2019), as well as Greece, Austria, and the Netherlands (Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). Camurça et al. (2021) have also reiterated that Donald Trump's administration in the USA can be likened to that of the Brazilian government under Jair Bolsonaro from 2018 to 2022.

Hence, these shared characteristics gain momentum across different countries, further propelled by the framework of the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017), within which many of the actors are recognized as digital natives. As a result, the migration of methods of engagement becomes more streamlined. Empirical studies have demonstrated that online communication platforms are used to foster polarization strategies on social networks, effectively molding and shaping transnational networks (Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Gattinara & Pirro, 2019).

Identitarian and nativist narratives, for example, exhibit strong connections with analogous movements within the European far-right (Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2020), often accompanied by anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism movements (Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Georgiadou et al., 2018; Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2020). However, the identitarian and conspiratorial repertoire also manifests itself in other regions, clearly demonstrating the transnationalization of these narratives, appearing in Brazil (Massuchin et al., 2022; Messenberg, 2017), the USA (Darmstadt et al.,

2019; Eddington, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2016), as well as other Latin American countries (Giordano, 2014).

Anti-communism and anti-left demonstrations also reverberate on a transnational scale (Machado & Colevati, 2021). The "red threat" is an integral part of the far-right repertoire in several countries (Caiani & Císař, 2018; Giordano, 2014), which portrays communists as the "personification of evil", "enemies of the State" (Messenberg, 2017, p. 635), and "dissolute, corrupt, liars, cynics, slanderers, and murderers" (Sá Motta, 2002, p. 6).

Another characteristic that transcends national borders is the emergence of alternative right-wing media (Carlson et al., 2021; Figenschou & Ihlebaek, 2019). Presenting itself as an alternative to mainstream media, the right-wing alternative press network mediates information in the online environment in countries such as the USA (Eddington, 2018), Brazil (Santos & Albuquerque, 2019), United Kingdom (Cushion et al., 2021; Figenschou & Ihlebaek, 2019), and other European countries (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Haller & Holt, 2019;).

This repertoire, however, is complemented by other elements, some of which are distinctly local or imbued with new meanings. This is notably evident in the case of far-right organizations in Brazil. These groups, despite their diversity at the national level (Miguel, 2021; Rocha, 2021; Solano, 2018) and their incorporation of numerous global issues, also showcase specific characteristics that imbue their modes of operation with distinct features and contours.

Exploring the Particularities of the Far-Right Phenomenon in Brazil

The 2013 protests, commonly known as the June Demonstrations, provide a distinct marker of the rightward shift in Brazil. These protests involved various groups with differing approaches, underscoring the diversity within these demonstrations and the rise of "right-wing protests" (Singer, 2013; Tatagiba et al., 2015). Notably, the groups *Movimento Brasil Livre*, *Movimento Vem pra Rua Brasil*, and *Revoltados Online* gained prominence during this period and were responsible for organizing protests in major Brazilian cities in the subsequent years.

These groups brought attention to long-standing grievances such as anti-PT (Workers' Party) sentiments, concerns about corruption, and economic dissatisfaction. Interestingly, they attracted support from a

more varied audience, not necessarily in full alignment with all the demands of the protest organizers (Tatagiba et al., 2015). These themes gained further momentum particularly due to particular forms of activism facilitated by the online environment (von Bülow et al., 2022).

According to Rocha (2021), the belief in the existence of a leftist hegemony in the country has empowered right-wing groups. The gradual shift in values and a potential "cultural regression" have led to widespread opposition to gender-related issues (Biroli & Caminotti, 2020; Cabezas, 2022). Additionally, Giordano (2014) emphasizes the strong affiliations that these groups maintain with the Catholic Church and the Armed Forces. These organizations also reject globalization and economic cooperation trends (Norris & Inglehart, 2016), opposing initiatives such as MERCOSUR. Institutions and the justice system are constantly attacked and a substantial part of the demonstrations is permeated by hate speech (Sponholz, 2020). In addition to this, there are reactionary stances and endorsements of dictatorships, accompanied by a disregard for democratic norms and values, the delegitimization of opponents, and the propagation of disinformation campaigns (Penteado et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2019).

Under various designations, spanning from "new right" to "alternative right" (Messenberg, 2017; Miguel, 2021; Rocha, 2021; Tatagiba et al., 2015), the scholarly literature has since begun to investigate these activist forms, encompassing discussions about potential intersections between neoliberalism and neoconservatism (Miguel, 2021; Rocha, 2021), along with the inquiry into whether there exists a shift from a prior network of interests (González et al., 2021). While there may be disagreements regarding the names or roots of these groups, there is widespread consensus about their effective appropriation of the online environment (Chagas & Massuchin, 2021; von Bülow et al., 2022; Santos & Albuquerque, 2019). This includes their organized and professional use of online social media platforms (Chagas, 2022), leading to inquiries into the existence of what has come to be termed in Brazil as the "Hate Office", devoted to disseminating content of interest to these groups (Sampaio, 2019).

Moreover, we find a conspicuous development of echo chambers that perpetually reinforce certain viewpoints through the consistent dissemination of content. This phenomenon played a pivotal role in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 (Cesarino, 2019; Messenberg, 2017), underpinned by an information flow imbalance that favored radical right-wing actors (Santos & Albuquerque, 2019). Additionally, it is common to

find political actors in positions of authority (such as members of the Bolsonaro family, ministers, and deputies) who actively engage with these collectives and engage with their followers, sometimes in informal and non-institutionalized settings such as anonymous websites, bloggers, digital content creators, and activists.

Hence, a cohesive collective arises, driven by the protests of the past decade, and modeled after established organizations in other countries, directly stemming from the process of transnationalization. This consolidation is further intensified through the utilization of digital technologies and narratives, molded by and grounded in issues originating from a prior political polarization in Brazil. Within this national context, distinctive or revitalized repertoires come to the forefront, enriched with local nuances. In the following sections, we will explore four of these repertoires in-depth, considering them pivotal in how these groups interact with other actors and institutions.

Regional Xenophobia in the Context of Global Migration Trends

Xenophobic discourses have become a hallmark of far-right groups in Europe (Álvarez-Benavides & Aguilar, 2020; Ben-David & Matamoroz-Fernández, 2016), frequently intertwined with the historical backdrop of migration within the region, especially in the context of regional conflicts that transpired toward the close of the twentieth century. In Brazil, these behaviors exhibit their own distinctive traits, manifesting not only in instances involving Latin American immigrants (such as those from Haiti and Venezuela) but also in connection with internal migration patterns, particularly the movement of individuals from the northern regions to the central-southern areas of the country.

In the context of international migration, Brazil was one of the primary destinations for Venezuelans in 2022 (International Organization on Migration, 2022). Over the span of a decade, Brazil saw a 24.4% increase in the number of newly registered immigrants, as per data released in 2021 by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Presently, Brazil is home to 1.3 million resident immigrants, with the majority originating from Venezuela and Haiti (Agência Brasil, 2021). Driven by socioeconomic factors and the devastating earthquake of 2010, many Haitians have emigrated to Brazil, mostly concentrated in the northern and southern regions of the country. The northern state of Acre has

served as a major gateway entry point, with a substantial increase in arrivals between 2010 and 2015 (Baeninger & Peres, 2017). In turn, migration from Venezuela has occurred since 2017, primarily overland via the northern state of Roraima (Simões, 2017), largely driven by the food and healthcare crisis in Venezuela.

Xenophobia encompasses and aggregates various forms of aversion toward the "other", encompassing factors such as religion, ethnicity, skin color, country of origin, and other aspects, although its primary emphasis is on territorial distinctions. The religious dimension, characterized as Islamophobia (Froio & Ganesh, 2019) or anti-Semitism, which has considerable weight in Europe, is much less prominent in Brazil. Conversely, the most pronounced intersection is racial, as emphasized by Moreno-Almeida and Gerbaudo (2021) in their study on Morocco. In Brazil, expressions of aversion, repulsion, mistrust, or aggression often constitute a blend of xenophobia and racial discrimination, especially against Haitian immigrants (Milesi et al., 2018).

In addition to cases of discrimination against foreigners, Brazil also witnesses prejudice within its own borders. Individuals from the Center-South axis (Southeast and South regions) often exhibit prejudice against people from the North axis (Northeast and North regions), especially when it comes to regional immigrants. These regions are often depicted using stereotypes of laziness and underdevelopment, a perception influenced by factors such as the very warm climate and economic disparities. This type of discourse characterizes the Northeast and North regions as inhospitable, burdened by poverty and unfavorable living conditions (de Albuquerque, 2011; Malvezzi, 2007).

The electoral landscape in Brazil has played a significant role in amplifying these discourses, dating back to the 2014 elections when xenophobia intersected with issues of race and class (Silva, 2016). This repertoire has since intensified in the 2018 and 2022 elections. One such example was a viral video featuring a woman from the southern state of Santa Catarina urging against hiring individuals who had voted for Lula, derogatorily referring to them as "scoundrels". Data released by Safernet revealed a concerning trend during national election periods, showing an increase in reports of online xenophobic attacks compared to other years (G1, 2023), indicating that xenophobic sentiments were amplified during these politically charged periods. Following the 2022 elections, there was a notable surge of people on social media blaming the Northeast region for Lula's victory. For instance, posts encouraging trips to the beaches in

the South instead of the Northeast emerged, suggesting that residents of the latter region were associated with thieves, in reference to Lula.

Xenophobia not only permeates the broader societal discourse but also infiltrates the discourse of right-wing politicians, indirectly encouraging discriminatory behavior. Jair Bolsonaro, during his presidency, made remarks such as "All you need is a bigger head to be from the Northeast" and "*Bolsa Família*[1] is a downright lie! In the Northeast, you can't find someone to work in your house. If you work, you'll lose your *Bolsa Família* benefits". These statements insinuate, without substantiated evidence, that individuals in the Northeast region would choose to rely on social welfare benefits over pursuing employment. Another example of Bolsonaro's xenophobic discourse was his remark, "It's full of *pau de arara* here", in which he used the derogatory expression *pau de arara* to refer to migrants from the Northeast to the Southeast.[2] In a deeply concerning incident in which workers from the northeastern state of Bahia were rescued in a situation analogous to slavery in wineries in Rio Grande do Sul, a city councilor suggested that companies should "no longer hire those people from up there", in reference to workers who migrate from the Northeast in search of job opportunities.

Following the 2022 presidential elections, there has been an observable rise in separatist sentiments, particularly advocating for the secession of the Northeast region from the rest of the country. This trend has been accompanied by the circulation of images depicting Brazil divided into two parts, sometimes even in official contexts, such as in 2023, when the governor of Minas Gerais, Romeu Zema, made a speech calling for the creation of a South-Southeast consortium. In response to such developments, images with the phrase "Build the Wall" were widely shared on Twitter, underscoring this desire for separation, often accompanied by hashtags promoted by separatist groups (Senra, 2023).

[1] Translator's note: Bolsa Família (Family Fund) is a conditional cash-transfer program designed to offer financial assistance to millions of impoverished Brazilians. The program played a pivotal role in the social policy of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and still largely associated with his administration from 2002 to 2006.

[2] Translator's note: A derogatory expression to refer to people from the Northeast region of Brazil. The expression "*Pau de arara*" originated from the vehicle used for transporting birds, where they perched on top of a stick. Later, it began to refer to illegal transportation in truck compartments with makeshift structures and passengers sitting on wooden planks. It was this kind of transportation that conveyed drought refugees from the Northeast to the Southeast of the country.

Lula, the PT, and *Petistas*[3]: The Retrieval of Historical Objects and Their Association to Hate Speech

Another singular trait of Brazil's local repertoire is the frequent and widespread attacks on the Workers' Party (PT) and its most prominent figure, Lula, which are prevalent throughout the Brazilian far-right landscape. On platforms such as Twitter—particularly within non-institutionalized far-right communities—there is a recurring narrative of hatred directed toward the PT (Massuchin et al., 2022). Expressions such as "*Leftism, PT, Lula: All of that is the great CANCER OF BRAZIL! Jail*!!!!!!" exemplify this type of behavior.

Rocha (2021) stemmed from the significance of the *Mensalão* corruption scandal, at the height of the Lula administration era, to underscore the emergence of counter-digital communities and forums on Orkut, which served as catalysts for activists to protest and initiate an anti-PT campaign. Amid the increasingly assertive rhetoric during the "June Demonstrations" of 2013 and the 2014 presidential elections, this radical right—which differed from the traditional right—found itself in a favorable position to actively engage in mobilizations and advocate for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (PT). This scenario exacerbated political divides and bolstered the rise of Jair Bolsonaro (Messenberg, 2017; Rocha, 2021). Furthermore, Jair Bolsonaro's confrontational stance against the PT was a hallmark of his political actions (Cesarino, 2019; Rocha, 2021), as evident in a statement made during his campaign rally: "Let's shoot all PT supporters here in Acre!"

Conversely, the Worker's Party had experienced a decline in support following the *Mensalão* scandal and its involvement in Brazil's largest anti-corruption operation—known as the Car-Wash operation. These developments further fueled a pronounced anti-PT sentiment among the electorate (Cesarino, 2019; Messenberg, 2017; Miguel, 2018). On top of all this, another narrative gained momentum through the proliferation of conspiracy theories and disinformation, which posited that the Workers' Party (PT) harbors a political agenda focused on fomenting a cultural revolution with the ultimate aim of instigating a communist revolution (Machado & Colevati, 2021). The discursive symbiosis between

[3] Translator's note: PT supporters are commonly referred to as "*petistas*" in Brazil.

the PT and communism led to the revival of an anti-communist discourse under a new guise: the anti-PT rhetoric, which became a more prominent and resonant local repertoire in Brazil than traditional anticommunism sentiments. Voting against the Workers' Party was the primary motivation for many voters who opted for the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro (Machado & Colevati, 2021; Sá Motta, 2002).

It's worth noting that *anti-petismo* is not a novel phenomenon (Borges & Vidigal, 2018). However, it has been increasingly embraced by various groups over the last decade. As a result, this sentiment has found a place within a broader movement that rejects the political system as a whole and its institutions, reflecting a crisis in representation. This has resulted in the Workers' Party (PT) being viewed as a symbol of all the problems afflicting the country, frequently pinpointed as the sole culprit for the economic decline of the past decade, and associated with the primary issue plaguing Brazil: corruption (Messenberg, 2017). The symbolic association between the PT and corruption, a process that had already been unfolding since the peak of Lulism with the *Mensalão* scandal in 2005, intensified during the clashes over Dilma's impeachment in 2015. This solidified the party's image as "the enemy of the nation and the embodiment of the dishonesty within the entire political system" (Montevechi, 2021).

At this juncture, organizations such as *Vem Pra Rua, Revoltados Online, Movimento Contra Corrupção (MCC), and Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL)* aligned themselves around a shared agenda: hatred of the PT (Montevechi, 2021; Rocha, 2021). At demonstrations advocating for Dilma's impeachment, posters carried slogans such as "Make communism a crime!"; "Brazil will not become a new Cuba"; and "PT is the cancer of Brazil" (Montevechi, 2021; Rocha, 2021).

According to Miguel (2018), these behaviors result from a sum of factors, among which: allegations of government incompetence, accusations of corruption and misappropriation of public funds, specific criticisms toward social inclusion policies, a belief in meritocracy, and notably, a pursuit of social distinction. There is a certain segment within the Brazilian middle class that refutes egalitarianism and social programs for upward mobility of the poorest, with an intense fear of losing their social status in relation to the lower classes (Miguel, 2018; Montevechi, 2021).

According to Solano (2018), there was a significant societal restructuring during the PT administrations. Robust social programs like *Fome*

Zero, *Bolsa Família*, *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (for home ownership), *PROUNI* (University for All Program), and racial quotas were among the measures implemented both as reparative actions and to combat exclusion. However, some of these programs faced criticism and opposition during the pro-impeachment protests of 2015–2016. During these protests, discourses emphasizing meritocracy and nostalgia took the streets, epitomized by slogans such as "I want my country back" (Miguel, 2018; Montevechi, 2021; Solano, 2018; Telles, 2016).

The Far-Right's Contempt for Pandemic Control Measures

The third repertoire encompasses the proliferation of discourses that undermine efforts to combat the pandemic. These narratives have arisen from a combination of staunch support for then-President Jair Bolsonaro's speeches and a disbelief in science. Massuchin et al. (2022) identified that far-right groups in the online environment, throughout the pandemic, displayed a strong focus on endorsing the former president. Their research, which examined unofficial and non-personal social media accounts, revealed that 46% of the content posted over an 18-month period (from 2020 to 2021) reiterated Bolsonaro's statements and actions.

This intense focus on Jair Bolsonaro meant that his statements—particularly those against the use of masks and vaccines—garnered significant attention and support from activists, right-wing media, parties, evangelical leaderships, and other allied politicians. Malerba and Fernandes (2021) demonstrated that the pandemic was a recurring topic in the former president's rhetoric, a viewpoint consistently echoed by his supporters. It's worth noting that far-right movements and parties in other countries, such as Austria and Germany, also referenced the pandemic (Rivas-de-Roca et al., 2022), but these allusions had limited impact among their followers and received minimal shares. This stands in contrast to the Brazilian context, where such content circulated more effectively.

The Brazilian far-right network centered on Bolsonaro actively supported the former president and consistently reaffirmed their opposition to measures aimed at combating the pandemic, sometimes even questioning the very existence of the pandemic, a reflection of their pandemic denialism (Guerreiro & Almeida, 2021) and their general distrust in science (Massuchin et al., 2021). The content disseminated

within this far-right network often fostered "distrust in scientific institutions, explicit discrediting of the individuals working within these institutions, their statements and methodologies, accompanied by an anti-scientific rhetoric proposing alternative solutions" (Massuchin et al., 2021, p. 165).

Despite the official declaration of the pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), a significant surge in the death toll, global border closures, and scientific research supporting the efficacy of measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing, Jair Bolsonaro, with support from various leaders and online groups, actively disseminated content opposing these pandemic control measures (Carreiro et al., 2021). Essentially, they viewed these measures as adversaries that required resistance and opposition.

Silas Malafaia, a pastor and influential religious leader, explicitly voiced criticism against the use of CoronaVac, a vaccine produced by the Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac Biotech, stating that Brazilians should not be treated as guinea pigs. Additionally, various evangelical leaders opposed the closure of churches and used platforms such as YouTube to express themselves (Machado et al., 2020). In the case of the former president, despite guidelines mandating the use of masks, a measure widely implemented worldwide, he faced fines for not obeying this rule in various public places. While media campaigns repeatedly emphasized the importance of "staying at home", the former president organized visits to his supporters in the form of motorcades. Additionally, Bolsonaro consistently expressed concerns about economic losses and unemployment concerns, even as the COVID-19 death toll continued to rise.

Furthermore, opposition to these preventive measures coincided with the promotion of alternative medical treatments, despite the lack of consensus within the medical community at that time. For instance, Bolsonaro advocated for the use of chloroquine in official speeches (Guerra, 2021). In terms of public policies, Abrucio et al. (2020) demonstrated that Bolsonaro's contentious relationship with state governments impeded the development of a cohesive strategy for combating the pandemic.

Moreover, a cluster of digital-native alternative media outlets, aligning with right-wing perspectives, reiterated pro-Bolsonaro narratives and content. Specifically concerning COVID-19 discourse, the Bolsonaro-aligned media network—such as *Jornal da Cidade Online*, *Brasil sem*

Medo, *Conexão Política*, and *Gazeta Brasil*—served as platforms to defend Bolsonaro's stance, as pointed out by Santos (2021) in his analysis of the hashtag #Bolsonarotemrazao. Another pro-Bolsonaro digital-native outlet, *Terra Brasil*, promoted the use of medication lacking scientific evidence, such as Ivermectin, and generated content that discredited government decisions, such as the use of masks (Mello, 2021).

Far-right groups on social networks resisted complying with basic measures for combating the pandemic (Massuchin et al., 2021), often alongside strategies that sought to legitimize alternative medical treatments. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find both pro-chloroquine and anti-chloroquine messages circulating in entirely separate environments, often associated with hyper-partisan media outlets, as pointed out by Recuero et al. (2021).

The alignment between support for Bolsonaro and opposition toward pandemic control measures is also mirrored in people's perceptions and evaluations of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who expressed trust in the Bolsonaro administration tended to have fewer concerns about health issues caused by the virus and believed that the former president managed the pandemic effectively (Meneguello & Porto, 2021). Equally significant is the relationship between individuals' self-identification with right-wing ideologies and their support for the president's values and attitudes within the context of the pandemic (Meneguello & Porto, 2021).

Attacks on Media Organizations and Strategic Use of the Press

While scholarly research on communication strategies and attributes of the far-right has revealed its complex association with journalism and journalists (Carlson et al., 2021; Figenschou & Ihlebaek, 2019), in Brazil, an added feature emerges within this repertoire: the strategic utilization of traditional media coverage when advantageous, coupled with the adoption of a journalistic model for generating their content (Massuchin et al., 2022). In essence, this means that there is a simultaneous presence of distrust, undermining, and attacks on the media, even as these very institutions are occasionally strategically utilized to bolster far-right narratives. Consequently, the nature of this "enmity" is complex and, at times, momentary, setting it apart as a distinctive element within the far-right repertoire in Brazil.

A review of the academic literature on trust in the media concluded that "people do not trust traditional media" (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 151). Another study conducted by Hanitzsch et al. (2018), encompassing 53 countries, including Brazil, suggests a robust correlation between trust in the press and trust in political institutions. The authors attribute this phenomenon to an anti-elite sentiment, whose influence also extends to the media.

The scholarly literature emphasizes that a portion of this skepticism is linked to the emergence of organized right-wing factions that purposefully target the press and its representatives, explicitly aiming to undermine their credibility (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Carlson et al., 2021; Malerba & Fernandes, 2021). While this is a common occurrence within the transnational repertoire, in Brazil such attacks are intertwined with the strategic use of traditional media outlets when it serves their interests. For instance, an illustrative case involves an editorial published by the prominent newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, shared on Twitter by the far-right page *BrazilFight*, which states: "*Flexible Democracy – The defense of friendly dictators by Lula and the PT has a longstanding tradition and will not change*". In this editorial, the newspaper criticizes Lula's stance in an international interview, underscoring his inconsistencies and criticizing what they refer to as "leftist repertoires".

This reveals a complex and even paradoxical scenario when it comes to journalistic institutions (Haller & Holt, 2019; Massuchin et al., 2022), as Brazilian agents who undermine traditional media simultaneously make strategic use of news coverage from the traditional press to their advantage. This dynamic also comes into play when traditional media outlets criticize or offer unfavorable coverage of individuals or entities opposed by far-right groups. In such instances, content from newspapers such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Estado de S. Paulo*, and *O Globo* begins to circulate without facing attacks and serves to reinforce viewpoints within the far-right.

Therefore, one finds a relationship of interdependency, wherein the "old media" frequently serves as a source of information for these profiles, either to create content (Cushion et al., 2021) or to launch attacks on other actors.

Lastly, we address the imitation of journalistic aesthetics (Chagas & Massuchin, 2021). Examples such as: "[…] Click to see more ☛ https://t.co/ES99ZIfHw4121" and "Urgent - […]". In these cases, they mimic the journalistic style in their writing. However, it is worth highlighting

that content production in these contexts does not necessarily adhere to the ethical standards of journalism (Recuero et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it's crucial to consider the new space created for the production and consumption of content by alternative right-wing media. This aligns with the use of online platforms to launch attacks against traditional media outlets, often accusing them of poor production quality and generating fake news. Additionally, individual attacks on press professionals are not uncommon, a practice that has also been repeatedly endorsed by Bolsonaro himself (Marques, 2023).

These alternative media outlets typically originate from online platforms, and their content is intricately linked to political and partisan ideologies, generating and disseminating content that deviates from traditional media practices. Consequently, traditional press outlets become the focal point of attacks and are viewed as adversaries. However, it's important to note that the way this dynamic unfolds in the Brazilian context is shaped by relationships of dependence and strategic use of the traditional media.

Final Remarks

The act of defining and identifying targets to confront is a global phenomenon in the interactions between the extreme right and other agents. With the advent of digital online technologies, this behavior has transcended national borders and unified the repertoires of active groups. On the other hand, despite the presence of unanimous common adversaries, certain contexts can imbue approaches, orientations, and interests with fresh significance, shining a spotlight on particular issues or even leading to the identification of novel targets, particularly during moments of political turmoil.

This chapter has been organized around this premise, delving into the unique singularities of the extreme right's relationship with the "other" within the Brazilian context. Drawing from the existing scholarly literature and the actions of both official and unofficial agents, especially within the online environment, we identified four adversaries that Brazilian far-right groups interact with in ways that set them apart from other international contexts: (1) regional migration; (2) the Workers' Party; (3) pandemic control measures; and (4) the traditional media.

Through our analysis, two distinct movements emerge. First, the identification of new targets, such as pandemic control measures, which

represents a distinct Brazilian element that even lacks any tangible physical presence. The second movement encompasses the reevaluation and reframing of existing targets. For example, while immigration is a common focus of far-right groups worldwide, in Brazil, it pertains more to internal issues rather than international migration. Similarly, while the press is a subject of criticism worldwide, in Brazil, the relationship with the media is marked by a complex "love-hate" dynamic. Additionally, the Workers' Party (PT) serves as a proxy for communism. In this manner, the far-right discourse gains new guises that ease its assimilation into the local context.

In terms of new research directions, exploring other Latin American repertoires may prove significant due to potential similarities, especially with the shift from left-leaning to right-leaning political movements in the region over the past decade (Giordano, 2014). In the Brazilian context, a particular element merits attention, even though it does not fall under the category of "enemies": the support for former President Jair Bolsonaro (Massuchin et al., 2022), which we only briefly discussed in this chapter.

Lastly, this chapter makes a valuable contribution by systematically exploring the novel elements—and their evolving meanings—that shape the far-right's repertoire, thereby expanding the debate and offering insights into a phenomenon that has extended across international borders.

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Normalizing Otherness: The Case of Right-Wing Populists in Germany Before and During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Sybille Reinke de Buitrago

Introduction

This chapter explores how the populist right-wing Self can be active in efforts to reconstruct itself from a society's Other into a society's mainstream Self, involving a normalization of what was before unthinkable and unsayable. To illustrate this, the chapter analyzes the case of the key right-wing populist groups in Germany in the last years—mainly the political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and to some degree others such as PEGIDA, and the *Querdenker* grouping active during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Founded in 2013, the AfD has touted itself as the alternative to the political establishment and elites; it is by now a right-wing populist party with extremist elements, and has thus become a case of suspicion by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in

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Germany. Yet, the party has been elected to almost all *Länder* Parliaments and to the German Bundestag, in June 2023 also gaining its first seat at the local political level (in Thuringia), and in July the first mayor office (in Saxony-Anhalt). Scholars observed that some AfD politicians have utilized right-wing extremist positions (Vehrkamp & Merkel, 2020), while constructing and pushing the populist people-versus-government opposition, equalizing the state/government with the 'mainstream' political establishment, and mass media as the government's mouthpiece (Groll, 2019; Treib et al., 2023). Other populist groups discussed are PEGIDA and *Querdenker*. PEGIDA stands for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), the German branch being active since 2014 as right-wing part populist, part extremist movement. The *Querdenker* term refers to a thinking that is different and/or opposed to the government and to the scientists they worked with during the pandemic. Scholars classified the *Querdenker* as a somewhat loosely organized and diverse group of pandemic deniers and vaccination opponents, and middle-class supporters that experienced material loss due to pandemic protection measures (Nachtwey et al., 2020, p. 51).

In Germany, populists have pursued three strategies: Othering upward, Othering downward and the instrumentalization of the Covid-19 pandemic for own gain. The chapter discusses all three strategies, but focuses on Othering upward, thus on the means pursued by the AfD as key populist actor to normalize the party into mainstream German politics and the center of society. This includes building dichotomies of the people versus the elite, thus the state and government, and in association a claimed-as-colluding media. As part of the state/government, the political system and political structures are devalued.

German populists have also engaged in Othering downward—against migrants and refugees—as part and parcel of their Othering upward. Since the so-called refugee crisis with its height around 2015/2016, this has been a strongly renewed focus in the discourse by the AfD and other right-wing populist groups. A new focus in the Othering of migrants and refugees is that on the Muslim as particular negative Other, illustrated by the 'aggressive Muslim men' and the 'covered-up Muslim women'.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a time of crisis, which populists have tried to utilize to their benefit. Doing so, the AfD and other populist groups in Germany were successful in gaining more

support—via introducing some of their political views into the mainstream, pressuring the government to soften some protection measures, pressuring police authorities during anti-government demonstrations, creating more doubt about the independence of the media and creating a level of distrust in experts and science. The AfD has used the pandemic with some success to normalize its positions into society.

The chapter approaches the topic from the view of the role of emotions, illustrating how populists have utilized emotions in discourse. The aim is to show the significance of the emotion-discourse link, and the impact of highly emotionally shaped Self-Other narratives in processes of Othering and in normalizing the Othered Self into the mainstream. The following sections present the conceptual framework and the empirical case studies of Othering upward, Othering downward and instrumentalization of the pandemic. Lastly, the chapter offers some implications on how to deal with populist discourse.

Conceptual Framework: Othering, Discourse and Emotions

Discourse has constitutive effects—it constitutes meaning and understanding, and through these social reality (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Some argue that "there is nothing outside of discourse" (Campbell, 1998, p. 4), discourse bringing out and producing social relations (Hansen, 2006). Discourse can be seen as a system of signification, involving signs, symbols, practices, identities, materiality and speakers with various power positions and claims, all of them engaged in acts of normalizing, institutionalizing, ordering and constituting meaning, and thereby also knowledge and power (Keller, 2011; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 108–112; Shapiro, 1989; Foucault, 1997). Discourse is part of and produces social practices, as "ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations" (Hajer, 1997). Speakers shape meaning by including or excluding certain issues, ideas, interpretations and people, evoking identity aspects, promoting certain meanings or adding to and adjusting them, or limiting or rejecting other, alternative meanings, and thus creating certain views of social reality and, lastly, also a certain action potential (Herschinger & Renner, 2014, pp. 13–17; Boekele et al., 2001, pp. 12–13). In this sense, discourses are productive in bringing about, endorsing and implementing a certain "regime of truth… a certain common sense" and excluding or making meaningless, inadequate or otherwise disqualifying

other modes to see and categorize (Milliken, 1999, p. 229). Discourse then is a struggle for dominant meanings, knowledge and better positions of various actors vis-à-vis others in the societal, political arena, meaning that discourses, or certain discursive modes and strands, can change over time. Discourses being systems of signification, changes can include signs, symbols, practices, identity aspects, and power positions and relations.

To understand things discursive, we can also consider narratives, often seen as part of broader discourse. A narrative is a "strategic story" or "the telling of a story in a certain way for a certain purpose … [such as] influence", via identification (Maan & Ricks, 2015). Narratives offer a frame of meaning for ideas and behavior (Günther et al., 2016, p. 1), and the originators of narratives set the agenda (Wiktorowicz, 2005, p. 98), aiming at their own group and others. But why do some narratives become meaningful and/or dominant? For narratives to have an impact and to be effective, they need to explain existing problems, tensions and frustrations, and furthermore offer visions, aims and legitimizations, all in a way so as to connect with the views and needs of those addressed (Neumann, 2016, pp. 84–85). Thus, when the promoted views and ideas convince, they can gain traction in a particular group or society at large.

Often a part of discourse are practices of Othering, and of constructing Self and Other in various relationships to one another. Self and Other are constituted by and illustrated in discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The need for identity, and belonging, requires identification with one group and differentiation from another (Connolly, 1991), which can facilitate also the search for a negative Other—and in the case of states, as foreign policy favors the Self, the search for risks and thus threatening Others (Holland, 2014; Shapiro, 1997). Thus, Self-Other relations are constructed also between states (Campbell, 1998; Mercer, 2014; Neumann, 1999). Such state Self-Other constructions are shaped by the historical experiences of the states involved, their social and political cultures, and geography, as well as by ongoing political and geopolitical developments, and the rules and norms a state holds (Houtum & Naerssen, 2002; Neumann, 1999). Identity facilitates orientation in the world, on the individual, group and national level; it is also co-constructed in interaction with others around. At the level of states, we speak of national identity, which involves a political community with its institutions, rights and duties, shared history, national narrative and myths (Smith, 1991, p. 9). Since identity construction includes the construction of difference, of Self versus an Other, and often Otherness, tension

between Self and Other can develop (Rumelili, 2015). Othering and communicating Otherness are aimed at constructing dichotomy and opposition, and a Self that is considered superior to an Other, but also at mobilizing actions to protect the good Self from the negative Other (see also Reinke de Buitrago, 2018).

Othering involves emotions, such as the evoking of emotions toward Self and Other, or emotional framings of issues at stake. Emotions are an important part of human existence and action in the social world. Emotions cannot be separated from cognition and behavior, as humans think and act also with and via emotions vis-à-vis their surrounding world (Bially Mattern, 2014, pp. 590–592; Mercer, 2014; Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008). Self-Other relations then are also emotionally shaped, where the Self is often framed in positive ways and the Other in negative ways, each typically exaggerated more or less, with complexity reduced or distorted (Reinke de Buitrago, 2019; Reinke de Buitrago & Resende, 2019). In applying emotions to states, we can observe affiliation and bonding or fear and hatred often driving interstate relations (Ahmed, 2004; Sasley, 2011). Self and Other can furthermore be emotionalized—purposely adding or strengthening emotional framings, appeal and intensity in narratives, in order to increase Self-Other difference, which in turn can add to or create tension regarding Self-Other relations and contested issues (see also Reinke de Buitrago, 2018). When certain topics, especially when already contested, are furthermore emotionally framed, they gain in importance and attain a level of urgency. Such emotionalization also facilitates a taking-of-sides, as in 'forcing' to decide for either side, and, thus, contributing to dichotomy and opposition.

Communicating Otherness: How Populists in Germany Engage in Othering

Populists in Germany have, as populists typically do, claimed to represent 'the people', to represent them truly or better than the government. But populists use a rather diffuse notion of 'the people', while also excluding some, for example migrants, or foreigners at large. They instrumentalize whatever social, political or economic challenges a country and society faces to construct dichotomies: on the one side, there are the people, and on the other side the elite, the political establishment, foreigners, migrants and/or refugees—who are Othered in various ways.

The following three case studies illustrate key strategies of how populists in Germany have engaged in Othering and communicating Otherness, including the Othering upward—using the elite-versus-people dichotomy to construct the populist Self as the good Other or as mainstream Self; Othering downward—the people-versus-foreign-Other dichotomy; and additionally the instrumentalization of the Covid-19 pandemic for further, specific Othering.

Othering Upward: Framing the Self as the Good Other in the Middle of Society

Discourse by populists aimed to portray the populist Self being on the side of the people, and against a government and political establishment that was more interested in itself than the people. As populists were political forces that democratic parties in Germany did not cooperate with, and as particularly the AfD and its representatives were usually actively sidelined by the political parties in Germany's democratic spectrum, populists can in the eyes of democratic actors be considered a negative Other. To counter this, especially in the last years, the AfD has actively engaged in efforts to move the party into the political mainstream, while accusing the democratic parties of being mainstream. AfD representatives have been accusing the government and political establishment of denying the AfD a rightful place in German politics, and the opportunity to cooperate with other parties, while claiming to be the critical voice and the alternative to the political mainstream—the objective being to promote itself as a good Other vis-à-vis the defamed government and mainstream. At the same time accusing the political mainstream and wanting to be normalized into part of this mainstream illustrates a typical populist contradiction, which also illustrates their manipulation.

AfD discourse in the last years has included strong elements of anti-elite positions, the AfD supporting protests against the government and its policies (Lehmann & Zehnter, 2022). In criticizing the government for failing to respond to the people, and even for being undemocratic, the AfD framed itself as caring for and being part of the people (Leschzyk, 2021), thus, as being in the middle of society and a normal political voice. In criticizing the enormous sums of money and credits going to the EU, the AfD tried to frame itself as protector or German interests and taxpayers (Salheiser & Richter, 2020). AfD politicians and other populists have criticized the government on many fronts, including the

ignoring of great needs of the German 'people' regarding education, housing or employment, while spending great sums on the integration of migrants, aid to refugees or the re-integration of people who went as foreign fighters to wars in Syria or Iraq (Bachmann, 2018), again positioning themselves as the party that really cares for 'the people', and as 'critical' voice silenced by the government. Other right-wing populists have portrayed themselves as patriots saving Germany (PEGIDA, 2019). AfD politicians have claimed that the government is trying to defame and besmirch the party and that mass media follows the government's tune, and used this as 'proof' of the AfD being on the side of the people (Grell, 2019). For example, AfD politicians continued to portray themselves as caring for how much difficulty and loss the people had to endure under governmental policies, before, during and after the pandemic (see also Salheiser & Richter, 2020). Accusing the political establishment of acting against the people, the AfD, but also other populists, aimed to position themselves as the good Other that is working for the people.

The AfD has in the last years also engaged in strategically adjusting their speech so as to reach more of society's mainstream. For example, AfD politicians concentrate on all issues of popular discontent frequently reported on in media, claiming then that they are the only ones who care for the peoples' concerns. Such issues, depending on local contexts, include larger issues such as the rise in precarious employment and life conditions, and smaller issues such as public transportation in rural areas or a functioning garbage collection—which is why the AfD party program often seems incoherent. But with this approach the AfD posits itself as the party that truly cares for 'the people'. At the same time, the AfD tries to position itself as a normal party in Germany's political spectrum, claiming to be democratic as it was democratically elected, and therefore a party that others should work with and cooperate with in policymaking. A cooperation with the AfD has been rejected almost completely by all other political parties, but the AfD's claims are clearly aiming to normalize itself into the political system. Another strategy of adjustment is a softening of speech seen in some groups of the New Right: via a softening of the previous martial language and the lesser use of elements of National Socialism, they hope to appeal more to the mainstream of society. Scholars see in the changed rhetoric and modernized aesthetic a way to avoid stigmatization and to build bridges to national-conservative actors and society's mainstream (Pfeiffer, 2018, pp. 37–41). Right-wing populists (and extremists) themselves speak of how they can appear more normal

in order to expand into new areas and increase support (IfS, 2019). The softened style is aimed to appear more acceptable as normal political actor to the population.

Efforts to build appeal include the heavy use of identity and emotions aspects. Populists, in particular the AfD, are working to upvalue the AfD Self from a negative Other vis a normalization into a good Other and alternative Other in German politics. Specifically, AfD discourse constructs dichotomies toward the government, thus between the government and its political institutions and the AfD, upvaluing the AfD vis-à-vis the government, but also between the government and 'the people' in order to delegitimize the government in the eyes of the people. Instead of government and the other political parties, the AfD portrays itself as being on the side of 'the people' with the aim of normalizing the AfD into German society's midst. Doing so, AfD politicians make heavy use of identity and emotional appeal and frame issues, Self and Other with strong emotional terms and in opposition, most often working with anxiety, fear, resentment or anger/rage. In stoking anxieties and pitting Germans against the government, the AfD offers itself as the political solution for Germans and Germany. Doing so, they seem to be able to connect with parts of the population, in particular those who feel alienated or second-class in society.

Othering Downward—Pitting the Migrant/Refugee Other Against 'the People'

The Othering downward—of migrants, refugees or foreigners at large, and since 2015 in particular of Muslims—is part and parcel of the Othering upward and is thus discussed here as well. Populists in part continued previous lines of Othering against foreigners in general and against migrants; with the refugee crisis leading to many more refugees coming to Europe and Germany, the focus on refugees and, in particular, on Muslims grew. Daily and often very emotional media coverage showing images of long lines of migrants and refugees coming to or being at the border or in arrival centers, of refugees' personal stories, with various depictions of them and their needs, seemed to offer populists much content on which to build their antagonism. The Othering of migrants and refugees often came in the form of devaluing them and their needs, of generalized views regarding some negative aspects, of a 'mass'

of refugees overwhelming Germany, and of Germany, Germans and their culture, values and democratic system being at risk.

Thus, AfD representatives portray migrants and refugees and at times all foreigners as people only wanting to live off Germany's generous social system and Germans' hard work, while themselves never having contributed it, and "this mass migration" as "destroying Germany" (Farle, 2018). Portrayals of the government as facilitating such migration and risking the country aim to delegitimize the government and its policies. The decision by then chancellor Angela Merkel to not close the border and allow tens of thousands of refugees to enter at once in September 2015 is called a "breach of law" that is claimed to have enabled even terrorists to come inside Germany (Farle, 2018). Some in the AfD call migrants "haphazard and … unskilled", and "delinquents" (Weidel, 2018); others speak of migrants overrunning and threatening Germany and making Germans lose their home, of importing their conflicts to Germany and thus causing social unrest (Höcke, 2015–2019). Posters at populist/extremist demonstrations claim that the people no longer want asylum seekers, refugees and migrants coming to Germany (Welt, 2015). Such discourse pushes the building of contrasts and antagonism, and the idea of foreign cultures not fitting into German culture. German identity is evoked as part of Western civilization and culture, in difference to the threatening "archaic" norms and behavior of foreigners coming to Germany (Farle, 2018). In such discourse, migrants and refugees were not recognized as people in need, or their needs were downplayed and pushed behind other, rather negative characteristics ascribed, for example lacking gratitude, being lazy and/or prone to violence, being archaic and not fit for and a danger to European/German culture and society.

Since 2015 with a larger influx of Muslim refugees, populists have focused on the Muslim as a particular negative Other, illustrated mostly in the 'aggressive Muslim men' and the 'covered-up Muslim women'. Thus, Muslim men are portrayed as aggressive, archaic, radical and violent, and generally hostile toward women; Muslim women are depicted as submissive, passive, overly dependent and rather as object than self-acting, able subject. For example, the men are "men with knives who receive alimentation", the women are "Headscarf girls", and Muslims in general are considered "good for nothing" (Weidel, 2018). Claims at demonstrations reject Islam as belonging to Germany (Welt, 2015). Not only the European/German culture is claimed to be at risk, some also warn that with more and more Muslims living in Germany, they are able to change

the democratic laws to favor Islam and its distinct values and way of life (Video Angela, 2018); discourse thus paints an urgent danger for Germans, their values, and even for liberal secularism and the democratic system.

Part of this discourse is a claimed 'Islamization' of Germany, but also Europe—via an Islamic takeover of Western liberal states and societies, with Islamic values and norms changing European societies permanently. Islam is said to be archaic, inherently radical and violent, and consisting of entirely different norms; Islam and Western liberalism, but also Muslims and non-Muslims are portrayed as being in fundamental contrast and conflict. Some thus describe Islam as illiberal and reform-resistant, as incompatible with democracy and the German basic law, and simply foreign to Germany and its society; Muslims are said to favor Islam over any democratic laws (Curio, 2018). Populists also make frequent references to the "disgrace of Cologne" (PEGIDA, 2019), where at New Year's Eve 2015/2016 more than 1000 incidents of mainly sexual assault against women by persons described as migrant were reported, and where police authorities seemed overwhelmed in handling the situation. In right-wing discourse, this event is considered and promoted as 'proof' of Muslim men being a danger to German women, and as illustration of the "imported violence" (Video Tagesschau, 2018). Such narratives aim to stoke fear and to link up with diffuse fears and concerns already existing in society, in order to mobilize populist support.

Populist discourse paints an imminent threat, and a government failing to address this threat, to which then Germans must respond to save themselves and their country's future. The migrant or refugee Other is represented as threat or danger, or with lesser emotional urgency as abusing generous Germany and Germans socially and economically. Distance, and fundamental dichotomy, is constructed between Germans and migrants/refugees, or even more diffusely non-Germans, where anyone non-German is somehow inferior and less. Furthermore, concern and fear are stoked, and existing tensions are exploited and instrumentalized, all aimed to mobilize support for populist actors and their policies as well as antagonism against both the migrant/refugee non-German Other and the 'failing' government.

Othering in the Instrumentalization of the Covid-19 Pandemic

As an additional strategy, populists in Germany attempted to instrumentalize the Covid-19 pandemic for their own gain vis-à-vis the government and the medical scientists and experts speaking on behalf of the governmental protection measures. As the pandemic was indeed a severe health crisis of global nature, it offered significant potential for new discursive spaces and opportunities for instrumentalization and mobilization, and thus is discussed here as a separate dimension in German populist discourse. Thus, in instrumentalizing the pandemic, populist actors engaged in active Othering of the government and of the scientists who provided information as basis for the governmental protection measures. On the one side, they framed their populist Self as better to and for the people, as truly understanding them and defending their interests against government and their pandemic policies. On the other side, they engaged in defaming and delegitimizing (medical) scientists and their views on the Covid-19 virus' danger and advice for appropriate protection measures, a defaming that often took the form of a generalized anti-science view.

The government was Othered for its protection policies, as were the scientists who provided studies and information as the basis for policies. The AfD framed the government as both failing to deal with the pandemic in not acting sufficiently, and as overreacting by stripping the people of civil liberties such as freedom of movement or by risking the livelihoods of businesses. Both government and scientists were put together as the Other: not caring for the people. The government was painted as unable and unwilling to protect the people in a sensible manner, as growing more incompetent and further losing legitimacy, as not caring for people losing their livelihoods due to the government's protection measures, and as not deserving the peoples' trust (Leschzyk, 2021; Salheiser & Richter, 2020), but caring more for itself and being more interested in its own power (Lehmann & Zehnter, 2022). The AfD and other populist groups actively portrayed the government and scientists as negative elite Other.

AfD representatives compared governmental protection measures, such as the vaccination, to actions typical during the time of National Socialism. They tried to discredit the vaccination, grossly distorted the negative side effects and misrepresented statistics and facts in order to create fear and to mobilize against government and scientists (see, for example, Becker, 2022; Tagesschau, 2021). Among the *Querdenker*

were many vaccination opponents and pandemic deniers, people with esoteric views and conspiracy theory followers. They heavily criticized the government for the protection measures, including mask-wearing and social-distance mandates, as well as closures of kindergartens, schools and recreational facilities. Regarding the Self, there was a growing belief in knowing, or rather feeling, the 'truth' without needing to be told by government or any scientists. The people were framed as having their own valid 'knowledge'. Over time, this group experienced a growing participation and even co-opting by right-wing extremists actors; their positions became more radical and more opposed to the government and scientists in general, and included even calls to violence. They framed the government as not truthful and as using the media as puppet, the political institutions as broken. Protesters also came to identify themselves among each other and vis-à-vis the people as alternative to the government and elites—by not wearing the mask and breaking pandemic rules, claiming that the masks not only hindered communication but also symbolized dictatorship (Nachtwey et al., 2020; Salheiser & Richter, 2020). Furthermore, demonstrations against the government and its policies came with new tactics to surprise police, circumvent restrictions and rules, and thus show the government to be incompetent and unable to provide order (Resende & Reinke de Buitrago, 2023a).

Known medical experts, especially when providing expertise for the government or when explaining the need for protection measures, but also respective political figures were discredited in populist framings, as part of the establishment and not to be trusted. They faced defamations and, in part, physical violence. Overall, populist efforts were aimed to make the government appear illegitimate and unable, and the media as lying mouthpiece of the government and thus unreliable; they furthermore led to a greater mistrust in (medical) scientists. The government and scientists were portrayed as negative Other, even as enemy, whereas science and scientific proceedings and methods were framed as subjective and arbitrary (for more, see Resende & Reinke de Buitrago, 2023a). Populists worked with creating fear and mistrust, rejecting facts and expertise. Othering the government, and media and science, into the negative Other and even enemy, and thus constructing dichotomy and antagonism, carries the risk of societal polarization and a society made up of many small belief bubbles no longer being able to find consensus.

Conclusion and Implications

The above findings raise the important question of how successful populists were in their Othering. The answer to this is mixed: while the AfD and other populists overall were not successful in motivating or forcing the government and scientists to significantly change positions and policies, some softening or caving in was observable. Importantly, the distrust vis-à-vis government and Germany's political system has grown, and the value of science and fact-based knowledge seems to have weakened in parts of society.

Thus, there was some reversing in protection measures regarding vaccination mandates: the mandate for medical personnel was only in part enforced, and the vaccination mandate for the entire population was debated, but due to pressure taken off the table. On the other hand, scientists were seen to continue to communicate in a evidence-based, factual manner, and to be open also about what they did not know (Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg, 2023). Many scientists also engaged in constant dialogue with the public regarding health needs during the pandemic and the efficacy of measures, to inform and explain, and thereby also reassure.

Distrust of government and doubt in politicians working for the good of the people and being responsible actors have increased. The strong Othering has raised doubts in German democracy as political system in parts of the population; people seem to feel less represented, particularly in the East of Germany. There, the AfD has also gained parliamentary seats in the last few years. For Manow (2021), in the East the AfD was able to profit from East Germans' fear of economic downgrading and unemployment risk, after their decades-long experience with precarious conditions. Arguably, that the AfD did not gain much more support and also in Western Germany is due to key politicians from all democratic colors joining together to openly reject AfD narratives.

The Othering of scientists, and with it science, seems to have resulted in a questioning of fact-based knowledge and a view of tested methodologies and expertise as something arbitrary, without general validity. Instead, for some, subjective views and opinion have gained an appearance of legitimacy and validity. In the East of Germany, with the AfD being strongest there, the vaccination rates against Covid-19 are generally lower, which is likely due to the impact of populists speaking against government and science.

As also scholars (Salheiser & Richter, 2020) point out, there is a clear danger of normalization of right-wing ideas in society. Right-wing views and positions, of more populist or more extremist leaning, seem to have taken hold and become much more sayable. In the long term, such normalization likely further strengthens such views, translates into policy, contributes to societal and political polarization, and lastly undermines the democratic political system in Germany.

How then should populist speech be dealt with and countered? Populist discourse can endanger societal cohesion and political stability, impacting societal views regarding the legitimacy of the political institutions and actors, the responsibility of government and the country's ability to integrate migrants and refugees, along with the potential changes for their own culture. In Germany, right-wing populism has taken hold of a significant part of society, with one fifth of the people showing right-wing populist attitudes and over two fifths leaning toward such views (Zeit Online, 2019), and grown support for the AfD. Not only has it become nearly impossible in a few federal states to form governing coalitions without the AfD, recently the AfD was successful in gaining seats at both the local level and its first mayor office. In some regions in Germany, the AfD is a potent political force. Other populist groups, while much weaker and perhaps only of temporary presence, have with their anti-government and/or anti-foreigner discourse contributed to societal polarization and aided populist positions. To counter populist advances, democratic actors have also become more outspoken against populist views and tendencies in the last years. The debate on democracy's value for society and its people, as well as the need to safeguard democracy, has become stronger. This debate must be continued, as well as broadened to include all of society; formats such as recent town hall meetings between politicians and the public can be a productive vehicle. Experts see the need of and potential in increased democracy education and media competence, the open labeling of anti-democratic views, and continued efforts to deconstruct prejudices and strengthen tolerance (Ferguson, 2016; Materna et al., 2022; Zeit Online, 2019). Furthermore, with populists, in Germany and elsewhere, promoting their own, alternative and self-servient 'truth', against established facts and evidence—not only during the pandemic but in general—we may have entered an era defined by post-truth and post-truth politics, where personal beliefs, opinions and emotions challenge fact (see also McIntyre, 2018, p. 5). Thus, populists "present their version of the facts as a more important truth,

and are deemed true representative of 'the people' by conveying that version of the truth" (Resende & Reinke de Buitrago, 2023b). Whenever populists engage in the pushing of an alternative 'truth', false facts, disinformation and other distortions, democrats and society overall must deconstruct and disentangle these as well as make transparent false linkages of what is and what should be done. Whenever populists portray emotionally charged, divisive images of developments and us-versus-them framings, the stoked emotions and their impact should be attended to. Whatever challenges societies, in Germany and elsewhere, face, their interpretation should not be left to populists but led head-on by democratic forces.

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Who is the People's Enemy? Performative Construction and Visual Representation Through AI of the *Otherness* in the Political Communication of Presidential Discourse in Mexico

Alberto Ruiz-Méndez, Ricardo Ignacio Prado-Hurtado, and Sofía Teresa Díaz-Torres

Introduction

This chapter's study object is the political discourse that Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) communicates through his daily morning conferences, popularly known as "la mañanera." The president has used this official communication space throughout his administration to identify the *otherness* as his political adversary under

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the adjective conservative (and its inflections). It is necessary to present the country's political context briefly to put this construction in its right dimension.

Mexico's political history has more than 70 years of hegemony of the same political party: the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). In 1977, a series of political reforms gave way to a historical change which included the creation of an autonomous institution to direct elections, the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) (Woldenberg, 2012). So, in 2000, the PRI lost a presidential election for the first time since its creation in 1929. This event is considered the maturity of democracy in the country since the conditions that theorists such as Dahl (2022) had established to speak of a democratic regime were finally being fulfilled. The change of political party in power nurtured the hope in many Mexicans that democracy would transform the country's public life.

During this alternation process, the country was governed by two presidents of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), a right political party that represented the second most important political force during the PRI's hegemony. The enthusiasm for the triumph of Vicente Fox (2000–2006) soon faded in the face of the actions of a president inexperienced in politics and incapable of understanding the importance of the historical moment in which he was the protagonist. Despite the disillusionment of that government, the citizenry gave a second chance to the PAN. President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) tried to make the hallmark of his government a frontal fight against organized crime without dissociating himself from the social and economic policies of the previous regimes. This decision led the country into a cruel and ineffective "war against drug cartels" where the dead and disappeared are counted in the hundreds of thousands. The balance of both PAN governments left the democratic transition with a tinge of disenchantment.

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In this context, the return of the PRI occurred with the victory of its presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. During his administration from 2012 to 2018, he tried to create a government of unity with all political forces, continued with neoliberal initiatives, and carried out structural reforms that promised to improve people's quality of life. However, what defined his tenure was the terrible handling of social conflicts—notably, the case of 43 students from the State of Guerrero who disappeared by organized crime in collusion with government armed forces, the denunciations of rampant and immoral corruption committed by governors from his party, and the embezzlement scandals linked to him and his close circle. These circumstances led the Mexican electorate from disenchantment to disillusionment with democracy.

This brief recapitulation of a part of Mexico's political history allows us to understand that the PRI has always been the center. On the one hand, although the PAN is an opposition party, it is a right-wing political party. For example, in economic matters, since the late 1980s, the neoliberal policies promoted by the PAN coincide with those promoted by the PRI, even though its Catholic social ideology does not coincide with the PRI's social ideology. On the other hand, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) are leftists. They oppose the neoliberal policies of the PRI by advocating economic nationalism with the State as the guiding axis—an economic policy championed by the PRI prior to the 1980s. Although the Mexican left has a long and interesting history, since the 1988 presidential elections, a left political party's economic, social, and political proposals are based on a redistribution of social spending guided by the State, which shows clear opposition to the neoliberal policies promoted by the PRI and PAN governments.

In 1997, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, candidate of the PRD, was elected as Chief of Government of the country's capital, meaning the first triumph of a Mexican left political party. Since then, the left has not ceased to govern that city. Although the triumph augured a promising future for the left in the next elections, the internal struggles of the PRD with its allies stemmed the party from its consolidation as a viable option for the citizens. In 2018, until the third attempt and with a new political party, a candidate emerging from the left would win the presidential elections. In this chapter, to explain the reasons for this triumph, we will pull on Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism and its discursive components.

The Discursive Construction of "the People"

Populism is a multifaceted phenomenon; no single theory or discipline can exhaust its complexity. The vast bibliography on it forces us to accept a couple of assumptions: first, defining populism—once and for all—is useless, and second, its analysis must admit a normative commitment from which to study it. In this work, the second assumption is Ernesto Laclau's theory since it will allow us to highlight the centrality of his discursive approach (Panizza & Stravrakakis, 2021) to characterize AMLO's political project as populist and, secondly, to analyze his political communication as a discursive logic of construction of *otherness* as a political adversary. In this section, we develop the first element.

AMLO's political project has at its core "the people" as the agent that will bring about regime change through elections by granting its leading representative, in this case, López Obrador, the necessary legitimacy to make decisions and speak on their behalf. Based on this, Laclau's (2005) maximalist theory (Urbinati, 2019) is presented as the appropriate theoretical framework to characterize that phenomenon insofar as it explains populism from its discursive capacity to create and represent a collective subject whose action is aimed at improving democracy. In this sense, a movement is populist not because it represents a certain social group (for example, people experiencing poverty), as previously understood, but because of the process of political articulation that will allow its members to identify themselves as "the people."

This process begins with a set of "popular demands," unsatisfied claims that gradually unify their bearers in an idea, albeit incipient, of "the people." In the Mexican case, those popular demands can be synthesized in three: first, the widening inequality between the poor and middle classes, on the one hand, and the economic and political elites, on the other, caused by the neoliberal policies applied by the alternating governments. Second, the failed strategy of military confrontation with organized crime, which had the opposite effect: increasing cases of violence among the population and, therefore, a rise in insecurity. Third, the corruption scandals without clear responsible parties, such as the so-called *Estafa Maestra* (Animal Político, s.f.). These demands led the Mexican electorate to see the political forces as enemies. Within the framework of the Mexican democratic transition, we find what Laclau (2005) calls the

> preconditions of populism: (1) the formation of an antagonistic internal boundary separating the "people" from power; (2) an equivalent articulation of demands that makes the emergence of the "people" possible. A third precondition emerges once political mobilization has reached a higher level: the unification of these diverse demands - whose equivalence, up to that point, had not gone beyond a feeling of solidarity - into a stable system of signification. (p. 99)

The 2018 electoral campaign was the third time López Obrador ran for president. In the previous two, he did so as the standard bearer for the PRD, and in the third with *Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA), a political party of his creation. Although each campaign had a dynamic, it captured the urgency of popular demands and provided the third precondition through the following discursive elements that allowed identifying his project as populist.

As the antagonism between the population and the alternating governments grew, AMLO's political platform "provided an appealing master frame for understanding the problems of the contemporary political system" (Bruhn, 2012, p. 103) through the interpretation of social reality as a confrontation of disadvantaged people against a corrupt elite guilty of their malaise. At the classic accusation that populism simplifies reality, Laclau (2005) uses the argument in reverse by pointing out that:

> the 'vagueness' of populist discourses, is it not a consequence, in some situations, of the vagueness and indeterminacy of social reality? [...] would not populism [...] be a performative act endowed with own rationality, that is to say, the fact of being vague in certain situations is the condition to build relevant political meanings. (p. 32)

AMLO's project knew how to capture the anger with the neoliberal policies of the democratic transition and "simplified"—first discursive element—the social reality in a phrase that to this day is insignia of his project: "for the good of all, first the poor." The second element of the AMLO's discourse was the creation of the "Mafia del Poder," all those public actors, antagonists of the people by favoring neoliberal policies, accomplices of corruption in public and private companies, who show disdain for the needs of the people and who turn them into a "gang of evildoers […] that became a de facto power situated above the constitutional institutions" (López Obrador, 2017, p. 4). With the idea of the "*Mafia del Poder*," AMLO again manages to "simplify" social reality by

presenting it as a moral conflict between a corrupt elite and subjugated people in search of their liberation.

From this conflict appears the third element of the populist discursive logic: the creation of an identity distinction that constructs a social frontier in which what is inside (the "equivalence") and what is outside (the "difference") make possible the creation of a "global political subject." In AMLO's project, the "equivalence" is made up of all those who carry popular demands and who constitute themselves as "the people" because of their opposition to the "difference," and the *Mafia del Poder* shows itself as an antagonist. In this scenario, AMLO's populist quality is configured as it delineates "the construction of internal borders and the identification of an institutionalized 'other.' Whenever we have this combination of structural moments, whatever the ideological or social contents of the political movement, we have populism of one kind or another" (Laclau, 2005, p. 151).

Diverse circumstances led to the first time a leftist candidate won the presidency in 2018. In addition to AMLO's constant presence in public life before and during each new presidential term, he knew how to symbolize "the dissidence of the regime, the prescription for the abuse of power, the persistence in the denunciations of vices from above and the hope for a change" (Anguiano, 2019, p. 138)—all these through an idea of "the people" that, as a discursive construction, provided a "stable system of signification" for the electorate that identified with his political project. In opposition to the *Mafia del Poder*, his people

> are not the liberal (abstract) people, represented by the cameras, but rather the concrete, real people, whom López Obrador associates with the productive classes (honest businessmen and manual workers) and the dispossessed, confronted with the parasitic classes (bankers, speculators, politicians, monopolists). (Illades, 2019, p. 45)[1]

The key to characterizing AMLO's project as populist lies in the idea that, based on that identity border, "the people" have the historical mission of ending the previous regime and establishing an authentic democracy. When López Obrador says that "only the people save the people," he sets the categories of hegemony and empty signifiers in motion.

[1] Translated by the authors.

For the Laclau, popular demands create a process of identification and differentiation of totality— "the people"—producing an exclusion—the *Mafia del Poder*; by understanding the latter as the antagonist, "the people" are assumed as an "incommensurable totality [and] This operation by which a particularity assumes a universal significance incommensurable with itself is what we call hegemony"(Laclau, 2005, p. 95). Nevertheless, hegemony by itself is an "impossible object"; that is, it requires content or action that gives it meaning. Hence, at the same time, he identifies it as an *empty signifier*: it represents someone, "the people," but does not represent a something or an action. AMLO's political project conferred the latter by representing him as the central moral agent of the democratic transformation, and that, having excluded the *Mafia del Poder* from that transformation, turns the people into a synecdoche, that is to say: "a partial component that aspires, nevertheless, to be conceived as the only legitimate totality" (Laclau, 2005, p. 108).

The above elements allow us to assume that AMLO's political project is populist because he discursively constructs an idea of "the people" he places at the center of democratic transformation and is the only politically validated agent to participate. It is leftist because, in the Mexican political context, he presents himself as challenging neoliberal policies through a "nationalist left" project where the creation of social justice begins in the intervening State, redistributing public spending and protecting "the people."

Recognizing populism as a polyhedral phenomenon shows us that, in addition to analyzing the construction of "the people," it is also necessary to research how it constructs the *otherness* as the antagonist of its people. In the following section, we will focus on this task because, in addition to the case at hand, it will reveal that AMLO's populism is closer to right populism.

The Performative Construction of the "Other"

Laclau's theory argues that populism performs a "simplification" of social reality into two fields: people/elite and does so through a discursive construction understood as a "system of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects' through the construction of antagonisms and drawing of political frontiers" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2002, pp. 3–4). As a political strategy, this system of meaningful practices is constituted by national symbols that give historical support to the populist

people and the emotions or affections that allow its mobilization, among other elements; in this sense, when we speak of the construction of the populist people, Laclau (2005) writes, "[W]e are dealing not with a conceptual operation of finding an abstruse common feature underlying all social grievances, but with a performative operation" (85).

This same performative operation can be applied to the construction of the antagonistic *otherness* of the people. However, to do so, it is necessary to take an additional step in Laclau's theory insofar as it does not consider one of the scenarios of that discursive construction: the mass media. It is necessary to add a "performative approach" that would allow us to see the

> populism, not only as a discourse but as a distinct practice-that, is something that is done-; this approach focuses on the question of how political leaders go about constructing a highly personalistic socio-cultural relation and identification with 'the people' against an 'elite' and a sociological Other" [and to this end focuses on] the importance of speech acts, the creation of meaning through performance, the role of audiences, actors, scripts, and so forth. (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021, pp. 49–50)

Recent studies on the use of social networks by populist leaders (Bucy, 2020; Cervi, 2021; Penteado, 2022) show that, indeed, the discourse communication process is already part of the focus of attention because the irruption of digital media, combined with traditional media, has enhanced its presence, reception, and impact. Despite this, we agree with Moffitt (2016) that we still do not have a clear understanding of how populists construct both their people and their *otherness*. In what follows, we attempt to fill this gap by reconstructing the presentation of the representation of the antagonistic *otherness* in AMLO's populism.

Given the volume of the morning press conferences and to reduce subjectivity in interpreting the data, we resorted to an independent evaluator to identify the relationships between conservative and its inflections (conservatism, conservatives, conservative, conservative thinking, conservative ideology). For this purpose, we used the software *ATLAS.ti*, which allows the processing of large volumes of data to obtain patterns, co-occurrences, and key codes using Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Lopezosa & Codina, 2023). The first step was a documentary review on the official

site (López Obrador, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d) containing the stenographic versions of the 1,117-morning conferences between December 3, 2018, and July 10, 2023.

The scatter plot (Diagram 1) graphically represents the percentage of conferences in which the word "conservative" (and its inflections) was mentioned on the ordinate axis and the date of the month on the abscissa axis. This percentage, calculated using a proportional rule, is the visual representation to observe patterns and trends over time, showing clearly how the frequency of mentions of the word "conservative" and its variants varies at different times. The highest percentage (100%) was presented in October 2022, and the lowest (23.53%) in December 2018. Generally, an upward trend in the frequency of mention is observed throughout the six years—particularly in 2023, as the presidential succession approaches.

In those morning press conferences, we performed an initial inductive coding to locate the word conservative and inflections. In this first coding, we found 734 conferences in which conservatives were discussed and 2,388 mentions of that word and its inflections. All paragraphs referring to this term were selected and coded in *ATLAS.ti & OpenAI*. It should be noted that when the term code is mentioned, one should not think only of numbers or acronyms since, in *ATLAS.ti,* codes are compound words, or simple words, and phrases that show an outstanding relationship with other words within the corpus analyzed. The program shows this relationship through the following categories: grounding: the number of times a code appears, density: indicating multiplicity of relationships, and co-occurrence: the association of the same code two or more times in a single sentence. In this case, the most significant relationship between codes is shown in Table 1.

With a grounding of 349, the table shows the codes with which the word conservative has a closer relationship; the more co-occurrence the two concepts have, the stronger their relationship is. The table shows that, in AMLO's populism, being conservative is a political stance, and the codes that follow it become its defining characteristics. In turn, these data allowed us to establish the semantic networks of the conservative code with the following qualifying adjectives: corrupt, hypocritical, authoritarian, opposed to change, classist, racist and, adversarial. This relationship is shown in Diagram 2.

The above diagram shows that the term conservative, with a grounding of 349, establishes a density, i.e., a synonymy link with the eight adjacent codes. For example, the term politics has a grounding of 648 but

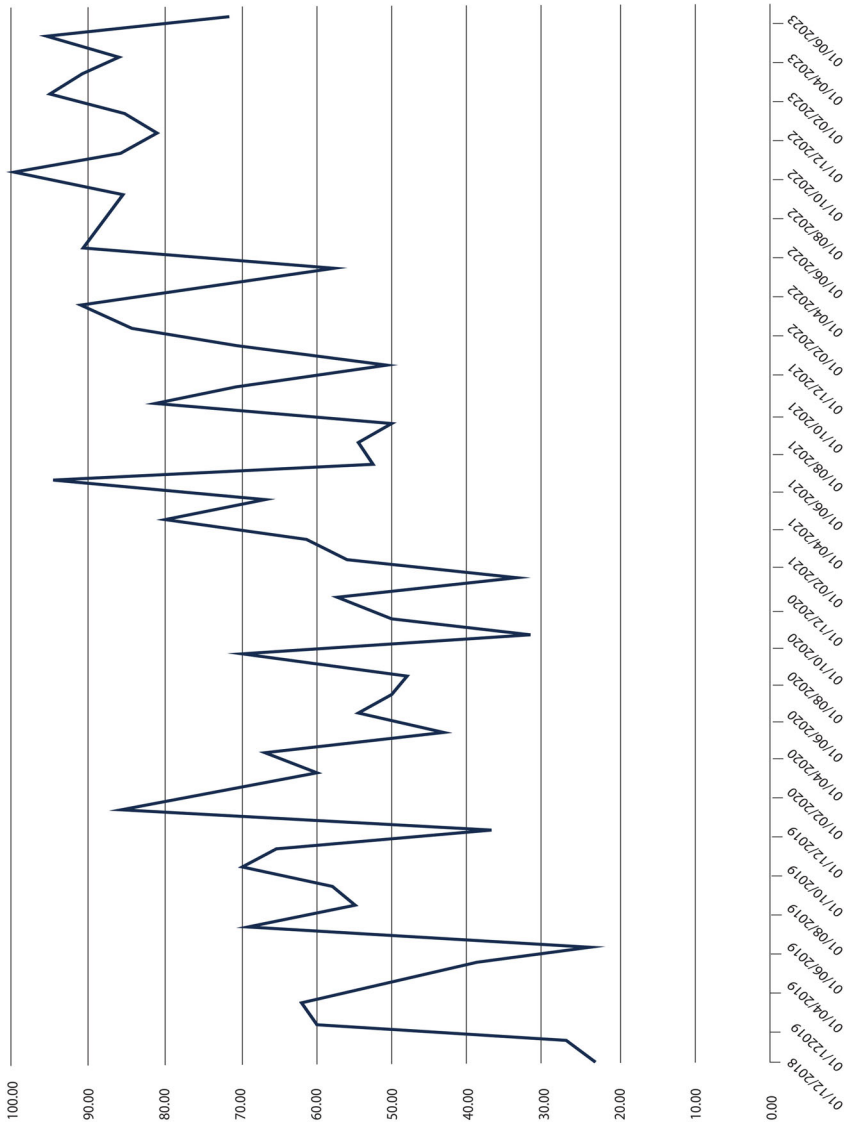


Diagram 1 Percentage of Conferences in which the word Conservative was mentioned

Table 1
Co-occurrence table between the word conservative and its codes

Column 1	*Conservatives Gr=349*
• Politics Gr=684	110
• Corrupts Gr=300	31
• Hypocrites Gr=101	18
• Authorritarians Gr=31	14
• Opposed to change Gr=52	13
• Racists Gr=37	13
• Classists Gr=31	11
• Adversaries Gr=14	10

density 1: with the term conservative. This means the eight codes adjacent to conservative define its significant content. *ATLAS.ti* showed that the adjacent codes have a higher density, i.e., they present a consistent synonymy linkage with the word conservative.

At the second level of semantic association, *ATLAS.ti* shows us the textual quotations where the greatest number of codes are found in co-occurrence. Thus, of the 734 morning press conferences in which conservatives were discussed, we could consider the following quotes as their most representative verbalizations. Diagram 3 shows the relationship of the quotations with the codes.

Finally, the first visual representation of the codes (Diagram 4), through a Sankey Model, shows the extent of the transfer of meaning between conservative and associated adjectives.

So, conservative becomes a *performative signifier* from the results obtained with this methodology. This word implies an action: conservative is equal to lying, stealing, discriminating, and imposing. This result may not be surprising for a constant observer of Mexican politics. However, paying attention only to discourse prevents us from recognizing, following Moffit (2016), "that populist representation of 'the people' [and their *otherness*] rely on a complex process of mediated claim-making between populist leaders, audiences, constituencies and media"

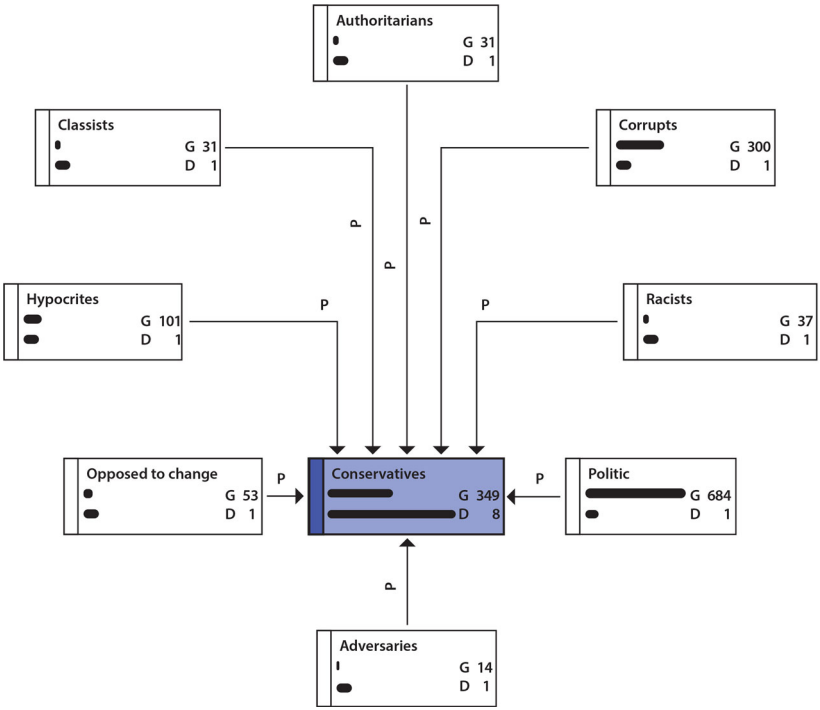


Diagram 2 Semantic Network of the word Conservative

(p. 100). Against this background, the performative approach and the unbiased evaluation of the presidential discourse through *ATLAS.ti & OpenIA* highlight the importance of the presentation in representing the antagonistic *otherness*, as this occurs through a *performative signifier*, that is, a word that implies an action.

The word conservative can be a signifier in creating an identity border. However, it is also performative insofar as something can be done with it: in the case of AMLO's populism, to associate the antagonistic *otherness* as a social agent that is in the terrain of illegality and immorality; in this sense, conservative is a *performative signifier*, that is, a category constructed based on actions that democratically delegitimize its bearer and that close the identitarian frontier that separates "the people" from their antagonistic other, turning AMLO's project into right populism.

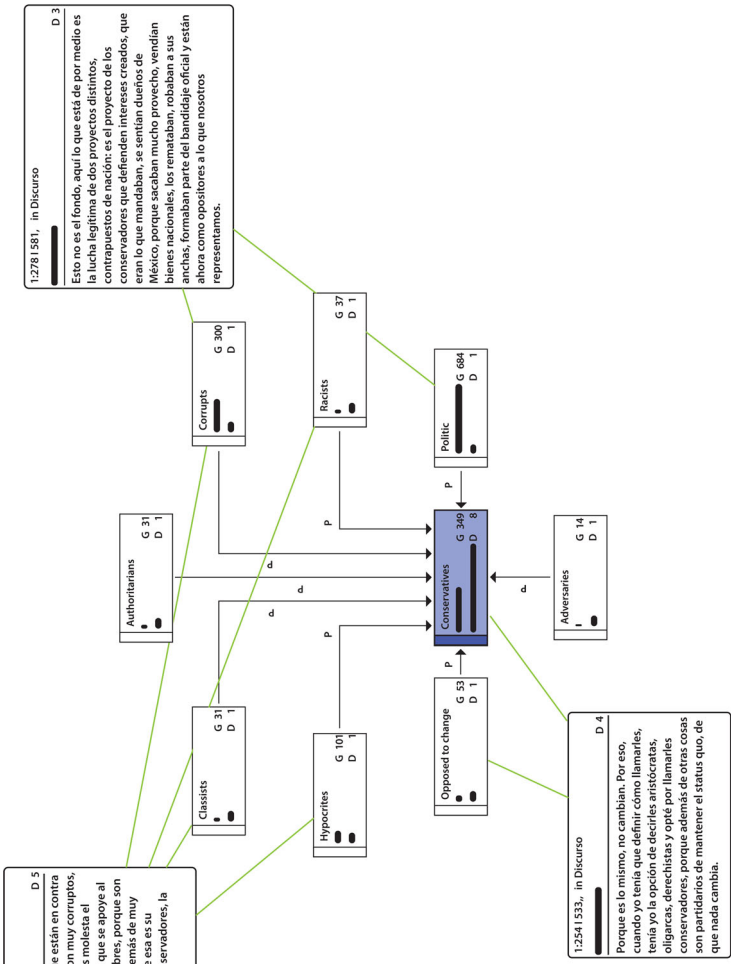


Diagram 3 Semantic association between textual citations and co-occurrence codes

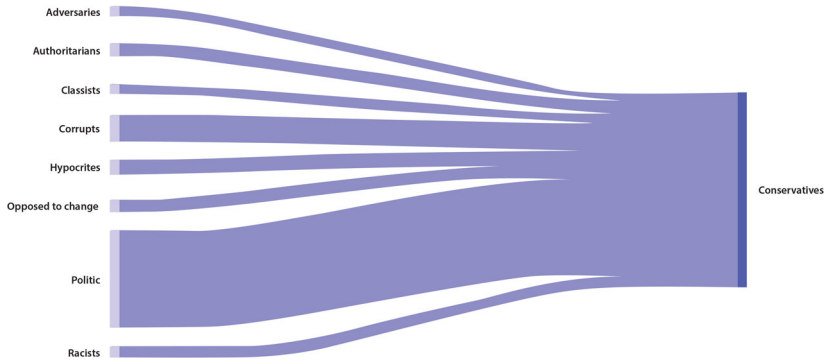


Diagram 4 Transfer of meaning between conservative and co-ocurrence codes

The Political Construction of Right Populism

The morning press conferences have been the main stage of AMLO's performativity to communicate his "representation" of "the people" and their antagonistic *otherness*. In this sense, they have fully fulfilled their claim to be, in the words of government communicators: "the political-cultural force that daily imprints the collective direction of a cognitive-psychic-ideological-ideological-emotional nature to the nation" (Esteinou, 2019, p. 128). The repetition of those conferences, but above all, the precision of the *performative signifiers* facilitates their reproducibility, their diffusion is broadened, and their function as *performative signifiers* is inserted in society as a filter to interpret democratic diversity. In AMLO's populism, the bearer of this *performative signifier* is linked to immorality and illegality that exclude him from the democratic game; this will turn that political project into a right populism.

Laclau's theory allows us to identify a social movement as populist regardless of the content of its demands or political orientation since the key is the creation of the dichotomous border that divides society between the elite and the people, turning the latter into the political subject destined to transform democracy. The literature has identified the difference between right and populism based on their conception of "the people": in left populism, the people are composed of those excluded from the system, while in right populism, the people are defined by an essentialist criterion, usually linked to nationalism. For left populism, the antagonistic other is the political and economic classes, and for right

populism, the antagonistic other is all those who threaten the benefits and rights linked to nationality (Cortés Rodas, 2020; de la Torre, 2019; Gandesha, 2018).

Now, in the context of the Mexican democratic transition, the left that López Obrador represents is defined as such by its opposition to the center and right parties that mainly support neoliberal policies. However, as Bruhn (2012) had already shown when analyzing his political platform in 2006, AMLO's political guidelines were "substantially to the right of his own party's platform" (p. 91). The main reason for this discrepancy is that AMLO is the champion of a historically regressive political program in economic and social matters: the nationalist, distributive, and protectionist State. His policies of direct monetary transfer to the marginalized population pretend to "reduce or end social inequality without proposing to liberalize people from the domination of capital and the State" (Illades, 2021). If to this "Welfare State" policy, we add his populist talents, AMLO's project is a "retro populism" or "reactionary populism" (Bartra, 2021) because his conception of "the people" is based on the values that make up the most traditional Mexican imaginary: "Workers and peasants work. Women procreate the family. Soldiers defend the homeland. Each one does what corresponds to him, establishing a lasting, harmonious, and just order" (Illades, 2019, p. 104).

In a leftist populism, such as the one posted by Mouffe (2018), the people are called upon to retake the rights denied to them. However, she recognizes that this should not imply the cancelation of the antagonistic other. In AMLO's populism, the *performative signifiers* of the conservatives—corrupt, hypocritical, authoritarian, opposed to change, racist, and classist—bring it closer to the vision of the people in right-wing populism, that is, an exclusionary vision whose objective is "to divide society, to construct the authentic and virtuous people, which is separated from the rest of civil society, thus producing polarization and preparing its base for an apocalyptic type of confrontation" (Cortes Rodas, 2020, p. 40).

The performative approach showed that the contents of the discourse, in turn, have performativity; in their simplification of reality, they are enunciated as "a doing." In the case of AMLO's populism, this "rhetorical simplification that from the mornings pretends to represent Mexican socio-political life, prevents the exercise of the necessary guarantee for the recognition and use of political rights" (Romeu, 2022, p. 90). Consequently, although López Obrador and his MORENA party present themselves as leftist, their discourse is loaded with performativity that, on

the one hand, and concerning their people, does not promote progressiveness in rights and freedoms; and on the other hand, there is constantly a moral disqualification that delegitimizes their criticisms and claims by imposing a *performative signifier* that places them in illegality and immorality and thus maintaining the narrative of moral conflict between the people and the elite.

From these two elements, Obrador's populism exercises a communication that generates an *affective polarization* (Ruiz-Méndez, 2022), that is, the practice of a top-down vertical discourse that builds another antagonistic one charged with a "significant affective dimension" (McCoy, 2018, p. 19). From it, a divisive reaction is generated in people: either you are with me, defender of the people, or they are with the conservatives: corrupt, hypocritical, authoritarian, opposed to change, racist, and classist. By associating these performative signifiers with the antagonistic other of "the people," Obrador's populism aims to politically delegitimize conservatives in decision-making on matters of public life because conservatives are the enemy of the people, a "gang of evildoers" who have lost all right to participate democratically.

We consider that the performative approach has shed new light on populism since it has shown us that the democratic credentials of populism depend on its construction of *otherness*. It may be that the strength of populism lies in the process of shaping "the people," but this does not imply the delegitimization of people who are not part of that hegemony. What Obrador's populism does is reinforce this delegitimization through the *performative signifiers* of its discourse, which distances it from a left populism and approaches the defense of right populism.

The Visual Construction of the "Other"

In this final section, taking an additional step to the performativity approach, we want to propose a novel way of approaching the objects of study in social sciences and humanities through *visual research methods* (Banks, 2001). This methodology, historically linked to visual anthropology, had its first developments in visual researchers such as Margaret Mead (1977), Gregory Bateson (2011), and Jean Rouch (1995) in the 1930s (Dion, 2016). Visual methods aim at a complete scope of human phenomena (Banks & Ruby, 2011) based on still and moving images that bring the phenomenon closer to the scrutiny and interpretation of third parties (Pink, 2006).

The use of images, or in our case, visual representations, has a significant advantage; they no longer talk about what the discourse is about; *they show it*. If the performativity approach emphasizes the "presentation" of the "representation," visual methods can show what the discourse "represents." Moreover, this is possible because visual representations make it possible to represent those sensations or emotions contained in the discourse, and its paralanguages, i.e., intonation, rhythm, and volume, among other characteristics, are presented as performative signs that provoke sensations. This form of communication at an emotional level is what authors such as Laplantine (2020) call *le sensible*.

It is essential to mention that, concerning AMLO's speech, the visual representations developed by an unbiased and independent AI system are not randomly generated images, artistic representations, or technological curiosities; they are based on a reality (Floch, 1981) that was analyzed through the approaches as mentioned earlier and the coding performed with *ATLAS.ti & OpenAI*.

Based on the above, we decided to develop a visual communication exercise assisted by AI using the *Dall-E 2* text-to-image conversion platform. In this platform, the input text or prompt is an instruction that can be as detailed as required so that the visual result has precise characteristics. This system uses the Internet to obtain small pieces of information combined to create completely original images, but with visual elements in common depending on the prompt entered. Our route for the creation of the visual representation of the antagonistic other in AMLO's speech consisted of a series of tests in increasing order to provide artificial intelligence.

We began by introducing only the codes with the highest co-occurrence, related to the term conservative, and written as adjectives: authoritarian, classist, racist, corrupt, hypocritical, but without further complementary information. In this phase, the results that can be observed are simple representations, without more context than the adjectives, but with repetitive elements in each representation: use of glasses, beard or mustache, coat, and tie, and presence of coins and bills. Some results are shown in Images 1, 2, 3, and 4.

In subsequent tests, elements of complexity and context were introduced to enrich the representation. For example, considering that the great Mexican muralists—Rivera or Alfaro Siqueiros—were the official graphic storytellers of the Mexican left, we considered it pertinent to ask



Image 1 Corrupt, stealing, classist, racist, very corrupt, hypocritical, hypocrisy



Image 2 Authoritarian, classist, racist, corrupt, hypocritical

the AI to imitate their style. This enriched the visual representations, as shown in this example (Images 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9).

It should be noted that when entering the textual quotations shown in Diagram 3, Dall-E 2 returned, as a result, a refusal to work with the text because it violated the operability policies, as shown in Image 10 and 11.



Image 3 Being against the transformation



Image 4 Maintain the status quo

We insist that this exercise aims to show the visual representation that an impartial evaluator (*Dall-E 2*) generates from the *performative signifiers* associated with the conservative in AMLO's speech. The gestures represented in the images developed by the AI can be decoded directly without the need for an explanation; this, according to the natural human capacity to decode macro- and micro-expressions that have a signifier,



Image 5 Painting in the muralist style of Diego Rivera about conservatives who are very corrupt, class-minded, racist, hypocritical, and authoritarian



Image 6 Painting in the muralist style of Diego Rivera about conservatives who are very corrupt, class-minded, racist, hypocritical, and authoritarian

practically universal, and that can be interpreted in a theoretical way through an anthropology of gestures Ray Birdwhistell (1979). Thus, the visual representation seeks to be only an experimental way of giving a tangible face to the conservative with all the characteristics that delimit and represent him according to AMLO's discourse; by presenting it in



Image 7 Painting about Mexican politics in Diego Rivera's muralist style that shows conservatives who are against the transformation, are very corrupt, classist, racist, hypocritical, and authoritarian



Image 8 Painting in the muralist style by David Alfaro Siqueiros that shows the conservatives of Mexican politics who are against the transformation, are very corrupt, classist, racist, hypocritical, and authoritarian

this text, we want to challenge our disciplines with the use of AI technologies in research for the search of a polyhedral compression of human phenomena.



Image 9 Painting on Mexican politics in the muralist style by David Alfaro Siqueirosthat shows conservatives who are very corrupt, class-minded, racist, hypocritical, authoritarian, who are against the transformation and opponents of the current government

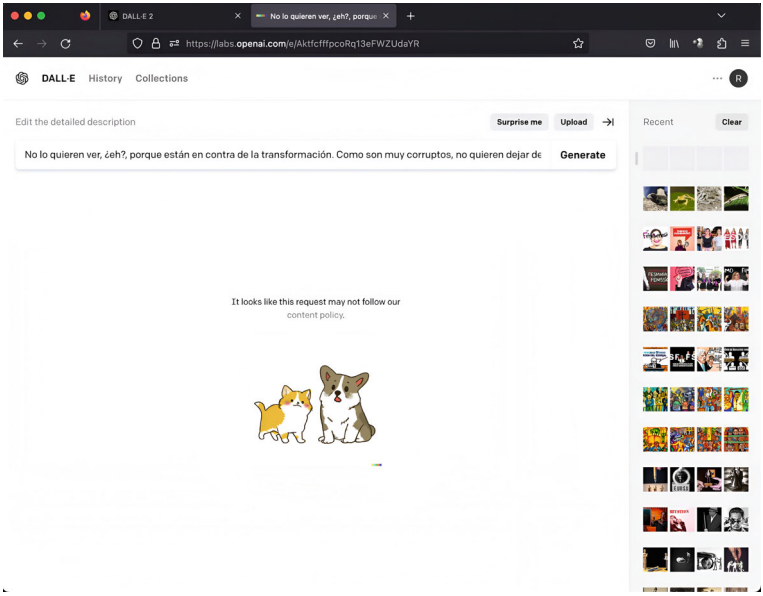


Image 10 Content Policy Violation Warning

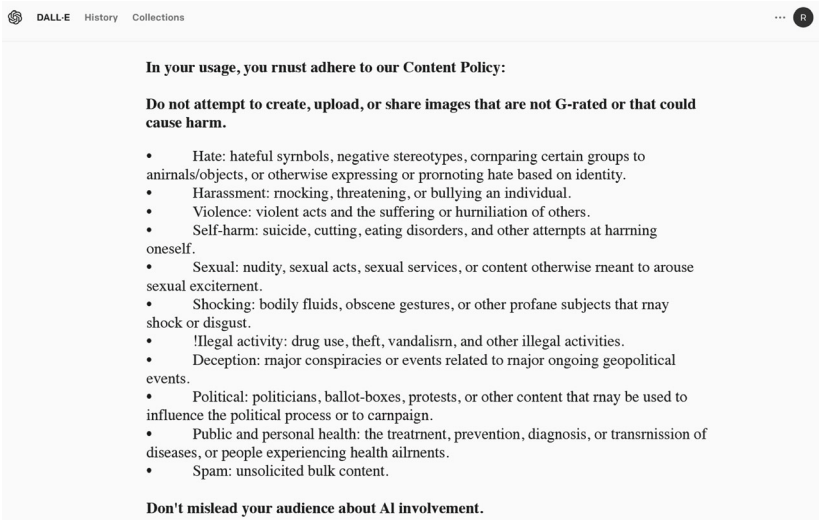


Image 11 List of potentially harmful content

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An "Other" Me: Proximity and Distance Between Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro When Defining Their Opponents on Twitter

Rafiza Varão, Marco A. Boselli, and Fernanda Vasques Ferreira

Introduction

One of the main strategies in political discourse, in general—and more specifically in populist discourse—is the definition of opponents. In the second case, it brings this category closer to that of enemies, even leading to a hyperbolic degree of characteristics linked to religious evil, as demonstrated by Lasswell (1938) when analyzing war propaganda in the twentieth century. According to the political scientist, part of this effort to delimit the opponent carries above all moral biases, "How may

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hate be mobilized against an enemy? How may the enemy be demoralized […]?" (Lasswell, 1938, p. 12). In digital populism, although it is different from the propaganda developed in the two World Wars, the exaggeration of otherness is a fundamental strategy—and, consequently, hate speech against opponents, making them repugnant (Harding, 1991).

This work aims to identify the negative construction of alterity in two representatives of digital populism in the twenty-first century: Donald Trump, former President of the United States, and Jair Bolsonaro, former President of Brazil, in their Twitter[1] accounts in the periods that preceded the election of both (2016 and 2018, respectively). What are the proximities and distances between Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro (two exemplars of digital populism)?

To answer this question, it is conducted a content analysis (Bardin, 2011) of the tweets of the two former presidents two months before the US election, and two months after that, in 201nd in 2020, when Trump unsuccessfully tried his re-election. In parallel, we analyzed Jair Bolsonaro's tweets in the 2018 and 2022 campaigns, analyzing his posts for the period of two months before and two months after the election dates. The data was collected using the Wayback Machine[2] tool. The analysis will indicate the similarities and differences between the two central actors of digital populism, respectively, in the United States and Brazil.

Otherness and Populism

The concept of otherness is, by definition, a place that crosses several areas, from philosophy through geography, including communication and its sub-areas, such as journalism (Freitas, Benetti, 2017). Because it is also intrinsically linked to human existence, its history is long-lived and can be reconstructed up to, at least "from Plato's *Sophist*, in which the Stranger participates in a dialogue on the ontological problems of being and non-being, of the One and the Other" (Van Pelt, 2000).

However, its greatest insertion is, without a doubt, that one which is built in Anthropology, often seen as an area founded on the very idea of the other, associated above all with the conception of otherness (Gusmão, 199, p. 42). In this way, there is a broad and fruitful tradition that reflects

[1] Now named X.

[2] https://archive.org/web/.

on "people who are not like us" (Larrosa, Lara, 1998, p. 8) and on the differences inherent to the human condition and which opposes the notion of identification (Oliveira, 2006).

Despite the different perspectives, alterity contemplates the

> […] process by which an "Other" is constructed. It carries the double sense of both the subject position of "Otherness" in which someone is placed and also the adoption of that subject position as the Other's perspective. Alterity is then a double process of placement and perception. (Madsen, 2012, p. 1)

Otherness is also understood as an essential dimension to establish ethical and moral elements, as these are only constituted when the "Other enters the scene" (Eco, 2021, sp). Thus, for the political field, challenged and at the same time based in many aspects on an ethical-moral substance, otherness is one of its central components, especially since the Modern State (Bobbio, 1992), with continuous overlaps between religious and political views. This situation does not mean that the ethical and the political systems are corresponding but that they intertwine and affect each other (Araújo, 2018).

Furthermore, in the figurative sense and the literal sense, as Luís Mauro Sá Martino (2019, p. 35) points out, when analyzing Lévinas (1995), the "face is the basis not only of social relations […] although it is not reduced to the social: It is the intersubjective structure from which politics and justice emerge". In its connotative aspect, the expression "give a face"—and its more colloquial substitute "give a phiz"—implies the attribution of identity and is often manifested in political discourse in an abstract and generalist way to identify not only voters but adversaries, in negative ways. Throughout history, it has also served to stipulate distinctions between those who can be considered human and non-human, depriving the second category of all its rights and making it the target of all sorts of crimes, such as slavery and the Holocaust (Arendt, 2013).

This is an aspect verified, for example, in the initial studies of the political scientist Harold Lasswell in the classic *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1938). When analyzing the propaganda of the First World War, he evaluates the construction of the image of the enemy, who receives a demonic "face". This, in turn, will confer the desired identity on the opponent, appealing to moral issues.

> Any nation Who began the war and blocks the peace is incorrigible, wicked, and perverse. To insist directly upon these qualities is merely a precaution, and its chief effects is to make it more certain that the enemy could be capable of so monstrous a thing as an aggressive war. Thus, by a circularity of psychological reaction the guilty is satanic and the satanic is the guilty. (Lasswell, 1938, p. 77)

This phenomenon can also be observed in Brazil. In the 1930s and 1940s, Catholic newspapers maintained a close relationship with public authorities and, during the Vargas Era, produced material contrary to communism, identified as an enemy of Brazilian society. It was the case of the newspaper *A cruz*, analyzed by Sobrinho (2014).

> Positioning itself alongside the dominant classes, the Catholic Restoration Movement chose communism as its main enemy in the 20s and 30s. Communism represented, for the leaders of this movement, a threat to the interests of the Catholic Church and groups dominant social groups. Faced with the "communist threat", intellectuals linked to this movement sought "mutual collaboration between State and Church [...]". (Sobrinho, 2014, p. 146)

In this sense, otherness is placed not only as a core component of political processes, and of the ethical and moral field, but is shown, especially from the twentieth century onwards, as a crucial element for the definition of who would be the opponent in the dispute between parties, governments, representatives, and so on.

Thus, already in its origins, populism—as a phenomenon of the contemporary world—involves the idea of otherness as necessary for strategies of discourse and political action since it is essentially a manifestation of political order. These origins, although vary temporally and geographically, depending on the sources consulted, repeatedly trace the same path concerning each other: The centrality of the figure of the people as the one to be defended and the elites as the enemy to be defeated.

So, if the origins of populism to which one refers are those of the former Russian Empire, the opposition will be between an "original" people (the Russian peasant) and usurpers (the tsars and the nobility). The Narodnik movement idealized the peasantry as the real Russian people and advocated their seizure of power.

On the other hand, if we think about the democratic world of the same period, represented especially by American society, the same people/elites opposition appears, although in a different way than that of Russian populism. In this case, the notion of people in power is directly related to the contemporary democratic ideal which, like Russian populism, understands that the people must be in charge—even though the word people itself is controversial and often empty (Laclau, 2005).

The term populism, then, is marked by the dispute of meanings, with a variety of definitions referring to it (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), with imprecise meanings, but with otherness always present and marked by an opposition between a gigantic enemy—for sometimes visible, sometimes invisible—and which puts an imprecise people and an establishment that is not very divisible on the one side. This conflicting otherness is also shown in the emergence of digital populism and is reinforced by scenarios of misinformation and the spread of hate speech through social media.

Digital Populism

Populism is usually defined as in the statement by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, pp. 5–6) presented below:

> […] populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.

In addition to the centrality of otherness, however, populism has other relevant characteristics that must be highlighted: The vicinal relationship it develops with the media; the construction of an abstract idea of the people, which must be identified with the populist leader; and, consequently, the development of a messianism in the figure of that same leader.

Therefore, firstly, populism is a phenomenon that requires a substantial approach to the media (in the past, mass media, today digital). In this approach, he constitutes his propaganda speech as a movement that legitimately represents the people. This, in turn, is idealized as a pure, immaculate figure, in opposition to corrupt elites (as we have already pointed out here). The media are responsible for transmitting the populist message—from Russian populism (which was disseminated via

the press) to the current aspects of what we define as populism. Thus, the notion of what the people would be is often imprecise but largely media-driven, created to convince an audience, and is essentially a construction (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This is how the very idea of a people, with a unified identity, is also a discourse, a representation. And.

> [...] Often, nothing is more distant from what a certain people are than their representation. Like national identity, therefore, the idea of people is a discourse constructed dialogically (Fiorin, 2009). When preparing its communication, populism must be able to convince the people that it is what the populist says it is. (Varão et al., 2023, p. 8)

Consequently, the populist leader also becomes a central element of the movement, as he needs, at the same time, to embody this ideal people and the image of their savior, the one chosen to lead them to the place of merit and belonging.

In traditional media, the mediatization of politics (Deiwiks, 2009) not only encompassed populist strategies as a possibility of the democratic system, which went through the twentieth century almost immutably, but experienced a true revolution with the rise of the internet and, in particular, of social media.

The use of the media by different populisms is now extensively analyzed and documented (Bartlett, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2018; Guazina, 2019; Hopster, 2021; Mercuri & Lima-Lopes, 2020; Moffitt, 2020; Urbinati, 2019), even when it comes to their new guises, as is the case of digital populism, examined in this text. This populism, in many ways, rejects traditional mass media and finds, above all, in social media its space for consolidation and proliferation.

Initially, this movement takes place through blogs, having a better-demarcated origin when it comes to *5 Stelle*, an Italian non-partisan organization, which launched comedian Giuseppe (Beppe) Piero Grillo as a representative of the Italian people. *5 Stelle* argued that any citizen could now express their thoughts and feelings on the internet and thus influence political decisions in Italy.

Years later, with the widespread dissemination of social media, this guide would be taken advantage of by the new digital right that expanded during the 2010s and which would appropriate populist premises associated with the continuous use of these platforms, using "[…] the internet to engage their party members and then claim that their actions are

direct expressions of what the public wants" (Leavy, 2018, p. 2). Often called technopopulism, digital populism adds other elements to traditional populism.

The first of these is the availability of mass media to disseminate political propaganda. Social media, then, represents a suppression of the control of these media and causes the populist leader to be constructed in these environments as an "unfiltered" figure, representing not only the people but also the truth itself. That's why instances of truth, such as journalism and science, begin to be attacked by these agents, including under terms such as fake news.

Thus, we have the implementation of a post-truth scenario in which the distortions that have always accompanied political propaganda are exacerbated, encouraging the dissemination of misinformation that only serves to strengthen populist and electoral ideals. By discrediting the media and journalism, for example, the foundations are built so that the populist leader can accuse journalists of liars while he becomes the guardian of the truth. The effects of this situation are dramatic, leading to an increase in violence against journalists around the world—with Brazil as a paradigmatic case of this increase, with a further 420% increase in numbers during Jair Bolsonaro's government.

Also in this scenario, supporters of the populist leader begin to play a central role in the dissemination of disinformative content, being incorporated into the routines of production and circulation of materials produced by themselves or received as propaganda by bodies associated with the populist. By being accepted into the propaganda process, no longer just as mere recipients, social media users engage in the dissemination of the populist agenda, through constant mobilization (Da Empoli, 2019).

This continuous participation in digital dissemination processes activates the link between voters, leaders, and ideology, as in a religion (Cesarino, 2019), reinforcing the messianism typical of populist movements, but which is intensified by supposed proximity to the "chosen one".

Another relevant phenomenon is that populist leaders begin to mirror and recognize themselves in the digital environment, imitating behaviors and practices that end up transforming them into political correspondents in very different realities, as in the case of Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump.

Methodology

The data collection was performed in two stages. First, we collected the data from the Wayback Machine[3] website, and in the second stage, the tweets were collected directly from Twitter (now X) using Python's tweepy[4] API. The initial collection from the Wayback Machine allows us to circumvent the limitations of tweepy, which allows us to go back in time up to 7 days. The disadvantage is that we have a very broad sample but without the guarantee of having all the posted tweets. The main function of the first collection is to have access to the tweet ID. After having the ID of each post at hand, tweepy allows for the collection of all data in a simple and organized way, and of posts made at any time without a 7-day limit.

The periods chosen to collect data for user @realDonaldTrump were from September 26, 2016, to February 5, 2017, and from September 28, 2020, to January 31, 2021. Those for the user @jairbolsonaro were from August 27, 2018, to January 6, 2019, and from August 29, 2022, to January 01, 2023. The chosen periods include moments of electoral campaign, elections, and after elections. The set of dates was generated by the python *Calendar*[5] library, using the *itermonthdates* module which always starts the sequence of days on a Monday.

The data was researched during the month of May 2023 (before current changes in API tweepy developer access). The data recovered include, in addition to the post identification number (ID), date and time, text of the tweet, and number of re-posts.

Results

In order to understand the construction of the negative otherness of Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro from the perspective of digital populism, we collected data on Twitter as mentioned previously and identified the main enemies mentioned in the text of the tweets. There is a clear distinction between "us" and "others" in the messages published on their social networks, where "we" means the group of people who adhere to the populist candidate, support, honor, finance, campaign,

[3] https://archive.org/web/.

[4] https://www.tweepy.org/—Versão 3.9.

[5] https://docs.python.org/3/library/calendar.html.

and endorsements. In contrast, the "others" are portrayed as individuals or entities that need to be eliminated and annihilated to guarantee well-being, development, and the promotion of what is referred to as democracy and liberty, breaking with what they call old politics or establishment. Ironically, they frequently are the representation of what they fight.

During the analyzed periods, we identified the principal enemies of Jair Bolsonaro. These antagonists are either explicitly mentioned through citations or references, or implicitly alluded to through events, speeches, or references that can be comprehended within the political, partisan, and ideological context in which they are situated—the tweets reveal the main enemies of the "people" (Varão et al., 2023). Nouns, adjectives, and proper names represent the opponents of the "people", who are often mobilized with discursive strategies focusing on disinformation, appeals to emotion and religiosity, hate speech, and a pervasive tone of victimization evident in the shared messages.

For instance, Jair Bolsonaro selected the Workers' Party (PT) and its leader, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had been democratically elected as president twice,[6] as his primary adversary, and consequently, the enemy of the "people" and Brazil. In 2018, other proper nouns came into focus, such as the PT presidential candidate, Fernando Haddad, the presidential candidate for the PSDB, Geraldo Alckmin, and the presidential candidate for the Republic of Brazil from the Rede Sustentabilidade, Marina Silva. However, the roster of enemies extends beyond political opponents. Journalists find themselves the target of threats, criticism, and accusations of spreading fake news, as illustrated by a tweet concerning Lauro Jardim,[7] posted by one of Bolsonaro's sons and subsequently retweeted by the then-president of the republic.

[6] Lula was elected president of the Republic of Brazil for the third time in 2023.

[7] Tweet text: Eduardo Bolsonaro. (2018, 06 outubro). *FAKE NEWS DO GLOBO Lauro Jardim faz matéria maldosa induzindo q recebi dinheiro público, qnd na verdade economizei e segui a lei. Inexiste pagamento p mim d aluguel do meu carro ou d salário p minha mãe - q é voluntária. Agora nos vemos na justiça sobre o direito de resposta*! English: Eduardo Bolsonaro. (2018, October 6). FAKE NEWS FROM GLOBO Lauro Jardim makes a malicious article inducing that I received public money, when in fact I saved and followed the law. There is no payment for me to rent my car or pay my mother—who is a volunteer. Now see you in court regarding the right to reply! https://t.co/JsFyYVHVbw.

The analysis of Bolsonaro's tweets in 2018 revealed a spectrum of declared and mentioned enemies in his publications, including the political system, corruption, the traditional media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), left-wing parties such as PSOL, PT, and PCdoB, individuals labeled as "murderers" and "criminals", countries like Cuba and Venezuela, journalists, violence, abortion, "indoctrination", ideology, fake news, and news outlets. On the other side of the spectrum, Bolsonaro's friendly associations encompass the police, military, the President of Italy, football celebrities, artists, and the "people" who support Bolsonaro without any expectation of reciprocation. Bolsonaro portrays himself as an alternative to the problems he attributes to previous PT governments. Notably, when journalistic outlets endorse Bolsonaro, publishing content or interviews in his favor, such "press" is deemed as reliable and truth-disseminating.[8]

During the 2022 electoral period, Bolsonaro continued to direct his attacks in general to the press, the Workers' Party (PT), and now, more pointedly, at his rival, Lula. He persistently attributed corruption to past governments, a recurring theme in his social media posts. He still considers the "people" as friends, and when convenient, the traditional press, retweeting news with attacks on his current great enemy, the PT.[9]

Topics that were not addressed by Bolsonaro on Twitter, or messages deleted between publication and this collection, were related to the possibility of fraud in electronic voting machines, criticism of the electoral system, as well as mentions of the TSE and STF. We mention this because they were recurring questions and mentions in their supporters' posts. And, sometimes, some of these messages escaped the filters and the "cleaning" carried out on their networks, either by court decision or by Bolsonaro's initiative.

In 2016, during the US presidential election, candidate Donald Trump employed the term "fake news" to denounce the media and the journalistic profession. Our analysis of his tweets revealed that Trump directed his communications toward specific targets, including the Democratic

[8] Tweet text: *Em entrevista isenta para a RedeTV, Bolsonaro fala sobre pontos de seu Plano de Governo*. English: In an impartial interview with RedeTV, Bolsonaro talks about points in his Government Plan https://t.co/mLwhoGI9rk.

[9] Tweets posted on August 27, 2022; August, 29 2022; September 29 /2022; October, 06 2022, among others.

Party's presidential candidate for the 2016 elections, Hillary Clinton,[10] as well as the media,[11] encompassing television stations,[12] the press,[13] and journalists.[14] Immigrants[15] residing in the United States were also a central focus in his posts, often portrayed as criminals who, in his view, needed to be barred from the country.

A predominant theme in the majority of the analyzed posts was Trump's contention that the media was untrustworthy, propagating false information, and displaying favoritism toward his electoral rivals.[16] This led him to assert that the electoral system could potentially be manipulated due to the proliferation of fabricated reports by the press. Trump's posts accused the electoral system of being susceptible to manipulation based on what he claimed were fictitious events reported in his posts, events that he argued had "never happened". These invented events were, in his view, responsible for the decline in his voter support.

In addition to these adversaries, Trump's critics also included supporters of Hillary Clinton.[17] Terms such as "corruption", "criminals", and "rigged elections" recurred in his posts throughout the 2016 campaign. On the supportive side, Trump consistently expressed gratitude for the presence of his supporters during his public appearances, often referencing the endorsement of fellow politicians from the Republican

[10] Hillary Clinton is attacked by Trump on accusations of dishonesty, inability to manage the country, defending rapists, being corrupt, and being involved in scandals. Tweet text: After decades of lies and scandal, Crooked Hillary's corruption is closing in. #DrainTheSwamp! https://t.co/YivCacmkKq.

[11] Texto do tuíte: Wow, the @nytimes is losing thousands of subscribers because of their very poor and highly inaccurate coverage of the "Trump phenomena".

[12] Tweet text: I thought that @CNN would get better after they failed so badly in their support of Hillary Clinton however, since election, they are worse!

[13] Tweet text: The phony story in the failing @nytimes is a TOTAL FABRICATION. Written by same people as last discredited story on women. WATCH!

[14] Tweet text: "Journalists shower Hillary Clinton with campaign cash". https://t.co/qZPPX0LO4X https://t.co/NsWbJN01Uu

[15] Tweet text: Thank you NH! We will end illegal immigration, stop the drugs, deport all criminal aliens & save American lives! Watch https://t.co/QfWZJXfvS7 https://t.co/jBeQEMLyth.

[16] Tweet text: Election is being rigged by the media, in a coordinated effort with the Clinton campaign, by putting stories that never happened into news!

[17] Tweet text: If my many supporters acted and threatened people like those who lost the election are doing, they would be scorned & called terrible names!

party. In terms of media outlets, Fox News stood out as close, consistently portrayed in a positive light on his Twitter feed. Following his election in 2016, his posts that criticized election coverage by CNN, NBC, and The New York Times grew more intense, overshadowing his criticism of the opposing candidate.

In 2020, the posts made by Trump, which are the subject of analysis in this study, predominantly pivot their critique toward the electoral system, positing that it is vulnerable to fraud, often emphasizing "concrete evidence of fraud".[18] The attacks on the electoral system,[19] as conveyed in these posts, frequently cite "alleged examples" of states where ballots were purportedly distributed haphazardly and erroneously to voters.

Furthermore, Joe Biden emerges as a new adversary, as he directly competes with Trump for the presidency. In addition to Biden, Trump's posts also assail Barack Obama and the Clintons, and their respective administrations are characterized as detrimental to the American populace. Trump frequently underscores the alleged corruption of his political opponents, occasionally mentioning his opposition to socialism.

Regarding the media landscape, Trump's accusations of spreading fake news continue to be predominantly directed at CNN, NBC, and The New York Times. Once again, Fox News stands as an exception, regarded as a reputable media outlet, and even receiving retweets from Trump himself on a few occasions.

In the post-election period, Trump's posts overwhelmingly revolve around questioning the legitimacy of the election, including some retweets from supporters who assert, verbatim, that the election had been stolen.

Conclusion

There are significant similarities between Trump and Bolsonaro in their Twitter posts, particularly in terms of identifying their adversaries. The press is consistently portrayed negatively, either as producers of "fake

[18] Tweet text: Project Veritas uncovers 'ballot harvesting fraud' in Minnesota: @mirandadevine @nypost #BallotHarvesting https://t.co/hN9yhKP24h.

[19] Tweet text: And this is the smallest of the problems being reported today as the requested absentee ballots begin to arrive. People are receiving their neighbors ballots; I received a ballot marked absentee military ballot, though I'm not sure that that is problematic or not. https://t.co/m5iZNRVeJ8.

news" in Trump's case or as disrespectful in Bolsonaro's case. Corruption is consistently attributed to their political rivals, and both leaders position socialism or communism as an enemy, positioning themselves as saviors. In some posts, Cuba and Venezuela emerge as points of concern, as well as their political opponents.

However, a notable divergence between the two figures in this analysis is their post-election behavior. While Trump directly challenged the fairness of the elections in his posts, Bolsonaro chose to delegate this task exclusively to his supporters.

Regarding otherness, it is clear, however, that both Bolsonaro and Trump are consistent in the definition of their enemy, markedly different not from themselves, but from their electorate, which largely identifies with their candidates. On the other hand, there is a very thin line of otherness between the two, who resemble each other in their discursive constructions on Twitter more than they distance themselves, and end up seeming like facets of the same person.

This identification, however, is not a real identification between individuals possessing indifferentiable characteristics, but an identification that comes from populist structures, which form an integral part of the propaganda to the men behind the tweets.

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"How Does the Other Half Tweet?": Analyzing the Construction of "Otherness" During the 2022 Brazilian Presidential Campaign

Raquel Recuero and Felipe Soares

Introduction

To understand how discourse enables and legitimizes exclusion, it is important to understand how it operates through otherness. This has become increasingly important in recent years, as populism, and particularly, far-right populism, is on the rise (Greven, 2016; Scott, 2019). Looking at Brazilian politics, particularly the 2022 election, can shed some light on how populism is mobilized in political discourse. This

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was an extremely polarized election (Tarouco, 2023), which consolidated profound changes in the political scenario in the country.

In this presidential election, the incumbent Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party—PL) faced the former president Lula da Silva (Workers' Party—PT) in a tight dispute which Lula won by a difference of less than 2% of the votes. The election happened in two rounds, one on October 3rd of 2022 and the second, on October 30th of 2022. Lula da Silva won both rounds.

Bolsonaro represented a lot of the far-right populism (Guimarães, 2021), often through a "macho" image where masculinity and violence were praised (Cioccari, 2018). He was also associated with frequent threats to democracy and to Brazilian institutions, scientific negationism, conservative views on human rights and so on. Lula da Silva, although a traditional representative from the left in the country, ran with the support of a "Coalition for Democracy", which comprised several parties from the left, the center and the moderate right-wing. It was a union against Bolsonaro and his administration.

Bolsonaro's administration was marked by many controversies, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they used disinformation about the disease, the virus and the vaccines to fight a political crisis in 2020 (Soares et al., 2021). Bolsonaro himself defended unproved drugs for COVID-19 to criticize preventative measures such as lockdowns and social distancing (Casarões & Magalhães, 2021), and his anti-vaccine discourse resulted in vaccine hesitancy in the country (Gramacho & Turgeon, 2021). These actions had an impact also in his campaign, as Brazil became one of the countries with the highest death rate from COVID in the world.

Bolsonaro's administration frequently attacked the electoral process in the country (Ruediger, 2022), claiming that the electronic ballot box was prone to fraud, and that there was a conspiracy from the left-wing and the democratic institutions. In July of 2022, just weeks before the official beginning of the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro made a public speech to the ambassadors of several countries accusing the Electoral Supreme Court and claiming the election would be corrupted.

One of the favorite spaces for Bolsonaro and his supporters to share their claims was social media platforms. In fact, since Bolsonaro's 2018 campaign to presidency successfully happened mostly online, these platforms became one of the key spaces for the discursive disputes (Cioccari, 2018; Maia et al., 2022; Piaia & Alves, 2020). The role of these platforms

became increasingly important during the campaign in 2022 and the Brazilian Electoral Court frequently issued orders to take out disinformation content to these campaigns. By the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, the discussion about platform legislation grew in the country, as these tools became key for the Bolsonarists to organize protest after the election results by blocking roads and threatening attacks and, finally, to attempt a coup with the invasion of the Praça dos Três Poderes, in January of 2023.

In this context, we want to explore and compare if and how both candidates used social media platforms during the second round of the election to create otherization and to build populists discourses. Therefore, we aim to understand (1) the similarities and differences of how each campaign mobilized and legitimized the idea of "Otherness" as part of their political discourse; (2) how the construction of this "Other" was used to reinforce the polarized environment; and (3) how it is connected to populism in this context.

To do so, we created a dataset with all tweets published by the official accounts of both candidates using Social Feed Manager (Prom, 2017). We collected 391 tweets from @jairbolsonaro's account and 1014 tweets from @lulaoficial's account during the second round of the campaign. We focused on the second round, as it was the final one and concentrated the dispute among the two candidates.

In the next sections, we provide an overview of how concepts related to polarization, populism and otherness are relevant for our specific case study, describe the methods used for data collection and analysis, report the findings of our analysis and discuss our results.

Polarization

The political context in Brazil has been following a highly polarized structure in the last few years (Santos Junior, 2023), especially when we look at conversations on social media during elections (Recuero et al., 2020; Soares & Recuero, 2021). This is similar to what has been seen in other countries around the world, such as the United States (Benkler et al., 2018; Young et al., 2022), Canada (Gruzd & Roy, 2014), Australia (Graham et al., 2021) and many others (Tornberg, 2018).

Polarization on social media has been linked to coordinated actions to spread partisan and misleading content (Giglietto et al., 2020; Gruzd et al., 2022), increased toxicity and antisocial behavior (Vogels, 2021)

and overall spread of misinformation (Recuero et al., 2020; Young et al., 2022). Polarization can also negatively influence how individuals perceive important public discussions, as previous studies have identified in discussions about the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Calvillo et al., 2020; Stecula & Pickup, 2021) and climate emergency (Bolsen & Shapiro, 2018).

Much of the misperceptions caused by political polarization are due to how partisans interact with in- and out-group individuals, as the polarized political structure can lead to increased affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019). Affective polarization particularly refers to the animosity between individuals from opposite partisan sides. This type of partisan hostility affects how individuals perceive those in the other side of the ideological divide beyond the political sphere (Iyengar et al., 2019), lead to misperceptions about various topics to hold their positive in-group reasoning (Druckman et al., 2021) and undermine support for democratic norms in contexts where they end up being politicized (Kingzette et al., 2021).

Affective polarization is particularly relevant for this study as it tends to reinforce the differences between in- and out-groups. This makes partisans more likely to see the world, particularly political discussions, in a divisive structure between us and them. This type of structure favors populist discourse and the construction of otherness through it, as we discuss in the following sections.

Populism

Populism is a complex concept, within several theories in political science. What most of these theories have in common is the image of a "strong leader" (Mudee & Kaltwasser, 2017). In this work, we will focus on Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017a, 2017b) concept, which states that populism is "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people". This concept is interesting as it focuses on populism as a malleable concept, which can be associated with other ideologies. At the same time, Mudde's (2004) ideas about populism allows us to connect populist articulations to otherness. His concept is defined based on the discursive articulation between "us" (the pure people) and them (the

corrupt elites) which is, mostly, the key element of otherness. Populism, to these authors, is based also on polarization, as it frequently uses discursive dichotomies and exclusion as operations to build their ideologies. So, for example, populism can appear within both right-wing and left-wing ideologies.

Mudde (2004) makes a distinction that is important for this study. He explains that there are two forms of populism, one that he calls "thin-centered" and the other, "thick-centered" populism. While both are characterized by the division of society in two groups, the "pure" people and the "corrupt" people (elites), thick-centered populism incorporates a strong ideological agenda based on nationalism and otherness. Thick-centered populism, thus, is more radical. Muddle argues that it is also the most dangerous form, as it may lead to authoritarian governments and the oppression of minorities.

Wodak's work (2011, 2015, 2018) focuses on how populist movements use discursive strategies to build their narratives. To the author, populism is also a way to use language and to construct meaning and legitimation to power relations. In her work, she found different discourses connected to populism, mostly the use of simplified language, appeals to emotion, nationalism (particularly connected to the binarism of the "true people" versus the "others"). Like Mudde's, her work also brings the connections to discourse and "otherization" as key to populism around the world. More than that, Wodak's work (2015) also connects right-wing populism with nationalism, exclusion and patriarchy as key values and the articulation of "the other" through narratives of fear.

These works show some important points as they understand otherness as a strategy of populism to build social cohesiveness in their platforms. As populism is a concept often connected to polarized political contexts (Roberts, 2022), it is an important discursive context to understand the Brazilian campaigns.

Otherness

"Otherness" is a concept that refers to the discursive process where a dominant group creates another stigmatized group ("the others"), using the proposed "difference" (between us and them) to justify discrimination and, sometimes, violence (Staszak, 2009). These groups are qualified through the process where good values are associated with the "us" group, whereas "the others" are the cause/producers of negative values.

In this process, the "us" category is also constructed, in opposition to "they" or "the others". Otherization, thus, is a process of constructing and representing the "other" in negative or inferior terms to justify discrimination, exclusion, or even hostility toward them. It can take various forms and is often utilized to maintain social hierarchies, power imbalances and stereotypes. The "other" in this process is someone to whom negative characteristics are attributed by discourse (Yetkiner, 2021). Language, in these cases, is used to create and reinforce divisions between social groups, as it produces and legitimizes the social identities and the power associated with them (Wodak, 2015).

Wodak's (2011, 2015, 2018) work focuses on otherness from the point of view of the construction of social identities, as discourse plays an important role in defining and categorizing different groups and how they are labeled and perceived by others in a certain society. These discursive strategies are important ways to establish and reinforce power relations and social hierarchies. One of these strategies is, thus, otherization. Through otherization, dominant groups construct and impose negative stereotypes and narratives of marginalized groups, which are legitimated and perpetuated by the same discourse. Wodak (2011, 2015) also explains how otherization is a common feature of populist's discourses and, particularly, the far-right, often, together with nationalism and racism and how it is directed to create exclusion through fear.

On political discourse, several studies investigate the strategies used to construct otherness. Sakki and Peterson (2016) for instance, studied the Nordic populist radical right discourse on blogs and found out three main forms of otherization on immigration issues: Representations of a deviant group of people, of a threatening ideology and of inner enemies. The far-right has been linked to different strategies to legitimate otherization, particularly, through exclusion and fear (Wodak, 2015, 2018). Finally, othering has also been linked, as a strategy, to political polarization (Keyvanfar & Creutz-Kömppi, 2008; Shayegh, 2022).

In a highly polarized election, much of the discourse produced during the campaigns aimed to reinforce a division between us and them (the Other). Therefore, it is key to understand how these strategies that create "the other" are shared and legitimated on social media platforms, particularly, during political campaigns.

Methods

In this chapter, we focus on how the Brazilian presidential campaigns of 2022 built otherness in their social media discourse. The proposed case study is based on Twitter, as it was largely used as a public space for political campaigns in the country. Our work is focused on three objectives: (1) the similarities and differences of how each campaign mobilized and legitimized the idea of "Otherness" as part of their political discourse; (2) how the construction of this "Other" was used to reinforce the polarized environment; and (3) how it is connected to populism in this context.

Data Collection

To better understand these issues, we collected all tweets published by the two major candidates, Jair Bolsonaro and Lula da Silva during the second round of the campaign (from October 4th to October 31st, 2022). During this period, both candidates were running against each other. We collected 1257 tweets from the official accounts of the candidates. We then read each tweet and looked for the messaged that contained otherization. Table 1 summarizes the data.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lenses, we further examined how these tweets constructed the idea of the "other" and through what types of discursive strategies. Critical discourse analysis is a framework that studies "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2001). To CDA, it is important to understand that social practices are a product of discourse (Fairclough, 1989) and it is key to understand how discourse shapes these practices and effects, as language, context and linguistics structures are understood as instruments of power. In this context, otherness is a discursive strategy to create and legitimate oppression and violence.

Table 1 Summary of the data

	Total number of tweets	*Tweets with otherization*	*Percentage*
Bolsonaro	246	76	30.8%
Lula	1011	234	23.1%

Fairclough (1989, 1995) also proposes a model for CDA. In his proposal, the analysis is based on a three-step process, which is textual analysis, the interaction analysis, which is based on the text's production/consumption and distribution, and the social context analysis, which is the contextual/effects analysis.

Based on this process, we look into our dataset for the strategies used to create otherness in the tweets. We first read and categorize the texts, asking ourselves: "Is there otherness in this text?" and further "Who is 'the other' in this text?". We further move to the discussion of how much of these texts make the same connections in discourse to create otherness. We then categorize these strategies. Finally, we also ask what are the contextual clues in these tweets, that help us understand how these otherness strategies are crossed by other discursive contexts, which may point to populist views.

Strategies of Otherization from Bolsonaro's Campaign

As Table 1 presents, Bolsonaro's tweets often used otherness as a strategy, with roughly a third of his tweets including it. But who is the "other" in these tweets? Mostly, the other is constructed as the category "adversaries". This is important because the "adversaries" as a general category, including everyone who was not explicitly supporting Bolsonaro. Thus, while othering Lula da Silva and "the left" is a process that appears in a few tweets from Bolsonaro's campaign, the majority of othering tweets talk simply about "adversaries" or make it implicit that "others" are the ones who are not supporting them. This operation validates not only Lula's "Coalition" and his supporters as the Other, but also, everyone who didn't explicitly support Bolsonaro. Therefore, while not all of Lula's supporters were actually from left-wing parties, to Bolsonaro's campaign, everyone who wasn't with Bolsonarom was a "leftist". We found 73 tweets (96% of Bolsonaro's tweets that included otherization) that focused on adversaries associated with the left as the "other". There were also otherization of the media, the scientists/specialists, and the polls institutes (one tweet each), which were indirectly associated with the left.

Examining the tweets from Bolsonaro's campaign to understand the discursive operations through which othering was created, we found five major strategies. We will further explore these categories and their presence on these discourses.

(a) **Association with violence and crime—**Many tweets from his campaign connected his adversaries to crimes, violence and corruption. Out of the tweets with otherization, 39.4% (30 tweets) used this strategy as a form of describing Bolsonaro's adversaries, the leftists and Lula. In fact, Lula himself was strongly associated with corruption and crime in Bolsonaro's discourse. The following text exemplifies these associations.

> In Lula's administration, organized crime grew and strengthened tremendously. The legalization of drugs, which destroy families and lead parents to bury their children, is only a matter of time. In Bolsonaro's administration, there has been a record number of drug seizures and significant setbacks for trafficking.

In the text, Lula's administration is portrayed as implicitly supporting crime, in opposition to Bolsonaro's. There is a moral evaluation of the adversaries connecting them not only to the growth of crime, but also, to the death of children. Adversaries, thus, by supporting Lula, support the destruction of the "good" society.

(b) **Moral panic—**In Bolsonaro's tweets, the left was also clearly associated with the destruction of the "important values" of society, such as religion, family and morality. In this case, the moral values were strongly associated with the conservative values. We identified 20 tweets that used this strategy (26.3%). One example from the corpus is the following tweets.

> What's at stake are clearly opposed and well-defined paths. On one side, socialism, abortion rights, the victimization of criminals, drug legalization, the relativization of crime, the demonization of police, systemic corruption, and the destruction of the family.

In this case, there is an articulation between politics and moral values. Bolsonaro's campaign created the opposition between "us" and "them", but also connected the others (adversaries) to the degradation of society and the destruction of values.

(c) **Disinformation and lies**—Another category found in the data were tweets claiming that content shared by Lula's campaign and his supporters were disinformation and lies. In total, 11 of Bolsonaro's tweets were included in this category (14.4%).

> The left claims to take pride in their ideals, but hides them during election years. They know that if they spoke the truth about their beliefs, they would never be accepted, so they lie without remorse. They could be honest and let the people decide, but greed and ambition take precedence.

In this example, the "othering" is created through the opposition between "truth" and "lies" as "others" are connected to the immorality of "lying without remorse". Again, we see a strong connection to values and morality.

(d) **Incompetency/Inability to lead**—Another strategy observed in Bolsonaro's tweets was to establish that the left and Lula da Silva were incompetent. In this case, they were criticized based on the claim that Bolsonaro's government was superior to Lula's and other leftists. We found seven tweets in this category (9.2%).

> Last 2 years of the PT's government (2015/2016): 2.87 million jobs lost. 2015: -1.55 million jobs. 2016: -1.32 million jobs

The example shows how othering is created through portraying the "others" as either incompetent (in the case of Lula's administration) or supporters of this incompetency (in case of Lula's supporters or adversaries), through data and compared to Bolsonaro's administration. In this case, there is a rationale applied to the othering.

(e) **Enemies of democracy**—Finally, using this strategy, Bolsonaro portrayed his adversaries as supporters of dictatorships (and associated dictatorships with the left), and authoritarianism. We found five tweets in this category (6.5%).

> Stay alert! One of the main and most challenging objectives was achieved yesterday. We already have what is necessary to free Brazil from authoritarianism, blackmail, and the injustice that so deeply infuriates us. The most profound change in the country has already begun! It's not the people who should fear.

In this example, othering is created through the call for attention, because "others" are planning to bring authoritarianism, corruption and injustice back to the country. In this case, authoritarianism makes a direct reference to dictatorships and the call "stay alert" to the frequent insinuations about fraud that Bolsonaro's campaign made, asking supporters to send their own "registers" of this fraud. The discourse about "the people as "us" also points to the idea that the elites are corrupt. This tweet was published immediately after the end of the first round.

Transversal Discourses

To better understand how these strategies of "othering" occurred, we also categorized the contextual discursive marks that allow the interpretation of these texts. We called them "transversal discourses" to point out that they create the effects and conditions to interpret the othering strategies we found. These discourses are used to reinforce strategies of otherization and they end up influencing the perception of both Bolsonaro's discourse and who are the others.

(a) **Nationalism—**Bolsonaro's campaign often made remarks to patriotism, the love for the country, the flag and the "national values", Bolsonaro often tweets with the image of the Brazilian flag or its colors. These references often placed these tweets as patriotics and focused on the country.

> Everyone is free to choose what path the country will follow, knowing that the consequences of each are clear. That being said, I am confident that crime will not regain control over our Brazil, because we have Brazil above all and GOD ABOVE ALL!

In this example, we see how the text makes nationalist references, claiming "the people" are the ones who value the country and consider "Brazil above all". At the same time, "the others" are the ones who don't

and are also connected to crime. In this case, we see the connection to crime strategy over the nationalist context built by Bolsonaro's campaign. It also makes a religious connection to values and morals to "us", the "good" people, Bolsonaro's followers, as they also consider "God" should be above "all".

(b) **Militarism**—Bolsonaro's tweets also often brought up the army in a "good light", claiming they were the only ones able to "save the democracy in the country. It was also common to suggest that the Brazilian dictatorship never existed and that Brazil went through a "good" military government.

> I make my own the wise and strong words of Lieutenant Silvia Waiãpi, the first indigenous person to become an officer in our glorious Brazilian army, elected Federal Deputy. As far as we are concerned, we will give our lives to protect our people and our sovereignty. BRAZIL ABOVE ALL!

The example shows how othering also bring the "good" people discourse, the "us" to a position of support of militarism. In this case the "good" people are also the army, who are willing to sacrifice in the name of the country. These are the "virtuous" people, who protect others and protect sovereignty. Consequently, the adversaries don't follow this good example, because they are not "us". This strategy is connected to moral panic and the exaltation of the "virtuous" people.

(c) **Religion and morals**—Finally, Bolsonaro's campaign frequently made references to God and to religion, as part of "the good" values. Religious discourse is always key to produce connection with the audience, and it is transversal to several tweets.

> Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness…' Ephesus 6:11–12—GOD BLESS OUR BELOVED BRAZIL!

Again, in this example, we see both militarism and religion as a context for othering. As previously discussed, in this example moral panic is the discursive strategy used for othering, as adversaries are seen as the ones

who are connected to "the devil" and will bring "darkness". This context was frequently used to validate Bolsonaro's campaign claims about how they represented the "virtuous" people through religion and morals, even though Bolsonaro himself didn't have a strong connection to religion.

These transversal discourses are important because they set the context where otherization happens. Others are not only the ones who don't share the "good values", such as patriotism and love for the country. Thus, they are a threat to democracy—as Bolsonaro often claimed, an idea that was used to construct the fear from Lula and his supporters similar to what Wodak observed in other contexts (2015, 2018). The victory of the adversaries was framed as the victory of the corruption of the institutions, the end of morality and good values and the destruction of the country. As the adversaries were built as "the left", which included everyone who wasn't supporting Bolsonaro, the idea of a "communist conspiracy" was also present.

These strategies and characteristics were key to the framing of Lula's victory as illegitimate, frauded and corrupted and thus, that it was grave enough that justified Bolsonaro's supporters to rebel, block roads and use violence to protest and claim for a military coup (as a military "intervention") to save the country.

Strategies of Otherization from Lula's Campaign

The percentage of tweets with otherization strategy on Lula's campaign was lower than Bolsonaro's. While Lula had many more tweets published during the analyzed period, only 23.1% of them had some type of discursive construct of "other". These 234 tweets mostly talked about the other as Bolsonaro (160—68.4%) and Bolsonaro's supporters (65—27.8%). In this case, the words "Bolsonaro" or "Bolsonaro's supporters" were explicitly used, contrary to Bolsonaro's campaign, in which "the enemy" was often implicit. Only 12 tweets (5.1%) spoke more generally about "adversaries" or criminals as "the others". Lula's campaign, thus, focused their discourse in creating a strong separation between him and his supporters and Bolsonaro and Bolsonaro's supporters.

(a) **Disinformation and lies**—The most used otherization strategy in Lula's tweets was the association of Bolsonaro's campaign with disinformation and lies. While Bolsonaro's campaign also claimed that Lula's supporters were spreading lies, this strategy was much

more prevalent in Lula's messages. One of the main traits of Lula's discourse was to fact-check Bolsonaro's declarations and associate his campaign with disinformation and lies. There were 92 tweets relying on this strategy (39.3%).

> The 'Auxílio Brasil' ends on December 31. For it to continue, Bolsonaro would have had to include it in the LDO (Law of Budget Guidelines). He didn't do it. Another lie from a citizen who lies 8 times a day. We will bring back the Bolsa Família with R$ 600 per family and R$ 150 per child.

In this tweet, Bolsonaro is explicitly called a liar, with a rational explanation. In this case, the strategy is used to othering Bolsonaro explicitly and his supporters, as supporters of lies, implicitly.

(b) **Association with violence and crime**—This strategy was used to associate Bolsonaro and his supporters with violence. Differently from Bolsonaro, who associated Lula with corruption, Bolsonaro's followers were mostly connected to political and physical violence and often, hate. Bolsonaro was associated with the far-right and fascist governments, based on hate, as well as racism. There were 79 tweets using this strategy (33.7%).

> A government that protects families cannot be in favor of guns. Guns kill, destroy families, and make women the biggest victims of this cowardice. Let's join together with Lula to take better care of families.

This tweet makes an implicit connection and criticism to Bolsonaro's government, as Bolsonaro frequently spoke for less gun control and the "right" to have guns (Cioccari, 2018). However, it also connects these claims to cowardice and claims that to "take care" of families (another "value" that Bolsonaro frequently defended), one needs to be pro-gun control. Othering, in this case, again, is focused on Bolsonaro.

(c) **Incompetency/Inability to lead**—Similarly to Bolsonaro's campaign, Lula's tweets also associated Bolsonaro with incompetency and inability to lead. However, Lula's campaign framed Bolsonaro and his supporters as negationists, as they refused the

COVID-19 vaccine and often criticized institutions and science. This strategy was used in 56 tweets (23.9%).

When he was trying to buy the vaccine, São Paulo and several countries around the world were already administering vaccines. He set up a crisis committee that advised him to deny COVID. He disregarded the people dying due to lack of oxygen in Manaus.

(d) **Enemies of democracy**—Lula's campaign also associated Bolsonaro and his supporters to fascism, and to military coup and threats to democracy. This association was increased at the end of the campaign. There were 7 tweets pointing to this strategy (3%).

Those who are going to vote, whether young or old, must know that they are choosing the future of the country. It's either the return of democracy or the beginning of a fascist government.

Similar to other examples, this excerpt of the dataset shows how this strategy was enabled by Lula's campaign. Here, Bolsonaro and his supporters are the enemies of democracy, the ones who represent a fascist government. Voting for them means voting against democracy.

Transversal Discourses

Lula's campaign had fewer transversal discourses, differently from Bolsonaro. We found two major transversal points:

Union—Part of Lula's campaign tweets used the idea of a union, or a coalition against Bolsonaro and his supporters. This means that the context for these tweets strongly marked the idea of plurality of support against a common enemy, Bolsonaro and his supporters. This gives the othering process an appearance of inclusion and union. This association, however, was also based on the association of Bolsonaro and his election to a possible dictatorship and to fascism, and thus, both the strategies of association with violence and crime and enemies of democracy.

> I was received by the chancellor of Germany, the presidents of Spain and France, without being president. He is not received by anyone, only the president of Saudi Arabia, which he thinks is democratic.

In this example, Lula highlights the solidarity he received internationally, while international leaders did not host meetings with Bolsonaro during the campaigns. By doing so, Lula's campaign argues that on top of a national coalition backing Lula, there is also international support for his campaign. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, is isolated with just a few supporters who are not in the democratic field.

Fear—To reinforce claims against Bolsonaro and portray him as a main threat to Brazilian democracy, fear was often mobilized in Lula's discourse. This was often also present when fact-checking Bolsonaro's claims, which portrayed him as a liar and unreliable, and especially in tweets that reinforced Bolsonaro's association with violence, crime and hate. In many tweets, Bolsonaro and his supporters were linked to guns, as well as various types of discursive and physical violence. Furthermore, a potential second Bolsonaro's administration was portrayed as potentially disastrous for the future of the country.

> In support of Lula, New York Times' editorial, the main newspaper in the US, declares that a second Bolsonaro's administration is a threat not just to Brazil, but to the entire planet Earth.

In the example, a foreign newspaper claims Bolsonaro is a threat to Brazil and the world, and thus that Lula is the only option for democracy and survival. The idea that Bolsonaro is a threat was connected to his attacks on the electronic ballot, the election and democratic institutions.

Discussion: Bolsonaro and Lula's Campaigns as Different Populisms

There are some important points to our analysis. First of all, there are similarities in how both campaigns construct "the other" and the strategies used to othering. Both Lula's and Bolsonaro's campaigns had their adversary and their followers constructed as "others". However, while Lula's campaign focused mostly on othering Bolsonaro and his followers, Bolsonaro's campaign, on the other hand, used "othering" to construct

the idea of "adversaries". For example, among the tweets with otherization, 67% of Lula's messages mentioned Bolsonaro, while less than 25% of Bolsonaro's messages mentioned Lula and his party. Therefore, to Lula's campaign, the other was Bolsonaro. To Bolsonaro's, all adversaries were "leftists". Since "the left" embodies everything that is despicable in this discourse, he manages to create a very strong "us" versus "them" opposition.

The categories of othering found are also similar. Both candidates try to associate each other and supporters to crime and violence, for example. This was an important category, as it is based on the creation of fear of the "other", discussed by Wodak (2015). In this case, the context of militarism, presented by Bolsonaro's campaign, offers the army as the solution to these "violent others", which could justify and even provoke the support for a military coup. In Lula's case, however, the militarism is not present but the idea of "union" against Bolsonaro, which portrays Bolsonaro as a main threat to democracy.

It is only in Bolsonaro's campaign that moral panic is a relevant form of othering. This is associated with the conservative moral discourse that is connected to the far-right and particularly to Bolsonaro (Cioccari, 2018; Maia et al., 2022; Piaia & Alves, 2020). The religious context in which often this othering happened also gives strength to this form of othering. In this case, othering happened through the process of creating a stereotype of impureness and immorality to Bolsonaro's adversaries. In this case, there is also fear, but it is not fear of violence but of the degradation of the moral values of this vision of society, which is also discussed by Wodak (2015). Other categories, such as the association to disinformation and lies, and the construction of the other as an enemy to democracy were also present in both campaigns. In Lula's case, this construction is reinforced by the contextual discussion of coalition and union, where everyone is together against Bolsonaro's threats.

Bolsonaro's campaign also embodied more strongly the values of nationalism, conservative moral values and often used transversal discourses associated to otherness, such as nationalism ("the unpatriotic adversaries"), militarism ("the ones who don't recognize the value of the army") and religion ("the impure ones") to othering their adversaries. Coherently with a far-right ideology, Bolsonaro's campaign often connected "the leftists" with moral decadence and the end of the "good values". These strategies are similar to the ones presented by (Wodak (2011, 2015) as examples of far-right forms to frame populism and to

establish the connection to "fear" of the other. Bolsonaro's campaign, in these cases, worked with fear. This fear was particularly focusing on the possibility of leftists being back in power in the country.

Bolsonaro's campaign, thus, could be more associated with what Mudde (2004) calls a "thick-centered populism. Bolsonaro's campaign focused strongly on othering and on creating fear of the "other" (the "left", but also, all the adversaries who were also stereotyped as "leftists") and in a general campaign with strong traces of nationalism, conservative values and dichotomy between his followers and adversaries. The association of the transversal discourses, such as militarism, religion and conservative values and nationalism, points directly to a far-right populist discourse (Scott, 2019; Wodak, 2015), but with specific strategies used by this campaign (similarly to what Guimarães & Silva, 2021, found).

Lula's campaign, on the other hand, while also connected to othering and other populist's strategies, presented a more of a "thin-centered" populism (Mudde, 2004). In this case, the campaign also used othering, mostly focusing on Bolsonaro and his supporters as associated with crime and violence, incompetence and enemies of democracy. These strategies were associated with an effort to create fear, as Bolsonaro could become a dictator and his supporters were described as violent. However, these tweets responded for much less than half of the total (around 37%).

Lula's most used strategy of othering was connecting Bolsonaro and his supporters to disinformation (39.1%). In fact, Lula's campaign was very much focused on deconstructing and fact-checking Bolsonaro. This explains also why Bolsonaro frequently accused Lula and "the leftists" of spreading disinformation, as they tried to change focus on the criticism. The majority of Lula's othering strategies, thus, focused on discussing Bolsonaro as incompetent and his campaign as disinformation. However, as we pointed out, fear of a coup or attempt against democracy was a transversal discourse in many of Lula's tweets, thus, also a strategy of fear (Wodak, 2015).

These differences are important as they increase polarization and particularly, affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019), as they tend to reinforce animosity against those on the other side of the political divide. The hostility against the other party was often mobilized by the discourse of fear (Wodak, 2015). In Bolsonaro's discourse by claiming that having leftists back in power could lead to a communist administration, and in Lula's discourse by claiming that a second Bolsonaro's government

could lead to an even weaker democracy, the threat of another military dictatorship and increased cases of violence and hate.

Finally this study suggests that Lula and Bolsonaro are both constructed as strong leaders and one is the only possible answer to the other. While part of this phenomenon is connected to the extremely polarized context of the 2022 election, this is not the only reason. Polarization is also the form through which these campaigns worked on Twitter, particularly through discursive strategies of otherness. This extreme may also be the cause of the increase of violence in the country in the aftermath of the election. Following Bolsonaro's defeat, many of his supporters protested across the country. They often engaged in violent behavior, which might have been fueled by Bolsonaro's discourse based on otherization and increased hostility against the other side during the campaigns. The unrest of Bolsonaro's supporters was motivated by the fear of another left-wing administration and claims that there was a coup from the leftists in place. While this case is specific to Brazil, the construction of otherness in discourse has the potential to fuel affective polarization in other countries and lead to similar incidents.

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The Enemy on the Left: The Construction of the "Evil Communist" in Brazilian Far-Right Discourse

Camilla Machuy

The surge of the far-right in Brazil during the second decade of the twenty-first century can be seen as a disruption in the country's democratic landscape, an occurrence that many attribute to the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the advent of the Information Society. Of course, the spread of far-right ideologies and movements has been significantly influenced by the strategic use of online technologies. In fact, "as soon as the Internet took shape in the 1990s, far-right entrepreneurs saw the advantages for the movement and established a significant presence" (Mudde, 2019, p. 69). In recent years, the far-right has used various digital platforms, social media networks, and online communication tools to disseminate their messages, mobilize

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supporters, and amplify their narratives (Howard, 2020). These technologies provide a powerful and accessible means for far-right groups to connect with a global audience, recruit new members, and incite existing followers (Empoli, 2018). Through the targeted use of social media algorithms, online forums, and digital echo chambers, far-right actors have created and sustained their own information ecosystems, often characterized by echo chambers that reinforce and amplify their ideological views (Kakutani, 2018; Ramonet, 2022). This digital space allows them to spread disinformation, conspiracy theories, and divisive rhetoric, reaching individuals who may be susceptible to these messages.

However, within the scope of this work, the intention is not to investigate the contribution of these new technologies to the contemporary rise of the far-right. Despite this, it is unwise to oversee the influences triggered by the impact of ICTs on the public's interaction with politics and how this has favored the rise of ultraconservative ideologies. Among them, the most famous is the Cambridge Analytica scandal. The episode revealed the manipulation of personal data from millions of Facebook users with the aim of influencing electoral processes, especially in the 2016 United States presidential elections and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. The company Cambridge Analytica, specialized in data analysis and communication strategies, gained unauthorized access to the data of approximately 87 million Facebook users, which was used to create distinct psychological profiles to target personalized political messages to users, intending to influence their opinions and political behaviors.

The events of the 2016 United States election starkly displayed the potency and sway of disinformation strategies within the political sphere. The election of Donald Trump as president, amidst a relentless proliferation of false and distorted information across social media platforms, prompted a profound reckoning with the pernicious repercussions of such practices within the democratic framework. In their scrutiny of the surge of Trumpism in the United States, a phenomenon that significantly influenced the trajectory of extremism in Brazil, Benkler et al. (2018), in their work "Network Propaganda" posit that the most pressing challenges within this disinformation ecosystem do not primarily stem from Russian bots, teenagers posting fake news on Facebook, the exploits of Cambridge Analytica, echo chambers, or any other previously pinpointed "villains" in studies exploring the proliferation of the far-right ideology. Rather, in their perspective:

> These dynamics, which play out across television, radio, and mainstream professional journalism at least as much as through the internet and social media, have been developing for 30 years and have resulted in a highly asymmetric media ecosystem that is the primary driver of disinformation and propaganda in the American public sphere. The right-wing media ecosystem circulates an overwhelming amount of domestic disinformation and propaganda, and its practices create the greatest vulnerabilities to both foreign propaganda and nihilistic commercial exploitation by clickbait factories. Outside the right-wing media ecosystem, we observe efforts by partisans, Russians, and clickbait factories, but fact-checking norms and journalistic institutional commitments dampen the diffusion and amplification of disinformation. These dynamics are inverted in the insular right-wing network, and partisan identity-confirming assertions, however false, are accelerated and amplified. (Benkler et al., 2018. p. 352)

The Brazilian *déjà vu*

Two years later, Brazil found itself facing a situation reminiscent of the United States. The sweeping victory of Jair Bolsonaro at the polls underscored the potent political advantage derived from astutely harnessing the potential of social media within political campaigns. The ascendancy of Brazilian ultraconservatism, however, did not emerge as a surprising development, given its emulation of the Trumpist electoral blueprint, albeit tailored to accommodate the socio-cultural nuances of Brazilian voters. Furthermore, the surge of Brazilian conservatism had been gaining momentum well before, notably exemplified by the June 2013 protests. What initially stemmed from protests against bus fare hikes quickly metamorphosed into an outpouring of multifaceted societal grievances. This collection of demands grew increasingly encompassing—ranging from heightened public transportation levies to a resolute antipathy toward partisan dynamics (Alonso; Mische, 2016). The far-reaching implications of these protests remained only partially discernible to Brazilian society, as showed by the 2015 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, which catalyzed a surge in aversion toward the Workers' Party (PT), often referred to as "antipetismo" (Fuks et al., 2021).

Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing candidate, a former military officer, and a self-proclaimed anti-establishment figure, skillfully capitalized on the prevailing atmosphere of "antipetismo." Employing an extensive campaign fueled by disinformation (Santos, 2020), Bolsonaro emerged

victorious in the 2018 elections. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, his governmental actions propagated an array of fake-scientific propositions. The fervent endorsement of hydroxychloroquine treatment as a miraculous remedy was particularly conspicuous, despite its discordance with the established scientific evidence (Casarões; Magalhães, 2021). Similarly, Bolsonaro ridiculed social distancing, unalterably avoided implementing lockdown measures, and heralded critics about the efficacy of vaccines, insinuating an alarming potential for AIDS transmission and suggesting that the immunization could cause the mutation of a human into a reptile. By 2023, the toll of COVID-19 victims in Brazil had surpassed a staggering 700,000.

The outcome of Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic crisis was characterized by a concatenation of factors: a calamitous erosion of public services, a plethora of misogynistic, homophobic, and racist pronouncements, and an overtly anti-democratic stance on human rights. These factors contributed to Bolsonaro's electoral defeat in 2022 at the hands of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the leader of the Workers' Party. Bolsonaro's reaction was to challenge the election results, sowing seeds of doubt concerning the reliability of Brazil's electronic voting system. These allegations were void of substantiating evidence. Notwithstanding, he adroitly used an efficient online disinformation network, inciting his supporters to besiege the Brazilian National Congress on January 8, 2023. Coordinated via Telegram and WhatsApp groups, these anti-democratic actions mirrored a coup-like endeavor, with the aim of toppling President Lula's administration. Subsequently, close to a thousand people were detained.

Echoes from the Past

Despite the recent surge of a conservative revolution in digital media gaining substantial attention in numerous recent studies and emerging as a pivotal topic in global sociopolitical debates, it would be unwise to view the sudden emergence of such ideologies in Brazil as a completely isolated phenomenon, even in our contemporary era. Throughout history, opposing political groups have perpetually rivaled for ideological dominance during their respective periods, leading us to recognize that conservative thought has deeply rooted origins in Brazil. This resurgence of conservatism bears striking similarities, although the contexts have undergone reinterpretation. Notably, the flirtation between Brazilian

conservatism and fascism can be traced back to the ascent of this ideology in Europe. In the 1930s, the Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB) took to the streets, ushering in a period of mass mobilization (Secco, 2022).

The focal point of this study, however, lies in scrutinizing the progression of conservative discourse from the era of the military dictatorship. This period, which started in the March 31st, 1964 coup orchestrated by the Brazilian Armed Forces against the democratically elected President João Goulart, saw the adoption of conservative principles like nationalism and anti-communism. The results of the Military Forces' attempt to create an "authoritarian utopia" (Fico, 2004) caused more than 400 deaths and more than 200 missing persons. This work explores the hypothesis that the foundations of this landscape, constructed with the aid of digital platforms, trace back to an unsettled past—an echo that still resounds prominently. The effort to trace how these ideas managed to survive and thrive again in recent years is of particular significance to this investigation. They have not only endured but also flourished, reemerging as a pivotal part of the conservative agenda and assuming a vital role in Bolsonaro's campaign platform and political pursuits.

The goal is to measure how the discourses from the three sources diverge and converge, textually speaking. The focus is on examining how specific terms like "communist," "communism," "leftism," "left-wing," and "terrorism" interact within the semantic context of these sources. Considering the notable presence of anti-communism biases in all of them, it is predicted that this cross-referencing of data will yield valuable insights for the work and enhance the understanding of how these belief systems endured over the period studied. Additionally, this analysis is poised to deepen our understanding of the means through which these belief systems endured while systematically framing communism as an adversary or malevolent influence.

Therefore, this work extracted insights from text data from three different sources: Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra's book "*A Verdade Sufocada*" ("The Suffocated Truth" in a free translation), Olavo de Carvalho's bestseller "*O mínimo que você precisa saber para não ser um idiota*" ("The least you need to know to not be an idiot" in a free translation), and the compilation of all 620 presidential speeches by Jair Bolsonaro, archived in the Governmental Library and available online. This methodological approach is important to comprehending the enduring resilience of conservative ideology within the context of Brazil's complex journey through re-democratization.

The "Manipulated" Truth

During the military dictatorship period, Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra served as an Army colonel and gained notoriety for his direct involvement in torture and the harsh repression tactics employed by the military regime (Godoy, 2014). According to numerous scholars, his book "A Verdade Sufocada" has been widely recognized as a form of historical revisionism. It is regarded as one of the most notable conspiracy theories advanced by figures within the Brazilian military (Rocha, 2021; Prado, 2021; Lacerda, 2019; Figueiredo, 2009). The book presents a biased narrative of the Brazilian military dictatorship, portraying it favorably while disputing allegations of human rights violations, torture, and abuses that happened during that tumultuous period.

Importantly, this book draws its inspiration entirely from a document created by the Brazilian Army—the Orvil project—designed to serve as a basis for the military coup of 1964. The primary aim of the Orvil project was to "rewrite History," effectively denying the military coup that ousted, João Goulart, and ruthlessly targeted left-wing activists (Brandão & Leite, 2012). The book's pages paint an unreal and implausible scenario in which the Military Forces frustrated the establishment of a communist dictatorship with backing from China and Russia (Figueiredo, 2009).

> Viewed through a powerful magnifying lens, the reality was distorted and morphed into a haunting menace, wandering through history dragging four chains: 1) Those who had opposed the military regime were leftists; 2) Leftists are communists; 3) Communists are dangerous; 4) Through the International Communist Movement (better known as ICM), Moscow, Beijing, and Cuba never ceased attempting to grasp their hairy hands on Brazil. With anti-communism as its backdrop, the Orvil project ventured into misguided definitions. The 1964 coup, for instance, was not a coup but rather a"democratic revolution". (Figueiredo, 2009, p. 78)

The anti-communist sentiment, therefore, played a crucial role in providing an ideological justification for the military coup and the maintenance of the dictatorial regime in Brazil for over two decades. The exploitation of this collective fear was fundamental in sustaining authoritarianism and legitimizing the violation of human rights and democratic freedoms during this dark period of Brazilian history, as elucidated by Motta (2000):

> The anti-communist argument held a prominent position within the power struggles occurring within the State, often driving extreme right-wing sectors into action. Furthermore, the military regime maintained constant surveillance over communists and the left, employing the formidable repressive apparatus constructed after 1964 whenever believed necessary. (Motta, 2000, p. 344)

Despite attempts to camouflage the truth, it's crucial to highlight that Ustra was legally recognized as a torturer by the Brazilian judicial system in 2008. However, it was not until 2012 that he was convicted for the death of only one victim. This conviction came during the investigations conducted by the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade, CNV), an initiative of the Brazilian government to uncover and clarify human rights violations during the dictatorship period. This specific verdict was disclosed as part of the CNV's inquiries (Sarkis, 2019). Interestingly, throughout his entire book, Ustra conspicuously avoids mentioning military-inflicted torture, yet readily links anti-dictatorship groups to terrorism and accuses communists of taking part in a broad conspiracy against Brazil. Additionally, the military coup is labeled a "counter-revolution."

> In examining my archives, I elucidate why civilians and military personnel initiated the Counter-Revolution on March 31, 1964, frustrating the attempt to seize power by the communists. Drawing from my experience as the commander of DOI/CODI/II Ex (1970 to 1973), I recount our struggle against the terrorist organizations that tried, in the 1960s and 1970s, during the Third Attempt to Seize Power, to establish a dictatorship akin to that of Cuba and other satellites of the International Communist Movement. (Ustra, 2007. p. 5)

Olavo: The Guru

Examining the strong connection between Ustra's principles and the enduring rhetorical elements that support the Brazilian New Right's agenda is crucial. In doing so, a fundamental link in transmitting the military belief system must be understood. One of the most notable figures on this ideological foundation is Olavo de Carvalho. Carvalho's work is known to have a "blind alignment to Orvil's conspirational narrative" (Rocha, 2021. p. 31) and to support the military dictatorship agenda

intensely. He was a self-proclaimed philosopher influenced by Traditionalism and the "conservative revolution," guided by the ideas of Julius Evola (Teitelbaum, 2020; Vasconcelos, 2022). He has more than forty books published, covering topics such as Astrology, Philosophy, Religion, Oriental Metaphysics, and Politics, according to his understanding of these subjects.

Carvalho became one of the most influential figures in Bolsonaro's administration, often referred to as the "ideological guru" and the intellectual founder of the Brazilian New Right. Carvalho dedicated himself to promoting countless conspiracy theories about a communist invasion, the flat Earth, geocentrism, creationism, and fake science, among other famous and not-so-famous ideas against common sense and academic knowledge. The supreme conspiracy theory advocated by the ideologue, and one deeply ingrained throughout his work, is that of the existence of a global left-wing or communist elite—ironically led by billionaires—who purportedly wield control over culture on a planetary scale, aiming to establish communism in all democratic nations worldwide (Rocha, 2021; Prado, 2021). Through this influence, this group is believed to have the power to extinguish all values of the so-called Jewish-Christian-Western civilization, such as family, patriotism, and religion. Undoubtedly, this is one of the most entrenched theories within conservative circles and the Brazilian far-right. This forms the basis, for instance, of the denialist and anti-establishment policies of the Jair Bolsonaro government, of which Olavo de Carvalho was the principal theoretical mentor. To combat the hidden and relentless "communism" enemy, which is thought to own the capability to dismantle the entire fabric of the reality embraced by modern society, any measure can be justified to protect these ideals.

> The program outlined by them [the communists], which at the time seemed distant from the immediate concerns of the average communist militant (and has not yet reached the awareness of the mentioned fools), is now being implemented on a global scale, and its accelerated execution reflects the close collaboration between high finance and the global network of communist organizations - the two arms of the world revolution. Issues such as abortionism, civil disarmament, sexual liberation, feminism, LGBTQ+ activism, criminalization of religious morality, state control of private life, and related topics are now infinitely more significant for the revolutionary strategy than the stereotypical divergences between "populist" and "elitist" economic policies (or "progressive" and "neoliberal" policies). (Carvalho, 2013. p. 387)

Bolsonaro Unveiled: Decoding the Rhetoric

The compilation of all 620 presidential speeches by Jair Bolsonaro, archived in the Governmental Library[1] and accessible online, represents an invaluable textual resource for elucidating the intricate interplay between the ideas propagated by Orvil, Ustra, and Olavo, and the development of the ultraconservative agenda that characterizes Bolsonarism. This extensive collection of presidential speeches was sourced through web scraping from the official government website, and offers a comprehensive view of the discursive evolution of Bolsonaro's presidency. It provides a unique opportunity to trace the dissemination and resonance of ideas promoted by influential figures such as Orvil, Ustra, and Olavo throughout his tenure.

Analyzing these speeches within the broader context of their temporal and sociopolitical setting enables a nuanced examination of how these ideological currents have influenced the rhetoric and policy directions of the Bolsonaro administration. It thus facilitates a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between presidential discourse and the development of the ultraconservative agenda in Brazilian politics. In essence, this compilation of presidential speeches represents a pivotal resource that allows for the exploration of the ideological threads intertwined into the fabric of *bolsonarism*, shedding light on the role played by these influential figures in shaping the political landscape of contemporary Brazil.

The following speech was made by President Jair Bolsonaro in response to a journalist's question. It serves as an undeniable example of rhetorical opposition against communism within the sphere of Brazilian politics. This discourse, marked by its enthusiastic critique of socialist ideals, finds resonance in the broader sociopolitical landscape and within the two more authors under scrutiny within this study. In examining Bolsonaro's impassioned speaking, we unveil a narrative thread that weaves through a broader tapestry of ideological contestation, offering insights into the multifaceted speech surrounding communism's role in contemporary Brazil. The language used within it is both illustrative and poignant, reflecting the ideological stance of its proponent and setting the stage for

[1] Website of the Library of the Presidential Office available in Portuguese: http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/bolsonaro/discursos?b_start:int=0. Accessed on August 11, 2023.

a comprehensive exploration of the interconnection of political rhetoric within the Brazilian context.

> What is the fate of a country that embraces socialism and communism? Venezuela is still fresh in our minds; there, people no longer have food to eat. They are fleeing, it is heartbreaking. I visited Roraima twice during my pre-campaign. Girls as young as 12 and women in their 50s are forced into prostitution there, and it's a misery. People who were coming here out of desperation. Ladies like you, excuse me for saying this, looking at your faces, women like you forced into prostitution. Is this what we want for Brazil? Is this the equality in socialism that the PT [Workers' Party] has always preached: everyone equal in misery, at the bottom, in prostitution, in despair, eating dogs, eating cats, eating scraps from the trash. Is this what we want for Brazil? The evidence is right there; no one is making this up. This happens in practice; you only need to see what's going on. Do we want this for ourselves? (Bolsonaro, 2019)[2]

In the contemporary era, 60 years post the 1960s, the global political and ideological landscape has undergone profound shifts. The end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of communist regimes in multiple nations have significantly diminished the influence of communist ideology as a global political force. Consequently, the concern about a communist threat has become obsolete. Nevertheless, the anti-communist narrative remains highly prevalent within far-right ideologies, serving as a means to mobilize support through fear and violence, and finding prominence in Jair Bolsonaro's electoral campaign and administration.

> Jair Bolsonaro is, without a doubt, the world's most radical far-right president who was democratically elected in recent decades. Under his governance, Brazil was considered the country that worst handled the Covid-19 pandemic, with over 500,000 deaths by June 2021, according to government statistics. In the previous month, Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo, blamed for Brazil's lack of vaccines, resigned under several different

[2] "Press Conference Given by the President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro, After the Ceremony Celebrating International Youth Day - Palácio do Planalto." Library of the Presidential Office at: http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/bolsonaro/entrevistas/entrevista-coletiva-concedida-pelo-presidente-da-republica-jair-bolsonaro-apos-solenidade-de-celebracao-do-dia-internacional-da-juventude-palacio-do-planalto. Accessed on August 12, 2023.

> political pressures. A career diplomat who was recommended for his cabinet position by philosopher Olavo de Carvalho—who drew close to the Bolsonaro family years ago—Araújo considered the World Health Organization "globalist" and argued that the virus, which he called the "communavirus," was an ideological device of a "globalist project" that would lead to communism. (Rocha et al., 2021, p. xiii)

Methodological Approach: Analyzing Textual Discourses

Within this methodology section, we present the methodology for the analysis, including the selection of terms to be analyzed and the tools used. The focal point is the scrutiny of the textual context surrounding terms such as "communism," "communist," and their associated semantic equivalents. The premise here is that these words, rather than carrying neutral connotations, are systematically integrated into narratives that portray them as threatening elements, set to undermine the core of Brazilian society. The methodological approach applied aims to uncover the strategic construction of these discursive constructs as formidable adversaries through the lens of textual analysis.

To understand this framework, the research used digital text analysis method with *Voyant Tools* (voyant-tools.org). Voyant Tools[3] is a web-based platform for text analysis that allows users to explore and analyze textual data. It supplies various visualization and analysis gears to help researchers gain insights from large bodies of text. One of Voyant Tools' notable features is its ability to create interactive visualizations, such as word clouds, word frequency graphs, and dispersion plots, to help users gain insights into the text data they are analyzing. It is commonly used by researchers, students, and professionals in linguistics, literature, digital humanities, and social sciences to better understand textual data and patterns within it.

The process began with the generation of word clouds extracted from the texts of the three books through the Voyant Tools platform. The integral texts of Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra's book "*A Verdade Sufocada*," Olavo de Carvalho's "*O mínimo que você precisa saber para não ser*

[3] More information can be found in Voyant Tools' website: https://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/about.

um idiota," and the compilation of all 620 presidential speeches by Jair Bolsonaro uploaded to system. Each text was analyzed individually, with dedicated calculations conducted for each text, rather than collectively considering all texts together.

In this process, common stop words were omitted to focus the analysis on the most pertinent terms. This curation of word clouds facilitated a comprehensive overview of the textual content presented by each author. Additionally, this phase laid the groundwork for a comparative analysis. By comparing the word clouds created from these works, the purpose was to identify shared themes and differences in the central ideas presented by the authors. This process also revealed keywords, forming the basis for in-depth textual exploration and interpretation.

In the second phase of analysis, the emphasis was on examining the contexts where the terms "communist" and "communism" appeared. This aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these terms were positioned within the texts, revealing their nuanced connotations and implications. After isolating these terms within their respective contexts, it became evident that they consistently carried inherent bias in their usage and conception. To accomplish this, we employed various chart types through Voyant Tools. In this analysis, word clouds, link term graphics, word trend charts, and bubble charts proved to be particularly insightful and valuable.

Results

This section will share the graphics generated with Voyant Tools for full-text data analysis. This exploration serves as a first step toward understanding how these authors framed their narratives and engaged with the subject matter of communism and related ideologies. The word cloud graphics are presented below (Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

Examination of these three word clouds unveils a significant overlap in certain words, underscoring a common thematic underpinning across these authors. Notably, we see many repeated words on the three graphics above such as Brasil (Brazil), Exército (Army), Governo (Government), País (Country), Presidente (President), Política (Politics), Comunista (Communist), Militar (Military), Esquerda (Left-wing), Deus (God), Vida (Life), Pandemia (Pandemic), etc. In a deeper analysis, when cross-referencing the 300 most prominent terms within all works, Bolsonaro and Ustra had 79 identical words while Bolsonaro and Olavo shared 74



Fig. 1 Word cloud of Ustra's "A verdade Sufocada"



Fig. 2 Word cloud of Carvalho's "O mínimo que você precisa saber para não ser idiota"



Fig. 3 Word cloud of Bolsonaro's discourses

matches. Additionally, Ustra and Olavo had 72 identical terms within their respective word clouds. These numbers highlight the substantial similarities in their discourses. The table below, generated by Voyant Tools, presents the count of identical words identified among the word clouds:

IDENTICAL WORDS—WORDCLOUDS COMPARISON		
BOLSONARO—USTRA	BOLSONARO—OLAVO	USTRA—OLAVO
79	74	72

The next step involved the isolation of terms related to "communism" and "communist." To accomplish this, Voyant Tools employs a search syntax, such as "comunis*," which indicates that all words commencing with "comunis" ("*comunista*," in Portuguese: related to communist, communism, communists, etc.) are included in the analysis when cross-referencing data.

During the reading of Ustra's book, it became clear that the words "communist" and "terrorist" were used interchangeably, almost as synonyms. This trend becomes even clearer when we conduct textual analysis through Voyant Tools. When comparing the data, we observe that

the term "comunis*," which represents words related to communism is swiftly replaced by the term "terror*" (e.g., "*terrorista*," meaning "terrorist" in Portuguese), encompassing words related to terrorism, throughout the course of the work. This shift is vividly depicted in the trend chart. On the other hand, the term "esquerd*" ("*esquerda*," in Portuguese: related to left-wing, leftist, leftism, etc.), which might have been a suitable synonym to replace "comunis*" in the context provided by Ustra, does not gain as much prominence (Figs. 4 and 5).

Additionally, an analysis was conducted using a bubble chart to observe the evolution of the terms "communis*," represented by the blue bubbles, and "terror*," represented by the pink bubbles, throughout

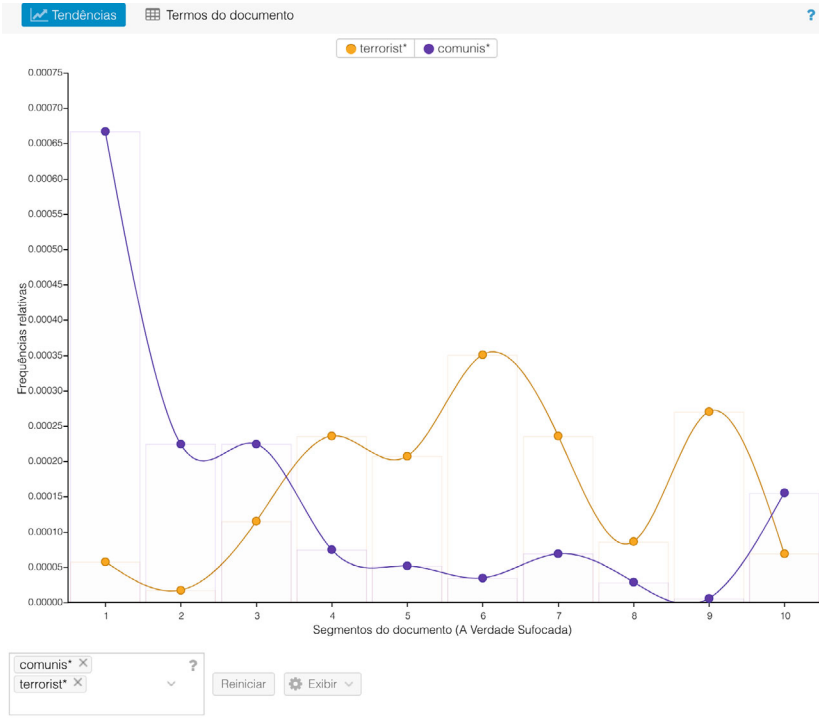


Fig. 4 Comparison between the terms "comunis*" and "terror*" in Ustra's work

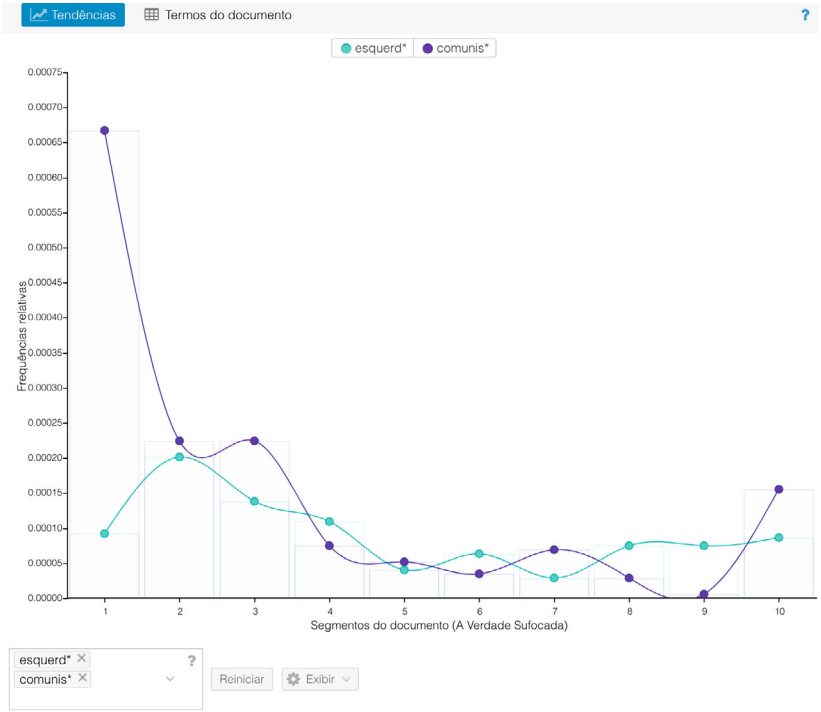


Fig. 5 Comparison between the terms "comunis*" and "esquerd*" in Ustra's work

Ustra's book, and the results clearly demonstrate the replacement of one term by the other (Fig. 6).

In Olavo's work, words related to the left-wing are more noticeable, as he strongly criticizes various sectors, which he believes are dominated by this political stream, such as universities and the country's intellectual



Fig. 6 Bubble chart representing the terms "comunis*" and "esquerd*"

elites. There is a clear correlation between the terms "esquerd*" (related to the left-wing) and "comunis*," yet the occurrence of "esquerd*" (left-wing) permeates the entire book (Fig. 7).

Nevertheless, the connection between the term "terror*" and "comunis*" is not as clear compared to Ustra's work. Although the line graph shows a similar pattern in the graph below, the difference in the trends of the two terms is significant (Fig. 8).

In Bolsonaro's speeches, it is worth mentioning that we could not gather sufficient data for a thorough comparison with the term "terroris*." Nevertheless, the graph below illustrates the correlation between "esquerd*" and "comunis*." Once the discourses were gathered in

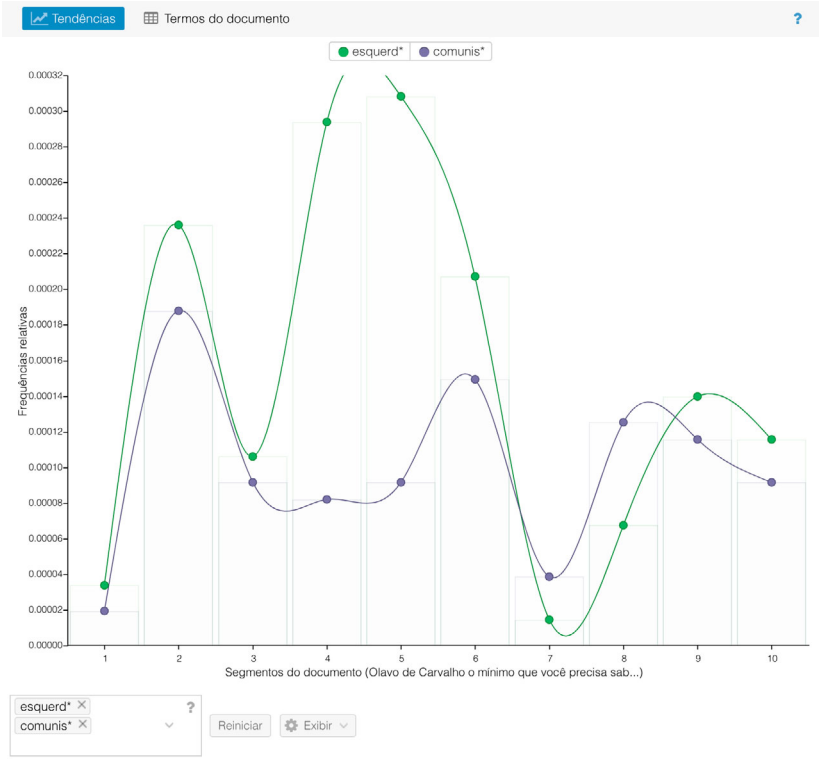


Fig. 7 Comparison between the terms "esquerd*" and "comunis*" in Olavo's work

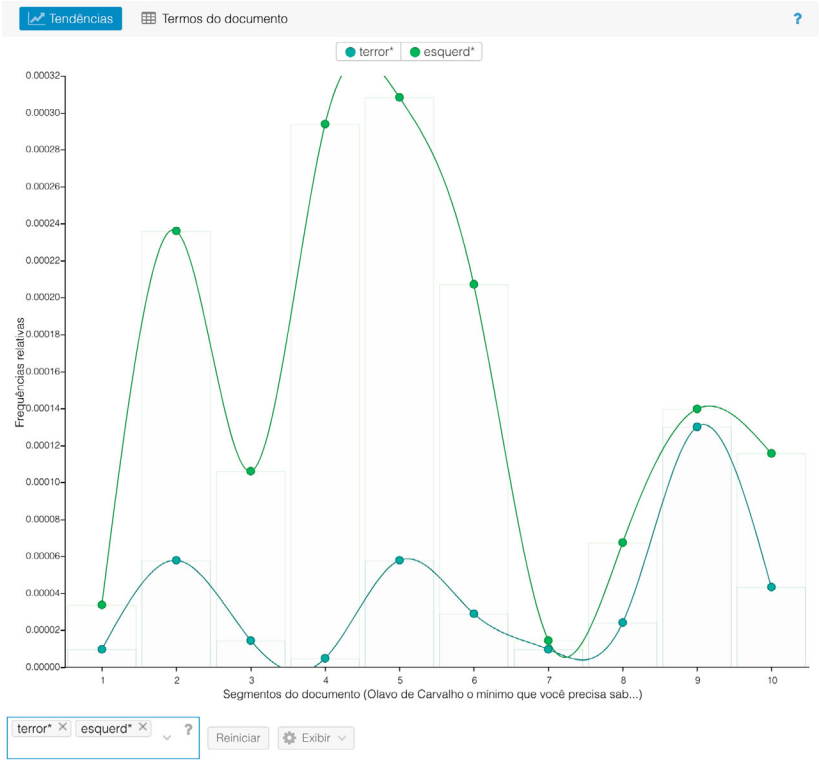


Fig. 8 Comparison between the terms "terror*" and "esquerd*" in Olavo's work

chronological order, it is interesting to understand how "comunis*" gained importance during Bolsonaro's administration (Fig. 9).

Ongoing with the logic of textual analysis, we isolated the core terms: "comunis*" in Ustra's book; "esquerd*" in Olavo's work; and both "esquerd*" and "comunis*" in Bolsonaro's discourses. Thus, we generated a link chart to better understand the context in which these terms appear. This approach allowed us to explore the connections between key terms and how they contribute to the construction of narratives in the studied works (Fig. 10).

On Ustra's link chart, notably, "comunis*" is closely linked to words such as "guerrilha" (guerrilla), "Cuba," "Lula" (referring to Luiz Inácio



Fig. 9 Comparison between the terms "esquerd*" and "comunis*" in Bolsonaro's discourses

Lula da Silva, the former and current Brazilian President), and "golpe" (coup). This network of connections sheds light on Ustra's perspective, revealing that he believed in a looming threat of a communist coup by leftist forces. In his view, these leftist forces were allegedly indoctrinated and supported by countries such as China, Russia, and Cuba. The inclusion of "golpe" in the network suggests that Ustra perceived the potential for a coup orchestrated by these leftist groups as a significant concern.

This intricate web of connections within Ustra's link chart demonstrates how he strategically interconnected these terms to shape his narrative. It implies that Ustra saw communism not as an abstract ideology but as a tangible and imminent threat, involving guerrilla movements, foreign governments, political leaders like Lula, and the fear of a



Fig. 10 Link chart of the term "comunis*" in Ustra's book

coup. Understanding these connections enhances our comprehension of how Ustra framed his discourse and the broader ideological landscape he sought to portray (Fig. 11).

The same pattern emerges in Olavo's link chart. When we explore into the term "esquerd*" (left-wing), a fascinating web of interconnected words unfolds, shedding light on his discourse. Notably, we find words such as "Nazismo" (nazism), "terrorismo" (terrorism), "ódio" (hate), "burrice" (dumbness), "violência" (violence), and a plethora of other terms all intricately linked.

Olavo de Carvalho is renowned for his outspoken stance against the left-wing, and the context presented in these graphics undeniably corroborates this reputation. The inclusion of words like "Nazismo" and

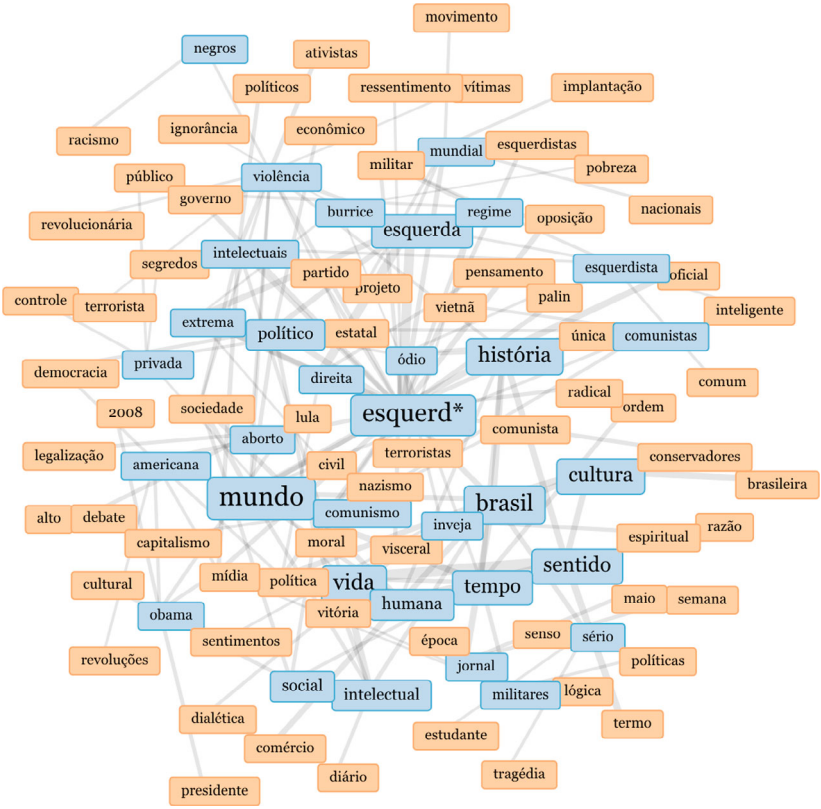


Fig. 11 Link chart of the term "esquerd*" in Olavo's book

"terrorismo" within the network suggests that Olavo consistently associates the left-wing with these negative connotations. This association reflects a pervasive ideological perspective in which the left is portrayed as a source of extremism, hatred, and violence, as perceived by Olavo.

In our analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's discourses, we adopted a unique approach by examining both the terms "esquerd*" and "comunis*." This dual focus allowed us to understand how these two distinct contexts intersected or diverged within his speeches, as visually represented in the graphics below. Furthermore, this analysis not only provides insights into his individual rhetoric but also aids in understanding how he

connects with the discourses of figures like Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra and Olavo de Carvalho. By examining the ways in which Bolsonaro approaches and contextualizes these terms, we can discern similarities and differences in his discourse when compared to Ustra and Olavo (Figs. 12 and 13).

It becomes abundantly clear that when Jair Bolsonaro addresses the topics of the left-wing and communism, he consistently reinforces his campaign slogan, "Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos" (Brazil above everything, God above us all). Within his discourse, Bolsonaro strategically links these political subjects with a set of core conservative values, including "família" (family), "liberdade" (freedom) e "propriedade" (property), and more. This connection serves as a central theme

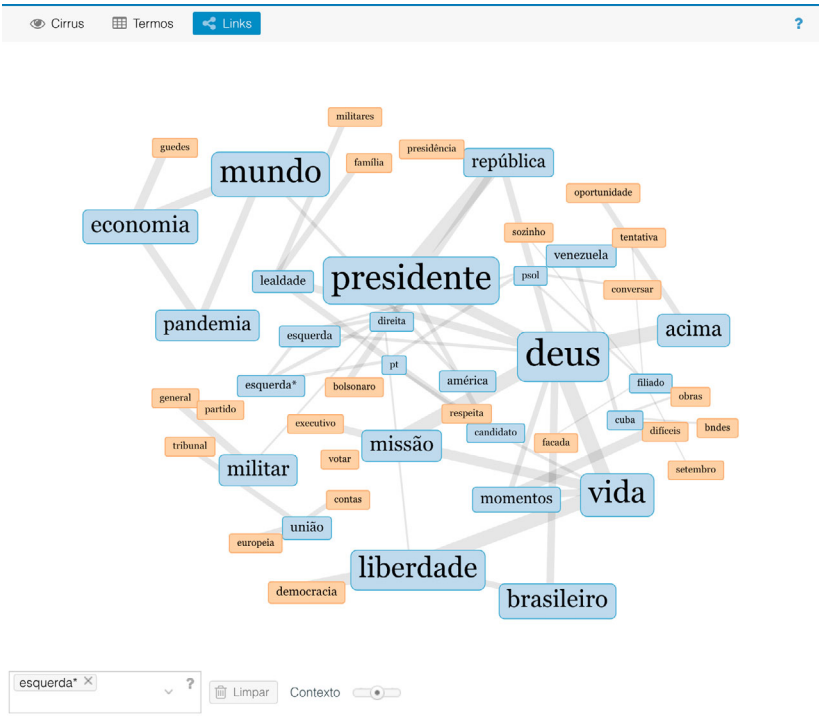


Fig. 12 Link chart of the term "esquerd*" in Bolsonaro's discourses

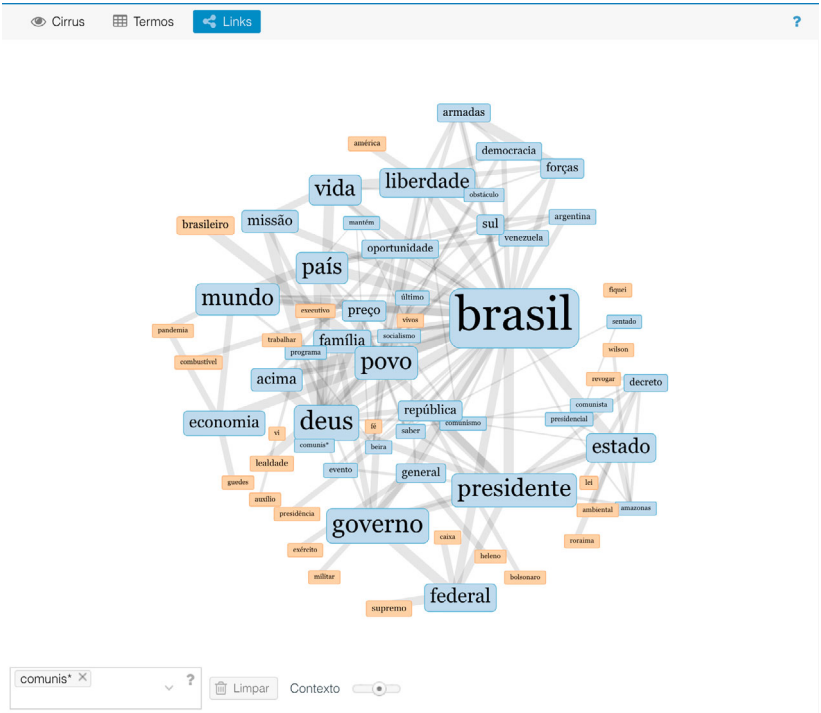


Fig. 13 Link chart of the term "comunis*" in Bolsonaro's discourses

in his speeches, highlighting the ideological foundations of his political agenda. In Bolsonaro's rhetoric, we often encounter references to the military, such as "Exército" (army) and "General" (general). These references are reminiscent of his own military background and symbolize a broader theme of law and order within his governance. It is worth noting that several high-ranking generals have played important roles in his government, contributing to the significance of this term. Bolsonaro's speeches also draw parallels between leftist policies and the crisis in Venezuela, using it as an example to caution against what he perceives as the dangers of communism.

Conclusion

Examining the link charts derived from the works of Ustra, Olavo, and Bolsonaro's discourses provides us with valuable insights into the thematic alignments and potential influences among these authors. It is crucial to emphasize that these link charts serve as visual tools, offering a glimpse into the connections between various terms used in their texts. While they do not serve as definitive proof of direct influence, they do illuminate patterns and shared discourse elements, encouraging a deeper exploration of their ideological relationships. Nevertheless, the correspondence of the identical terms on the word clouds of the three works is quite shocking. This shared vocabulary provides compelling evidence of a common ideological foundation that permeates their works. It highlights their resonance with specific themes and raises questions about how these ideas circulate and evolve within Brazil's political and social landscape. Ultimately, the prevalence of identical words among these authors adds depth to understanding their collective impact on shaping the discourse around these critical issues in Brazilian society.

In conclusion, this study has embarked on a journey through the annals of Brazilian history, from the emergence of conservative ideologies intertwined with fascism to the enduring legacy of anti-communism in contemporary digital media. Despite the profound shifts in the global political landscape, the resurgent conservative discourse in Brazil finds its roots in a complex historical context. The military dictatorship era, started by the 1964 coup, introduced conservative principles such as nationalism and anti-communism. This period was marked by repression, human rights violations, and the strategic construction of narratives to justify authoritarianism. These narratives, built upon the fear of communism, laid the foundation for the resurgence of conservative ideologies in the digital age. By examining the textual discourses of Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, Olavo de Carvalho, and Jair Bolsonaro, this research has revealed the persistence of anti-communist biases and the deliberate framing of terms like "communist" and "communism" within specific narratives. The analysis, helped by Voyant Tools, has provided valuable insights into the semantic shifts and ideological convergence among these influential figures.

This study underlines the enduring influence of conservative ideologies in Brazilian politics, supported by anti-communism. It highlights the

intricate interplay between historical narratives and contemporary politics, offering valuable insights into the ideological currents that continue to shape Brazil's sociopolitical landscape. In the midst of a changing global context, where communism as a political force has waned, the anti-communist sentiment remains a potent tool for mobilization and legitimation within far-right ideologies. This long-lasting narrative, deeply embedded in Brazil's political history, serves as a reminder of the power of rhetoric and the importance of understanding the historical roots of contemporary political movements. As Brazil grapples with the complexities of its political landscape, further research in this area can contribute to a deeper understanding of the nation's sociopolitical dynamics. It is essential to continue examining the ideological underpinnings of conservative discourse and its implications for the future of Brazilian democracy and society.

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Podcasting and the Language of Destruction: Far-Right Discourse for a Parallel 'New' Brazil

Nivaldo Ferraz and Daniel Gambaro

Introduction

Social media campaigns driven by data Cambridge Analytica obtained to support the contested election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (2017–2020), as well as the suspicion of similar actions affecting the *Brexit* referendum, in the United Kingdom, were a clear signal of calculated movements to promote the ascension of far-right extremists to centres of power. In Italy, the inauguration of far-right Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, in July 2018, was another indicator (Empoli, 2020). Facts like these have been occurring in places where, as History shows, people fought for Democracy: in Spain of Santiago Abascal, leader of right-wing party Vox; in France of Marine Le Pen and her *Rassemblement National*; in Germany of Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel's

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Alternative für Deutschland, among others ('Quem São Os Líderes…', 2019).

The massive campaigns to manipulate opinions and distort information in social media, produced and boosted by professional agencies such as Vote Leave, AIQ, Leave EU and Cambridge Analytica (Pinto & Moraes, 2020), spread across the social networks of countless amateurs (Keen, 2009), just to feedback into media companies identified with the far-right rhetoric—in Brazil, Radio and TV Jovem Pan, Oeste Magazine and Brasil Paralelo, to name a few. For the past two decades, media uses touching discourses to sensibilise important public segments, leading to systematic attacks to destroy important landmarks of Western democracy (Santiago, 2019).

In January 2019, Jair Bolsonaro took office as President of Brazil. From his inauguration, Bolsonaro used all possible resources to dismantle several developments conquered by the Brazilian democracy, resorting to a system that established a hate rhetoric and a cultural war (Rocha, 2021). Using a populist, far-right discourse, he proposed the destruction of 'communist perils' threatening the homeland. His simple and vulgar language convinced millions of people that the right thing to do is to carry a gun, produce 'fake news' and disregard social minorities such as Black and Indigenous populations—even using physical violence.

As main device of a 'language of destruction' (Starling et al., 2022), discourses are open to unreal interpretations. Beliefs substitute reality and science, and a misinformation culture develops from the dissemination of fake news (Kakutani, 2018). Countless speeches embracing conspiracy theories lead 'bolsonarism' followers to distrust facts. Soon after his inauguration, in a speech during a visit to Washington, Bolsonaro summarised what we call the principles of 'incivility' as pointed by Muniz Sodré (2021): 'Brazil isn't an open land where we intend to build things to our people. What we must do is deconstruct many things. Undo many things. So then we start making' ('Nós Temos É Que…', 2019).

Brazilian contemporary extreme-right is largely governed under Olavo de Carvalho's beliefs—even after his death in 2022, Carvalho is still the far-right guru, a self-proclaimed 'philosopher' rejected by left-wing intellectuality, similar to what Steve Bannon had been for Donald Trump. Carvalho believed the military dictatorship made a mistake by letting left-wing supporters take over Culture (Chiaverini, 2020). His perception nurtures a vision of Brazil that defines an idealised 'Brazilian people'

through restrictive values such as traditional family, Christianism, nationalism, and a notion of freedom that mixes values of family unity and free market. Bolsonaro is, therefore, an outcome of a political configuration shaped years before.[1]

In the temporary viability previous to this political condition *Brasil Paralelo* (BP, translated as Parallel Brazil) was established, in 2016, just to gain power in 2019. BP is an audio-visual producer crafted from the constitutions of right-wing extremism, under a pact of worship to Olavo de Carvalho's work and the connected cultural project it strives to implement (Paulo, 2020). At large looking to an idyllic monarchic past, BP arguments for the constitution of a 'new Brazil': throughout its production—for instance, video documentaries—the company defends the thesis of a sick society due to 'leftist cultural hegemony' and 'Paulo Freire dictatorship' in education.

We start our chapter recovering how media has constructed the relation between facts and fiction, showing the difficulties to separate one from another in different discourses. Next, we will analyse the cultural war created by Brazilian far-right, which adopts fundaments from American authors that inspired Olavo de Carvalho. The following chapter describes Brasil Paralelo (BP) as participant in this cultural front to fight everything that means a democratic state of law (Santiago, 2019). Following, we present our methodology to analyse BP's production: we observed three BP podcast series to list the values impregnating them. To finish, we analyse and comment on eight episodes from those three series.

The Power of Networks and the Invention of News

The invention of information is an inherited part of human relationships, which backs to old History but became more prevalent with the spread of journalism. Twentieth-century events supressed any remaining separation between fiction and reality, a phenomenon illustrated by Orson

[1] Some idiosyncrasies opened space for Brazilian far-right politicians, making us different from other countries. One is Operation Car Wash, an anti-corruption probe marked by a collection of intentional legal errors that resulted in the prison of former president and natural 2018 candidate for Worker's Party Lula da Silva. Without any evidence cited in the conviction record written, pronounced, and signed by the then Judge Sérgio Moro (Azevedo, 2022), Lula was barred from running the elections against Bolsonaro.

Welles's adaptation of H. G. Wells's romance War of the Worlds on 30 October 1938 for CBS Radio. Welles fused fiction and reality by narrating facts that were, at the same time, pretend and credible due to the use of typical informative radio language (Meditsch, 1998). An estimated 2 million Americans believed Martians were killing people.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, to make a false information gain relevance, be discussed and reach millions of people requires strategies to simulate an importance it does not have, like the use of automatic systems—'bots'—or the hiring of people—'trolls'. Another form is the *'firehosing'*, i.e. hiring agencies to make a massive number of publications on social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, but micro-targeting groups of users according to mined data. The falsely elevated information, repeated many times, becomes familiar, leading people to accept it as the truth (Mello, 2020, pp. 24–25).

Also, in these few years of twenty-first century, it became common for communication companies to substitute conventional journalistic investigation activities—like checking information with reliable sources before publishing—for 'curation': to measure the networks' temperature, finding what is relevant among the subjects being discussed, and then direct sets of messages to groups of users according to algorithmic-identified profiles. Even the journalistic discursive production started to look for what is on the networks and uses keywords reproduced from the instantaneous 'trending topics' to engage readers. As discussed by Canclini (2021), the words formulated to express the reality in social network websites, which until the end of the twentieth century was a prerogative of professional journalism, today 'became signs of search and are articulated by algorithms in an electronic panopticon for the market, because the information we give to search engines about our behaviours, desires and opinions converts us into commodities' (p. 100).

Therefore, the old-fashioned civilian idea of access to news prepared by professionals turns into a game that, due to a digital obligation of interaction, has the exclusive function of attracting users' attention. According to Sodré (2021), it occurs under the logic of an algorithmic culture that makes individuals' attention part of the financialisation of communications, even if it costs the deterioration of socio-political institutions. While visiting Facebook, Max Fisher (2023, p. 19) formulated a tabu-question for the Big Techs (Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta and Microsoft):

'What are the consequences of having an ever-increasing share of all politics, information, and human relations pass through internet platforms designed expressly to manipulate attention?'.

This discussion points towards the platformisation phenomenon, defined by Poell, Nieborg and van Dijck (2019, p. 5) as 'the penetration of the infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life… we conceive of this process as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around platforms'. The economic issue drives the asymmetric power relations over the platforms, being users' actions conditioned by a small group of agents that, in exchange for the convenience of access, controls the information and products that circulate on networks.

That aspect of platformisation enables the circulation of versions of facts—which always existed but became more dangerous now because of engagement boosting (Aguiar & Rodrigues, 2021). How we think, behave and relate to each other is transformed, and 'the effect, multiplied by billions of users, has been the transformation of society itself' (Fisher, 2023, p. 21).

This systematization of interpersonal communication creates an information monopoly inherent to social laws and rules, making the network a '"city" without citizenship, all inhabitants electronically together, but humanly separated, akin to a group of automatons. Separation is the keyword to a new civilisational equation, ballasted with "uncivil" dynamics' (Sodré, 2021, p. 14).

Olavism-Bolsonarism Driven by Hate in the Trench of a Cultural War

The word culture, which makes the far-right declares a 'war' for its possession, is hard to define. Many academics have described it, thus we choose the synthesis proposed by Williams, to whom

> it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant. The complex of senses [of the word culture] indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence. (1983, p. 91)

The cultural war guiding the elevation of Brazilian far-right was elaborated by its guru Olavo de Carvalho (1947–2022) in keynotes, interviews, essays and 'philosophy' courses. Carvalho's prevalence is explained by a recurrent discursive form: an offensive and outraged rhetoric filled with vulgarity, which makes him close not to the 'ordinary man', but to 'any man'. He used his earlier works on media companies to legitimate allegations that he knew the backstage of the press, and it was incrusted with left-wing activists. Those experiences, connected to probable readings of American conservatives such as Davison Hunter (Culture Wars: the struggle to define America—1991) and Allan Bloom (The closing of de American mind—1987), further a dissonant reading of Emmanuel Kant, resulted in his philosophy course. Marketed as the exposure of non-accepted truths, the lessons were attended by social media influencers and politicians. Considering Olavo's influence, we propose there is an 'olavist' view, therefore an 'olavism'.

Bolsonaro represents the same dissonant speech in politics, the rhetoric of destruction using simple words, so everybody understands. One example is a broadcast from his courtyard to a crowd agglomerating on Paulista Avenue, the most important of São Paulo, when he said: 'this bunch [Brazilian left-wing], if wants to stay here, will have to be under our laws. Either they leave [the country] or go to jail. Those red criminals will be banned from our fatherland' ('Bolsonaro Diz Que…', 2018). That discourse also refers to a poor adaptation of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1997), inverting the archetype of hero to convince millions of followers that there is a war between good and evil, being Bolsonaro the chosen one to represent all good in the world, and everything different represents the evil. Mauro Wolf (2018), Philosophy professor at University of Brasilia, considers a fundamental characteristic of cultural wars this violent way of proposing the defeat of 'enemies' that are supposedly attacking the 'traditional society'.

Cavalcante et al. (2021) describe a liberal-conservative identity, nurtured within the processes that resulted in Bolsonaro administration, symbolised by the values expressed on his government's slogan: God, fatherland, family and liberty. 'Family', or the Christian union between man and woman to generate children, is a central matter surrounded by other themes: the fight against a 'homosexual dictatorship' to preserve Bible's values; or an idea of merit and conquest by virtue of one's own work which, in the liberal-conservative amalgamation, are a reward from God. Liberty is also a fundamental code: the freedom of speech covers

a demand for the right to direct defamatory words to social minorities; to speak against History and against science to defend mercantilist logics (as in anti-environmental actions); and freedom to carry weapons as if they were the only possible protection to family and private property. Finally, family also occupies the core of a nationalist moral, opposing to a 'globalism' that strives to impose other values—such as diversity.

Hence, when a considerable part of the population hears phrases from Bolsonaro campaigns in 2018 and 2022—'enough of corruption', 'we will fix this country', 'more important than life is our liberty'—they believe someone will correct everything wrong that is happening, and the hatred towards the errors of corrupt politicians increases. Followers began to call 'a myth' a man who was no more than a conservative influencer, a professional politician who denied his own 'professionalism' as a promise not to repeat the Brazilian corrupt politics—none of that became true during his term.

We recurse to drag queen Rita von Hunty to justify the use of 'bolsonarism' to describe a social structure that emerged during Bolsonaro administration (2018–2022):

> I assert that the matrixes, the nuances, the specific characteristics of this movement, when identified as bolsonarism, they mean the emergence of something… we are speaking of a reactionary, violent, exclusive and paranoic formation that begins on the 1990 decade, of a 'Brazilian right-wing'… that is also a consequence of a broad amnesty produced at the end of the civil/military dictatorship… There are no bolsonarists, only the bolsonarism, which is a social structure. (Hunty, 2022)

So, following the synthesis of Olavo de Carvalho's ideas and its materialisation in Jair Bolsonaro actions, we are suggesting the label 'olavism-bolsonarism' as a central philosophy for the Brazilian liberal-conservative identified by Cavalcante et al. (2021).Olavism-bolsonarism shows its face mainly as white, mature men, commanding a crowd of younger men and women, also white, which compose a 'numerous and angry right-wing youth' (Rocha, 2021, p. 127).

Fear of losing their conquests because of 'a bunch of corrupts'. Hate for 'children-eaters' or, updating the 'communist evil', revulsion against

Workers' Party[2] supporters that distribute 'baby bottles with cock-shaped nipples' at daycare centres. Suspicions that the victory of left-wing parties would politically and economically turn Brazil into Venezuela. These are examples of misinformation that agitate those who have faith in what is spread through social media. With rage, minions of olavism-bolsonarism demand compensation for events that never occurred. Hatred, disguised as defence of liberal-conservative values, is more than a rhetoric resource the Brazilian extreme-right spreads through the internet; it is part of a system to contaminate with fury a weary population that watches politicians get richer while suffers from poverty, famine, the lack of opportunities and of adequate life conditions.

As we understand, the high-potentially destructive hatred distributed to Brazilian population by olavism-bolsonarism agents is, in fact, envy of what has been built and refusal to accept the absolute inability to do better. Hence, the productions of Brasil Paralelo (BP), even if not explicitly pro-Bolsonaro, expose the values of a liberal-conservatism that imbue olavism-bolsonarism. BP tries to find in a remote and improbable past, even in the Medieval era, the values that, they wish, would represent the highest desirable behaviour today.

About Brasil Paralelo

In 2023, the 'about us' section of Brasil Paralelo's website (www.brasilparalelo.com.br) stated they were 'a company of entertainment and education', free of ideologies. The description alleges they are 'the second largest pro-free society organisation in the world'—which shows a clear ideological bias. It is also ideological the company's mission, vision and values:

> Mission: To regain the good values, ideas, and feelings of every Brazilian heart
> Vision: To be the ecosystem with the greatest cultural influence in Brazil
> Values: Truth, Liberty, Art, Ambition, Meritocracy, Union, Diplomacy.

The short narrative about the company's history emphasises one value, the meritocracy: three partners started a company with scarce resources,

[2] Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) is Lula's political party, funded in 1980, during the civil-military dictatorship.

but 'with the help of who believed in the project', they managed to interview important people on video. After the success of these first productions, they attracted enough subscribers and individual sponsors to finance ever more ambitious projects.

> We thus witness the entification of classical liberal narrative. A group of ordinary youngsters, who must borrow resources to make their dream come true, achieve success by offering the market a product that meets consumers' needs. The company itself is the incarnation of the myth and the message is clear: believe in self-funding, defend private sector against the state – the former is efficient in detecting consumers' needs; the other, structurally ineffective and corrupt. It doesn't matter if the budget suggests much greater financial support than what would be raised by ordinary citizens. The entrepreneurs continue to renew their bets, declaring they do not receive any income outside the circle of members. (Paulo, 2020, p. 105)

It is reasonable to suspect that people or entities with high economic power have sponsored BP at least in its initial phase, since most of the audio-visual sector in Brazil depend on public policies for funding. However, there are two other sources that can sustain the company's financial autonomy.

First, as BP asserts in response to Paulo's claims ('Direito de resposta da…', 2020), part of its revenue comes from subscription plans and crowdfunding. It is entirely possible for an audio-visual producer to have thousands of people taking part in crowdfunding campaigns through massive advertising on social media. Moreover, the number of subscribers escalated after a change to BP's business model in 2021, reaching 575,4 thousand individuals in 2022 (www.brasilparelelo.com.br). BP started calling their website a platform, that is, a content aggregator to offer: original productions (especially so-called documentaries and interview videos); on-line courses covering subjects such as family, liberty and entrepreneurship; and a collection of third-party films and TV series curated according to 'good values', i.e. the classic, conservative and religious concept of family and free market. The BP platform's segmentation may well be a reason for the increase in subscriptions.

Second, BP affirms to monetise their free YouTube videos ('Direito de resposta da…', 2020), as the podcasts we analyse later in this chapter. Their shows linger on the original strategy of presenting famous personalities among far-right and conservative audience, thus serving two

purposes: generate income from views and, more notably, promote BP platform. It is of knowledge that platforms such YouTube boost content seeking engagement, and that polemic material about politics is fertile for an algorithmic culture that propagates information through waves of sensible impact (Sodré, 2021). Thus, when reproducing in interviews, chats, and free pseudo-documentaries conspiracy theories, or a conservative discourse seasoned with hate speech, the company broadens its chance of monetisation by taking advantage of recommendation systems.

Analysis Corpus and Methodology

The presence of people relevant to liberal-conservatism in Brasil Paralelo podcasts promotes legitimacy to the discourse that permeates the company's production. The debates are conducted to stress the authenticity of values such as meritocracy, traditional family, economic liberalism, abolition of state etc., and to demonstrate that progressivism views, even when coherent, face limitations because they don't rely on the private sector but on a social context where the state is present.

Since 2021 BP produced different titles and formats:

- *Contraponto* (Counterpoint): interviews with people one may consider the 'leaders' of liberal-conservative thinking, produced from September 2021 to February, 2023.
- *Conversa Paralela* (Parallel Conversation): in general, chats about controversial issues that emulate debates with two guests but, differently from a debate, display only one point of view. The series started in September 2021 and was interrupted from February to September 2023.
- *Sabatina*: a limited series of interviews of right-wing prominent people to a group of hosts—everyone sharing similar political views. 21 videos were produced between March and June 2023.
- *Red Pill*: the title references the movie The Matrix (1999). In general, four people analyse (and recommend) movies from a right-wing perspective—even if the meanings of the story are subverted. It is produced since October 2021, but became exclusive to BP subscribers in 2022 and only some newer episodes are available.

- *BP Cast*: this is not a podcast per se, but the sporadic live broadcast of conversations and interviews, later distributed through podcasts aggregators.

Our first step was to do an exploratory survey to identify the structures of the shows. Once we recognised their similarities (one or two hosts and one or two interviewees on a conversation), we concentrated our observations on three series: *Contraponto*, *Conversa Paralela* and *Red Pill*.

Next, we accessed the list of episodes available on BP's YouTube channel to identify the participants, topics and explicit values of each episode available. The values were obtained from: the title of the video; the video description on YouTube; by watching the first minutes of every episode—sometimes BP inserts a teaser with polemical dialogues to attract audience. After that, the main values were categorised into five themes: Cultural War; Collective Rights; Society and Control; Science and Denialism; Economy and Politics. Table 1 shows the main values under each theme and the number of episodes they are explicitly mentioned (some episodes show more than one explicit value).

The following step was the selection of episodes from each series to analytical listening. We used two choice parameters: number of views on YouTube and thematic diversity among those we selected. We decided for eight episodes, each with more than 300 thousand views on 25 October 2023.

The listening allowed us to name the intrinsic values and structure of each episode, that is, how issues and subjects discussed during the conversations turn into the legitimating values BP defends and serve the broader discursive character of olavism-bolsonarism. So, we went ahead to an analysis of the discursive elements, unveiling the rhetorical fundaments implied by hosts and reinforced by interviewees. That enabled us to comprehend how the global values of the podcast series, indicated in Table 1, are reworked within the episodes we analysed. Table 2 outlines this scenario, which helps us conclude that even when the episode has a core theme/value, the show's discursive aesthetics enable the crossing over other values significant for liberal-conservatism.

The discursive analysis also allowed us to describe some strategies that, used repeatedly, not only help to legitimise the speeches and values, but also semantically associate themes as diverse as 'ecology' and 'protection of family'. The next two sections deepen the analysis.

Table 1 Recurrence of values in each podcast series

	Conversa paralela (Parallel conversation)	*Contraponto (Counterpoint)*	*Red pill*
# episodes available in 25 October 2023	70 episodes	53 episodes	17 episodes
Values	**# of episodes with the explicit value**		
Cultural War			
Traditional Family	10	12	3
Conservative/Christian values	16	10	8
Educational indoctrination	5	4	1
Ideal of Beauty and Health	1	3	0
Fine Arts against modern arts/modern architecture	0	3	1
Collective rights			
Patriarchy (fight against Feminism)	3	4	2
Binary sexuality (fight against '*gender ideology*')	3	3	1
Right to life (fight against abortion)	2	5	0
Racial equality (denial of the existence of racism)	2	1	0
Society and Control			
Suspicion of traditional journalistic media	4	14	0
Report of manipulative media entertainment	6	4	2
Unlimited freedom of expression	4	8	2
Armamentism	1	3	0
'Human rights for right humans'	3	7	0
Drug addiction related issues	1	3	0
Law enforcement and prison system	2	5	0
Science and denialism			
Denial of Climate change	5	2	1
Historical revisionism	5	5	1
Antivaccine movement	0	2	0
Covid-19 pandemic (as a fraud to control populations)	0	5	0

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Conversa paralela (Parallel conversation)	*Contraponto (Counterpoint)*	*Red pill*
# episodes available in 25 October 2023	70 episodes	53 episodes	17 episodes
Economy and Politics			
Entrepreneurship and Meritocracy	13	3	0
Economic liberalism/Free Market/Minimum State	6	18	1
Disbelief in general politics & representative democracy	0	27	2
Disbelief in Supreme Courts/ Judicial systems	1	12	0
Nationalism (opposed to '*globalism*' and communism)	2	11	1
Anti-progressist agenda	7	12	1
No explicit value	0	5	3

Summary of Eight Episodes

Contraponto was hosted by Bruno Magalhães, public prosecutor who holds a Law degree and is described in BP's website as philosophy teacher. We chose three episodes from this series:

Augusto Nunes, journalist, was editorial director of major Brazilian newspapers and magazines. By the time of his interview, Nunes was a commentator for Record Television Network and for Joven Pan radio and web portal. Both companies declared ideological and economic interest in Bolsonaro's government. Nunes tells that, in 1968, he tried to study Law and then Journalism at universities where the military dictatorship was challenged. Upon his involvement with urban guerrilla during that time he became a detractor of the Brazilian left. He presents himself as an honest and incorruptible journalist, precisely because he is conservative.

Luciano Hang, businessperson, owner of a large department store network called Havan. A declared anti-communist, Hang wears clothes displaying the Brazilian flag colours, and uses social media to attack political, economic and ideological opponents. He told his trajectory during the interview: the son of a humble family that fought several forces and conquered the world. His speech mixes themes as family, religion and reduction of the welfare state—which he believes is the greatest barrier

Table 2 Values present in eight episodes

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
Views on YouTube—25 October 2023	*1.422.352*	*410.294*	*655.784*	*1.169.388*	*1.358.182*	*2.066.472*	*676.694*	*385.806*
Cultural War								
Traditional Family	Mentioned	Mentioned	Core value	Core value		Mentioned	Core value	
Conservative/ Christian values	Mentioned	Discussed	Core value	Discussed	Mentioned	Core value	Core value	Discussed
Educational indoctrination		Mentioned	Discussed	Core value	Discussed	Discussed	Mentioned	Mentioned
Ideal of Beauty and Health							Discussed	
Fine Arts against modern arts/ modern architecture						Mentioned	Discussed	Discussed
Collective rights								
Patriarchy (fight against Feminism)		Mentioned		Core value		Mentioned	Core value	Mentioned
Binary sexuality (fight against '*gender ideology*')	Mentioned		Core value	Discussed			Discussed	Mentioned

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
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Right to life (fight against abortion)		Mentioned	Mentioned	Discussed				
Racial equality (denial of the existence of racism)		Mentioned		Mentioned		Discussed	Mentioned	
Society and Control								
Suspicion of traditional journalistic media	Core value	Discussed		Mentioned	Discussed			Mentioned

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
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Report of manipulative media entertainment	Core value	Discussed		Discussed		Mentioned		Discussed
Unlimited freedom of expression	Discussed	Discussed	Mentioned	Discussed	Discussed			Discussed
Armamentism		Discussed						Mentioned
'Human rights for right humans'	Mentioned		Discussed					
Drug addiction related issues		Mentioned	Mentioned		Mentioned		Mentioned	

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
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Law enforcement and prison system	Discussed	Mentioned	Mentioned					
Science and denialism								
Denial of Climate change		Discussed		Discussed	Core value			Mentioned
Historical revisionism	Mentioned		Discussed	Discussed	Mentioned	Core value		
Antivaccine movement	Mentioned		Discussed		Discussed			Mentioned

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
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Covid-19 pandemic (as a fraud to control populations)		Discussed	Discussed		Discussed			Mentioned
Economy and Politics								
Entrepreneurship and Meritocracy	Mentioned	Core value	Mentioned	Mentioned			Mentioned	Mentioned
Economic liberalism/Free Market/Minimum State		Core value	Mentioned		Discussed		Mentioned	Discussed

	Contraponto			*Conversa paralela*			*Red pill*	
	Augusto Nunes	*Luciano Hang*	*Nikolas Ferreira*	*Ideological indoctrination in schools*	*Is global warming a lie?*	*What they didn't tell about the history of Brazil*	*Feminism and Disney's princesses*	*Globalism and dystopia in the movies*
Launch date	*08 Nov 21*	*07 Feb 22*	*05 Aug 22*	*04 Jan 22*	*30 Aug 22*	*06 Sep 22*	*23 Oct 21*	*13 Nov 21*
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Disbelief in general politics/ representative democracy	Discussed	Core Value	Discussed	Mentioned	Discussed	Core value	Mentioned	Core value
Disbelief in Supreme Courts/ Judicial systems	Core value	Discussed	Mentioned		Mentioned			Discussed
Nationalism (opposed to '*globalism*' and communism)	Discussed	Discussed	Discussed	Mentioned	Core value			Core value
Anti-progressist agenda	Mentioned	Core value	Discussed	Core value	Mentioned	Mentioned	Mentioned	Discussed

Note "Core value" refers to leading topics on the show; "Discussed" are values approached with some depth; "Mentioned" indicates a value only superficially approached.

for Brazilian independent entrepreneurs. He also believes the true goal of collective rights (as environmental protection) is to prevent progress while benefiting 'other' class of people—never clearly identifying who are those.

Nikolas Ferreira, young politician that pronounces a radical conservative speech, often homophobic, in defence of 'traditional family' and against the welfare state. Evangelical Christian who was born on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais State, made a name for himself politically by producing videos aimed at young people of his age. The digital influencer became the most voted councillor in Belo Horizonte, in 2020, and was elected federal deputy in October 2022. During the interview Ferreira cites passages from the Bible, in distorted readings, to justify his conservative beliefs. He claims that young Brazilians only think about the weekend and are addicted to dopamine. Furthermore, Ferreira believes Brazil must first improve the economy, and then deal with 'our madness, which is our culture'.

Conversa Paralela is hosted by Arthur Morrison, a designer, anarcho-capitalist who preaches for the abolition of the state; and Lara Brenner, graduate and post-graduate in Law, who sells Portuguese Language courses aiming legal usage and professional expression. The episodes we analysed are:

Ideological indoctrination at schools. Two interviewees: Karen Nery, livestock farmer, veterinarian, creator of the forum 'Parents with an Eye on Didactic Material' on YouTube and Instagram. She presents herself as an eternal watchdog of teaching material contents. Nery complained several times that books do not have 'content', without defining it. Isabela Arruda, 15-year-old influencer, was introduced as a teenager rejected by a hegemonic 'progressivist' ideology of teachers and disciplines in the schools she attended. She speaks as heroine of the criticism of 'progressivism', and as precocious in the search for content beyond classes: at the age of 11 she read an Olavo de Carvalho book 'stolen' from her mother.

Is global warming a lie? The guests to this episode were Ricardo Felício, former professor at the Geography Department at University of São Paulo who was fired after rejecting on-line classes during the Covid-19 pandemic; and the professional writer Alexandre costa, whose works denounce globalism and new global order. The show's title-question is answered in less than five minutes: global warming is a hoax planted by powerful people and supported by leftists who wish to implement a New Order. Environmentalism acts in favour of newest billion-dollar

agribusinesses. Felício uses distorted and incomplete facts and data based on scientific research, mixing them with his opinions to challenge the reality. The episode is an excuse for scientific denialism, defence of predatory agribusinesses, and to contest global organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO).

What they didn't tell about the History of Brazil. The most watched BP show was aired on 06 September 2022, eve of the bicentenary of Brazilian independence. It functions as an extension to a BP original movie about Brazilian History. The interviewee, Luiz Raphael Tonon, is graduated in Philosophy and History (licentiate degree), teacher in different high schools. During a 2-hour-long conversation, the participants argue that the History of Brazil is poorly told under the influence of ideological groups (a generic left, Marxists). Today's dominant discourse is based, according to Tonon, in the republican ideal that intends to erase supposed achievements and values of the monarchy.

The word 'independency' is recursively used to reinforce one idealisation: the 'liberty' of Brazilian people, in fact, would depend upon Christian-conservative values from the empire period. Freedom and independency were the motto of Bolsonaro's re-election campaign that occurred when the show was aired. In general, the episode's discourse elevates characters from our monarchic history to forgotten heroes, and the recovery of their ideals would be the only possible means to undo republican setbacks.

Red Pill's main host is Guilherme Freire, Head of Streaming and Education in BP. Freire holds a licentiate degree in Philosophy from Monastery of São Bento and a master's degree in Philosophy from Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. Very often Freire is joined by Marcos Ruppelt, whose professional career surround marketing departments; today he is Product Marketing Manager at BP. Both Freire and Ruppelt profiles have a strong link with religion.

Feminism and Disney's Princesses. The participants in this episode were journalist Mariana Brito and digital influencer Pietra Bertolazzi. Brito, an anti-feminist, worked for several news companies and today share with her husband the ownership of an on-line bookstore to sell books about humanism, religiosity, anti-communism, etc. She also has a pay-per-view channel where she discusses 'women's matters'. Bertolazzi dropped a career as DJ to dedicate to political activism. She was commentator at Jovem Pan. She is active on social media and offers on-line courses about

how to fight ideological indoctrination at schools. Bertolazzi self declares anti-feminist and advocates for a patriarchal society.

The core value in this show is a hierarchised family in which the man is the leader and must protect the woman, submissive to him. Hosts and guests worship a romanticised medieval era, outlining in the king's figure an example of masculinity. Moreover, they also revere an ideal of beauty that contrasts with cultural and racial diversity. They paint this set of manners as a strategy to combat the socialism associated with a global market. In their imagined reality, feminists are 'agents' who operate under orders to distort sacred values: previously the witches, Disney gradually transformed princesses into feminists.

Globalism and dystopia in the movies. The guests are Flávio Morgenstern, columnist and 'script leader' at BP, and YouTuber Paulo Kogos. Morgenstern is former Literature student at University of São Paulo and has collaborated with conservative and right-wing websites and magazines. He took Olavo de Carvalho's lessons and publishes books and papers that follow his guru's line. Kogos has a degree in Business Administration and specialisation in Economics. Currently he studies for a licentiate degree in Philosophy at Monastery of São Bento. The four participants discussed a few movies that represent the dystopic world we live in. Their comments privileged works that, they assume, denounce a 'globalist order' based on an authoritarian global government that wants to destroy the free market. The interpretations ignore the contexts and the intentions of moviemakers, whereas look for symbols in the narratives that supposedly praise: the defence of individual freedom against the centralised control of undefined governments and markets; the patriarchy and the masculine force to face real dangers of the world; Christian moral values, necessary to save the world while people are corrupted with sexual liberation; scientific denialism, because science is used for biopolitical control.

Recurrent Strategies

This section reveals some strategies BP uses in podcasts to stress subjects, themes, and values that amalgamate in the liberal-conservative spectrum. Foremost, we must consider that BP podcasts, as well as other free-to-view productions, serve as advertising material for their platform and other paid products. Second, subjects are intertwined during the conversations, which creates a false correlation between them. Therefore, the

recursive references to subjects, themes and values improve personal and algorithmic recommendations. Moreover, BP also makes 'cuts': short videos with controversial statements from the shows that are easier to share through messaging apps like WhatsApp.

Building Heros. Interviewees often pose as chased by some higher order that threats individual liberties. Pietra Bertolazzi, for instance, attributes the loss of a personal sponsorship to feminist harassment (instead of her political views). Luciano Hang complains he faces the bureaucracies of Brazilian State every day, created by leftists who do not want the progress of the nation. Augusto Nunes says that newsrooms are taken by 'petistas' (Worker's Party members), except for the shows and magazines to which he contributes; and petistas report versions while he reports facts. Karen Nery presents herself as a tireless fighter against 'gender ideology' and other 'leftisms' in schools. Participants in the Red Pill about dystopian movies equate themselves with guerrillas taking on the state system—otherwise, they would be on TV rather than YouTube.

Combination of values. As shown in **Table 2**, subjects relevant to olavism-bolsonarism are treated throughout the chats, even if out of context, to reinforce a pretended relation between all of them. For example, Brito and Bertolazzi reckon that 'society' seems to be prohibiting heterosexuality, so Disney combines 'gender ideology' and feminism to fight everything that stands for the true beauty. This agenda extends to other shows: a degeneration of human body and architecture is in course to eliminate beauty and to control the society. The strategy was created by Frankfurt School and other left-wing intellectuals that envy the fine arts and, instead, promote ordinary consumable products. In result, a 'new man' is designed by globalism, fragile and powerless, as a denial of Bible values.

Guests in the episode to retell Brazil's History say feminism fails when it does not recognise the role of Princess Isabel as first woman to rule Brazil before Dilma Rousseff (a hypothesis easily deconstructed); and affirm that our miscegenation is evidence that there was no oppressor/oppressed relationship during the Brazilian slavery period. To sustain that global warming is a lie, Felício asserts that the images that prove the melting of glaciers are, in fact, subjective creations such as 'gender ideology'; and that NGOs use the preservation of riparian forest as excuse to avoid individual entrepreneurism in favour of big corporations.

Obliteration of the state. Every show presents at least one moment when participants claim for an alternative government system and a

minimal or inexistent state. This is summarised in Luciano Hang's interview, when he urges the autoregulation of the market and asserts that every social inclusion policy is harmful to economic development and people. In the episode about globalism and dystopia, the police officer in *Terminator 2* is interpretated as an allegory to the fusion of state power and globalism: people are left alone to struggle for survival against the statal machine.

The generic 'they'. Globalism is an imaginary form of government in which generic economic agents (bankers) unite with known political agents, such as Worker's Party, President Lula, NGOs and the Supreme Court. There is, however, something unknown acting in the backstage. In the episodes about dystopia and global warming, interviewees allege that the Supreme Court acted under external orders during the pandemic to violate individual freedom, and that masks and vaccines were a bigger plan to control citizens. They are also convinced that Indigenous people's struggles for land are a globalist demand. In the podcast about indoctrination at schools, 'they' were at one point the UN (almost called 'leftist'), since it is outrageous that a textbook publishes UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 sustainable development goals. The same show points to a 'hidden mechanism' behind progressivism at schools.

Disqualify the 'enemies'. Hosts and guests, to show some superiority, use vulgarities when referring to otherness. This strategy, common to olavism, creates a 'shared identity' and a sense of community, while show the 'others' as beyond salvation. To Costa, scientists and journalists dedicated to cover global warming are 'rascals' and 'swindlers'. Petistas are usually called thieves.

Feminists are ugly women as pictured by witches in Disney's classic movies and by princesses on newer ones, like Moana, who has dark skin. In the episode about indoctrination at schools, a guest gives as example for 'lost daughter' a vegan feminist girl with hairy armpits and green hair. Everything that is not on Christian-conservative patterns must be battled: in the *Red Pill* about dystopic movies, drag queen Pablo Vittar is ridiculed for her appearance and called 'he/him', rather than the female pronouns with which she identifies.

Antiscientific discourse. Denialism gains power through recurrent antiscientific speeches. Guests Felício and Morgenstern and almost all hosts raise doubt about university education and research. Besides, it is a customary practice to show distorted or partial data as the truth. In the show about climate change, Felício cites results of a study about

coffee plantations to confirm his thesis that the greenhouse effect is beneficial for agriculture, but never contextualises that the mentioned research treats the effects of global warming as a major problem. Nunes in September 2021 questioned the need to use a mask to prevent Covid-19. Morgenstern insinuated that vaccines against Covid-19 cause infertility.

Only they have a 'red pill'. Another regularity is hosts and guests often announcing a truth only who follows BP will know. For instance, to expose children to contemporary Disney movies means to expose them to veiled sexual connotations. Hang and participants in the episode about global warming denounce journalists for lying about the pandemic and climate changes in order to articulate panic. Thus, 'they' can sell more access to news media while controlling people's actions, only to enlarge the profits of a very selected group of businesspersons.

Anyway, we must only remember that the shows about History of Brazil and ideological indoctrination at schools make explicit what other episodes only insinuate: the school teaches little or teaches wrongly. Therefore, the only reliable source of information and knowledge would be Brasil Paralelo.

Closing Remarks

There is a fantasy rooted in olavism-bolsonarism imaginary wherein the times of monarchy—or of military dictatorship—in Brazil were safe and prosperous, so maybe we should return to that. Purposefully incorrect rereadings of our History provoke in people a 'longing' for what never existed. Along comes a desire to destroy contemporary facts equally non-existent, brazilianised from examples from abroad, especially points where far-right groups speak out.

Activities as those of Brasil Paralelo use the power of platformisation to feedback movements that weaken our institutions (Castells, 2019). The analysis of BP podcasts elucidates that the cultural war and the propositions that put in question LGBTQIA+ rights, the rights of free expression in schools, the attempts of an ecological maintenance vital to the fragile climate equilibrium of the planet, among others, are still alive in Brazil and now have new spaces for manifestation. The post-truth world, to which BP collaborates, and

> which the traditional media end up participating in, transforms uncertainty into the only reliable truth: 'my truth', each individual's truth. The fragmentation of messaging and the ambiguity of communication elicit unique and personal emotional responses, which are then constantly fuelled by hope-destroying tactics, ensuring that nothing changes. (Castells, 2019)

Brasil Paralelo is only one agent in this farse presented as reality, where Brazilians democratically handed over the country (from 2019 to 2022) to a group that, in the name of 'God, fatherland, family and liberty', acted on the three Republican powers, as well as on a few traditional media companies, on digital media and on religious instances to dismantle contemporary political, social and cultural achievements.

The end of Bolsonaro administration, defeated by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on the 2022 elections, is not the end of olavism-bolsonarism or the liberal-conservatism. Quite the opposite, the phenomenon we are facing now always existed as an embryo inside the Brazilian republic but never found social, economic and political structures of communication and expression to manifest itself. Now, such conditions exist. The visions we discussed in this chapter cohabit with attempts to implement a democratic state of law with social welfare, a struggle that lasts more than 35 years since the end of the civic-military dictatorship. This cohabitation puts Brazil in a state of permanent confrontation.

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The Constructions of "Otherness" Through the Mainstream Media: The Normalization of Jair Bolsonaro's Far-Right Discourse by Brazilian Newspapers

Ana Gabriela Guerreiro, Liziane Guazina, and Florence Le Cam

Introduction

The emergence of a new right-wing populism in several countries has been linked to the use of communication strategies to sharpen political polarizations and exploit emotional appeals in amplifying antagonisms, conflicts, and fears on digital social media platforms. This phenomenon has had direct repercussions in Brazil with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018.

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However, the rise of the far-right wing in Brazil began years before. As a federal deputy, Bolsonaro gained space in the Brazilian mainstream media, which grew as he gained strength to occupy the most important political position in Brazil. Bolsonaro was elected president with a distinct political campaign compared to what the traditional media was used to. He replaced the traditional model with the massive use of digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Bolsonaro strengthened his conservative discourse and targeted religious, militaristic, and anti-PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores, left-wing opposition party) themes. At the same time, he succeeded in portraying himself to a significant part of the population as a "new" politician who would break with the established corruption in the country.

The politician's ascent was also motivated by the return of populism to Brazil. Nonetheless, at this time the phenomenon emerged linked to far-right leadership as conceptualized by Mudde (2019). According to Aggio and Castro (2020), Jair Bolsonaro represents the "strongest global representation of far-right populism" due to his communication strategies on social media anchored in populist rhetoric tailored to the characteristics of these digital platforms, similar to Donald Trump's election in the United States (Aggio & Castro, 2020, p. 3).

This chapter discusses the contribution of the Brazilian mainstream media to the emergence of Jair Bolsonaro's political agenda at the center of the Brazilian public debate. Several authors have pointed out the link between journalism and populism as a drive to spread populist rhetoric and agenda in different countries including the role of far right-wing populist strategies in building high polarization using "us versus them" discourse (Mazzoleni, 2014; Mudde, 2019).

Regarding Bolsonaro, these strategies included using far-right conservative and moral agenda to criticize the LGBTQIA+ community and to attack the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores), the main political opponent party of the Brazilian far-right groups (Araújo & Prior, 2020). This phenomenon is a consequence of the so-called media populism, in which far-right politicians adopt communication strategies that suit media needs in order to gain visibility.

Numerous studies have been devoted to understanding the growth of Jair Bolsonaro and the far-right wing in Brazil, including the political process that allowed conservative groups, liberals, extremists, religious individuals, and nationalists be united by the defense of values propagated by a former deputy and military reserve officer (Albuquerque &

Alves, 2023; Cesarino, 2020; Gagliardi et al., 2023; Guazina et al., 2023; Kalil, 2018; Tatagiba et al., 2015).

Historically, the politician tried to approach the popular layers solely through his discourse, by adopting the slogan "my party is the people," along with the defense of Brazilian patriotism and the division of Brazilians between those who were opposed or favorable to the PT (Ernst et al., 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Stanyer et al., 2016). In this chapter we focus on the role of the media in increasing the visibility of the politician's ideas.

The methodological approach was developed in Guerreiro (2023) and comprised the analysis of the news published during the ten years before Bolsonaro's election (2008 to 2018) in two Brazilian newspapers (Folha de São Paulo and O Estado de São Paulo). The chapter explores the analysis and results of that study. The analysis focused on gender and political disputes, the two most frequently issues addressed in the newspapers during his period in the Brazilian House of Representatives.

Using Content Analysis as qualitative approach, the study analyzed 571 news which covered Bolsonaro's attacks against the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as against the Workers' Party. The results provided an overall understanding of how the two main Brazilian newspapers used mechanisms of normalization (Ekström et al., 2020) of the politician's discourse in their daily coverage. Hence, these newspapers contributed to the higher visibility and public legitimization of Bolsonaro's constructions of "otherness" in the national public agenda.

The choice of Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo newspapers for the analysis was based on several reasons, including their reputation as reference newspapers in Brazil from Zamin's perspective (2014). The concept of normalization, as studied by Diehl (2017) and Ekström et al. (2020), highlights how the repetition of radical content without filters ends up softening it to the audience. As a result, radical and extreme views become increasingly normal and uncontroversial in public political discourse.

Communication and the Far-Right in Brazil

Throughout his political career, Jair Bolsonaro has adopted a conservative agenda defending moral values, anti-corruption measures, and launching various attacks against left-wing parties. When we examine Bolsonaro's speeches, we can see that the politician embodies several characteristics of

populist discourse, as argued by various authors who have been studying the phenomenon of populism and its implications with the media in democratic regimes in recent years (Araújo & Prior, 2020; Blassnig et al., 2020; Bos et al., 2011; De Vreese et al., 2018; Guazina, 2021; Laclau, 2005; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004, 2019; Waisbord, 2018).

As a representative of the far-right, Bolsonaro divides society into two antagonistic groups ("us vs. them"), portrays himself as an outsider to the political establishment, and champions anti-system rhetoric, presenting himself as the one capable of solving the nation's problems (Bos et al., 2011). Throughout his political journey, Bolsonaro exploited the anti-PT sentiment and adopted a series of practices commonly used by populists, focusing his discourse on socially controversial and low-public-perception themes such as nationalism and corruption, while employing typical communication mechanisms of populists.

Authors such as De Vreese et al. (2018) and Mazzoleni (2014) argue that populism is a communicational phenomenon, and its three main actors—politicians, media, and citizens—are directly related. They also argue that populism is a communicative phenomenon and employs common tools that are directly picked up by the media, such as the construction of the "us vs. them" discourse, direct criticisms of elites, and democratic institutions in countries, as well as moral appeals—in Bolsonaro's case, directly expressed through the defense of family values, God, and criticism of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Moralism is the second rhetoric frequently applied in populist communication after anti-elitism. Hermet (2003) states that populism is "an ideology that identifies the will of the people with justice and morality" (Hermet, 2003, p. 7). Bolsonaro is one of the politicians who have adopted a "moral agenda" and conservatism in his speeches throughout his political career.

In the specific case of Brazil, Martinez (2022) argues that the process of approaching moral issues occurred in the country as a reaction to advances in gender and sexuality agendas achieved during the governments of the PT until 2016, when then-president Dilma Rousseff (PT) was impeached. In the case of Jair Bolsonaro, his positions, with a broad media character, have been present in the Brazilian press throughout the politician's political history. Even in cases where Bolsonaro's ideas went beyond common sense, the media gave him space, as we will demonstrate throughout this work.

In this logic the populist discourse possesses characteristics that directly attract the attention of mainstream media, with aspects of sensationalism and filled with emotional appeals (Diehl, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to directly discuss the relationship between the media and populist discourse within the media logic, which has its own elements of dissemination and information capture.

Populists meet various criteria of mass media, such as producing scandals, breaking taboos, arousing emotions, and constructing the narrative that the people are a "majority" deceived by economic, political, and media elites. As a result, they are portrayed as heroes and leaders capable of liberating the people from oppression (Diehl, 2017, p. 80). Araújo and Prior (2020) refer to the "often disturbing and politically incorrect discourse" adopted by populist actors to grab the attention of the mainstream media.

Several authors work with the concept of normalization of the discourse of populist politicians by the mainstream press (Araújo & Prior, 2020; Bos et al., 2011; Diehl, 2017; Guazina et al., 2019; Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Mitozo et al., 2020). In common, they argue that the discourse and style of populist leaders like Jair Bolsonaro attract the attention of the mainstream media by prioritizing the disruption of normality, using extreme rhetoric, and even politically incorrect language.

In this way, far-right-wing messages can become normalized in society due to the attention they receive from the media. The repetition of radical content ends up softening it for the audience, as advocated by Diehl (2017, p. 82). In practice, the normalization of the discourse of populist leaders means transmitting their thoughts through the mainstream media "naturally," without mechanisms capable of countering or even questioning radical ideas spread by these politicians.

Similarly, Mudde (2019) states that the mainstream media boosts the agenda of the radical right and, in practice, supports its ideologies. A study involving the Twitter account of former US President Donald Trump, conducted by Mitozo et al. (2020, p. 161) shows how the statements of the American president on his personal social media were incorporated by the major media outlets in the United States.

The case of Trump is like Bolsonaro in Brazil. Before becoming a presidential candidate, Bolsonaro, then a congressman and member of the Brazilian National Congress, had space in the mainstream media precisely because of his ideas that broke the norm of the legislative work in Brazil. Whenever Bolsonaro took the floor in the National Congress to speak out

against gays, his words were quickly transmitted by the major Brazilian press.

The analysis of the reports from Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo, combined with the discussion we have presented here, revisiting various concepts and studies on populist politicians and their relationships with the media, helps us understand the phenomenon of the normalization of Jair Bolsonaro's speech by the Brazilian mainstream media.

Normalization of Bolsonaro's Discourse by the Newspapers

Throughout the research we sought a methodology with focus on identifying whether the productive routine of the newspapers contributed to the circulation of Bolsonaro's free thought in the coverage of the Brazilian mainstream media conducting a Content Analysis (CA) on the selected corpus for the study.

The corpus consists of news articles published by both newspapers from January 1, 2008, to July 31, 2018, before the Brazilian Presidential election. In this article we focused only on the two most prevalent themes in the newspapers' coverage during the analysis period: political disputes and gender/racism.[1]

The Content Analysis is based on variables (categories) that are applied to the selected material for analysis using similar procedures throughout all analyzable content to describe the criteria, proportions, and correlations existing between them.

The group of articles under the theme "gender/racism" includes Bolsonaro's attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community, the "gay kit," women, and black people, as well as all the controversies raised by Bolsonaro regarding these issues. This group contains a significant number of articles related to the former congressman as he made a mark in Brazilian politics for being openly opposed to gays and minorities.

As stated by Miguel (2021), extreme right-wing politicians combine criticism of feminist, black, and LGBTQIA+ movements under the same umbrella, justifying their joint analysis in the corpus.

[1] The complete study can be found in Guerreiro (2023).

On the other hand, the thematic group "PT/political disputes" gathers articles with a political focus related to Bolsonaro. In most of them the politician attacks the PT (the party that is his main opponent) and other opposition parties. This group also includes news covering political disputes in Congress involving Bolsonaro, including his party actions and controversial legislative proposals raised by the then congressman.

The ten-year temporal cut (2008–2018) was necessary to make the research feasible and represents Bolsonaro's rise in the Brazilian mainstream media as the 2018 electoral competition approached. Both Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo are among the most widely circulated newspapers in Brazil. According to data from the Brazilian Verifier Communication Institute (IVC)[2] from 2019, Folha leads in circulation among national print media outlets, followed by O Globo and O Estado de S. Paulo.

Within the selected Content Analysis methodology for the research, categories were created by Guerreiro (2023) to classify the news articles inductively according to variables required for the study. The classification system uses definition categories to transform content into units of record, meaning that each of the categories applied in the analysis of the texts allows for identifying a distinct unit (element), as presented by Sampaio and Lycarião (2021).

The categories were created based on exploratory analysis of the corpus and previous studies (Amossy, 2011; Bakhtin, 2006; Bazaco et al., 2019; Charron, 2006; Cardoso, 2001; Neves, 2000; Araújo & Prior, 2020). They were applied to the entirety of the research corpus: 571 selected news articles. Each one of them was analyzed for each of the elements presented in Table 1 and the list below. This model allows for an equal analysis of all the material without prioritizing one or another research element, as advocated by Sampaio and Lycarião (2021).

- Categories and elements of Content Analysis of the two newspapers

    1. Bolsonaro as the sole source in the text;
    2. Presence of counterpoint in the article and its space;
    3. Sources cited in the articles;
    4. Origin of the news;

[2] IVC is a Brazilian entity that conducts media audits, including the measurement of circulation rates of the country's main newspapers.

Table 1 Description of the categories for the *corpus* analysis

Category	*Description*
1. Source/counterpoint	Is Bolsonaro the sole source in the texts? What other sources are cited in the articles? Is there a counterpoint to his thoughts?
2. Textual genre	Did the news originate from a statement made by the politician himself or as a consequence of his statement/action? Or did it arise from journalistic investigation without being prompted by Bolsonaro?
3. Style/fatic function	Does the headline of the article/report/interview induce clicks by featuring something that deviates from the standard political coverage?
4. Presence of direct or reported speech	Are Bolsonaro's statements reproduced in quotation marks or transcribed by the reporter? Are there verbs that indicate the transcription of his speech?
5. Journalist's attitude	What posture of the journalist can be identified in the text? Did they provoke the politician to speak? Or did they reproduce a statement spontaneously made by Bolsonaro?

Source Guerreiro (2023), Guazina et al. (2021)

5. Direct (verbatim) quotes from Bolsonaro in the articles;
6. Reproduction of the politician's controversial ideas in the news;
7. Frequency of clickbait titles.

After completing the content analysis, we proceeded to the final step: inference and descriptive statistical analysis of the data by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The descriptive analysis of the data was presented with the calculation of the percentage of responses for each of the analyzed categories. The association between the evaluated categories was performed through the Chi-Square test. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant for all tested variables.

Results of the *Corpus* Analyses

Out of the 571 articles published, 291 (51%) were published in the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, and 280 (49%) were published in Estado de S. Paulo. The year 2015 marked the beginning of a systematic increase in the interest of the newspapers in Jair Bolsonaro. Before this exponential growth, the politician appeared sporadically and almost non-existent in the pages of both newspapers.

From 2008 to 2010, Bolsonaro's presence in the mainstream media registered a percentage close to zero. In 2011, the politician had a "peak" of media coverage due to the controversy surrounding the "gay kit."[3] After this theme was extensively explored in 2011, Bolsonaro returned to receive limited attention from both newspapers, with a slight increase from 2013 when he became involved in disputes for the leadership of the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies and embraced the causes of anti-corruption protests that spread throughout the country.

The scenario changed radically from 2015 with Bolsonaro's systematic growth in the media, reaching its peak in the election year. The trend kept increasing without reduction until 2018, the year he was elected president of the Republic. Until 2016, Bolsonaro was not seen as a real possibility for the electoral race, a scenario that changed the following year when the then-deputy became a viable option for a significant percentage of the Brazilian population—increasing the interest of the newspapers and mainstream media in the politician.

Of the total 571 news articles analyzed about Bolsonaro by the two newspapers, the majority were published in 2017 and 2018, as shown in Figure 1. The high number of articles related to Jair Bolsonaro during this period is explained by his pre-candidacy for the Presidency, which gained momentum from 2017 onwards and made him increasingly present in the Brazilian media.

The data shows how Bolsonaro's presence in the mainstream media increased as the election year approached. To better understand the phenomenon and the consequent normalization of his discourse by the newspapers, we will now present the results of the Content Analysis

[3] The "kit" consisted of a booklet against homophobia elaborated by the Ministry of Education during the government of then-President Lula (2011). However, Bolsonaro framed the issue as something that would influence young people "to become gay"—the opposite of the intended purpose for which the material was created. See Guazina and Guerreiro (2021).

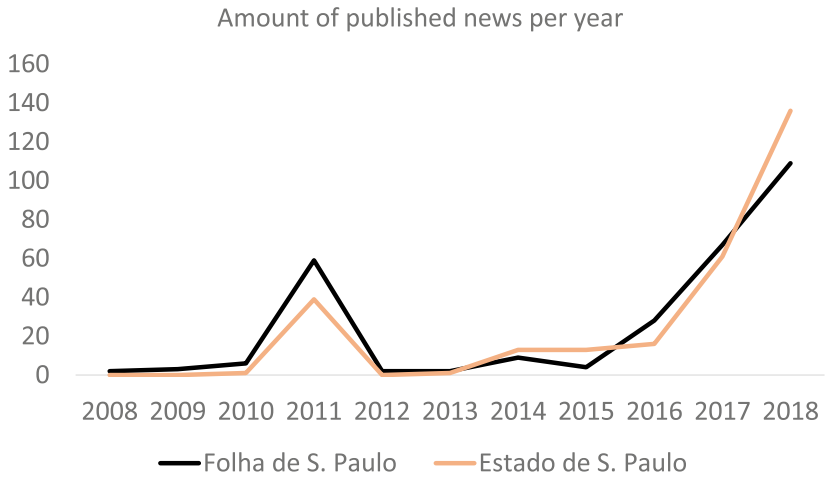


Fig. 1 Absolute frequency of articles in the corpus by year and analyzed newspaper (*Source* Guerreiro, 2023)

divided into the two thematic groups selected for the research: gender/racism and PT/political disputes.

At the end of the detailed analysis by theme, we will summarize the overall data collected during the application of the categories in the Content Analysis of the 571 articles selected for this study.

Thematic Group 1: PT/Political Disputes

In this thematic group, there are news covering various topics related to Bolsonaro's political activities. The subjects vary over time as the politician presents himself as a viable candidate for the 2018 presidential election. In the initial period of the *corpus*, between 2008 and 2016, the thematic group includes news about political clashes involving the parliamentarian and his colleagues in the National Congress; day-to-day legislative activities related to his political actions, and processes he faced in the Chamber of Deputies and the Supreme Federal Court, among others.

From 2017 onwards, news related to Bolsonaro's criticism of PT, Lula, and Dilma Rousseff started to appear in this thematic group, along with news related to the electoral competition and 2018 campaign events.

Presents examples of news articles from both analyzed newspapers related to this thematic group.

As this thematic group gathers political news related to electoral competition, candidacies, and parties, it is natural that the greater flow occurred closer to the election period, and not in previous years when Bolsonaro did not frequently explore this theme in his political repertoire, as shown in Figure 2.

Out of the 377 articles published in this thematic group, Jair Bolsonaro was the sole source in 92 (24.4%) of them. There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency of single-source articles between the newspapers Folha de S. Paulo (43 articles; 23%) and Estado de S. Paulo (49 articles; 25.8%), with $p = 0.549$.

Among the 187 articles analyzed in Folha de S. Paulo, there was a counterpoint to Jair Bolsonaro's speech in 106 (56.7%) of them. Among the 190 articles analyzed in Estado de S. Paulo, there was a counterpoint in 105 (55.3%) of them. From a statistical point of view, there was similarity in this aspect between the two analyzed newspapers ($p = 0.74$). However, Table 2 shows that in more than 50% of the articles analyzed in both newspapers, there was either no counterpoint to Jair Bolsonaro's

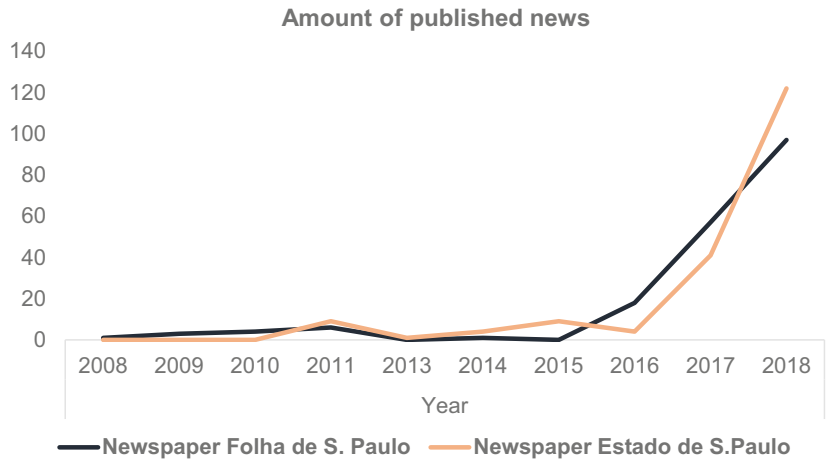


Fig. 2 Absolute frequency of news related to the thematic group PT and political disputes (*Source* Guerreiro, 2023)

Table 2 Distribution and characterization of the counterpoint in relation to Bolsonaro's speeches on the PT/political dispute theme

Counterpoint	*Amount of news (%)*
There was no counterpoint	166 (44.0)
Counterpoint with more space than Bolsonaro	90 (23.9)
Counterpoint with less space than Bolsonaro	52 (13.8)
Counterpoint with the same space as Bolsonaro	69 (18.3)
Total	**377 (100.0)**

Source Guerreiro (2023)

speech or the space given to the counterpoint was smaller than that given to Bolsonaro.

In the 377 articles related to Jair Bolsonaro in this thematic group, it can be observed that besides the 92 news pieces where the politician was the sole source (24.4%), opposition deputies/parties were mentioned in 160 articles (42.4%), and Bolsonaro's allies in 74 articles (19.6%).

The significant presence of opposition members in the articles is naturally explained by the theme of political rivalry. The opposition members were the ones who clashed with Bolsonaro on various topics, as well as the politician's allies, who also appeared prominently in this thematic group.

It is worth noting that when we mention opposition members, we are referring to deputies/senators who served as a counterpoint to Bolsonaro—most of them belonging to the PT and PSOL parties, which were part of the Federal Government's support base, including Jean Wyllys and Maria do Rosário.[4] Members of the Judiciary are among the sources classified as opposition to Bolsonaro in the news.

The results also show a representative number of news stories in which Bolsonaro was the only source heard, something that could be questioned from the point of view of journalistic impartiality since the topic would require a greater presence of the contradictory in news.

Table 3 shows the absolute and relative distribution of all sources cited in the news related to the theme PT/dispute politics, combining both

[4] Jean Wyllys and Maria do Rosário were deputies during the same period as Bolsonaro and became frequent opponents of the politician. Wyllys, who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community, clashed with Bolsonaro on this issue. Maria do Rosário was accused by the politician of being "so ugly that she doesn't even deserve to be raped" and became a political enemy of Bolsonaro, engaging in several confrontations with the congressman.

Folha de S. Paulo and Estado de S. Paulo. It is important to note that all citations from the Federal Government were found in Folha de S. Paulo only.

Another important piece of data we obtained after analyzing the results pertains to the origins of the news in this thematic of political rivalry. Table 4 demonstrates that 71.3% of the articles were related to a statement/action by Bolsonaro or were a consequence or reaction to such statements/actions, a significantly high rate.

As pointed out by Di Franco (2006), the increasing practice of the press to use excessive quotations, lack of investigation, and substitution of journalistic inquiries with transcriptions of sources' statements has made

Table 3 Distribution of the sources cited in Folha de S. Paulo and Estado de S. Paulo related to the thematic group PT and political disputes

Sources cited	*Amount of news (%)*
Opposition parties/Congressmen opponents	160 (4.4)
Bolsonaro alone	92 (24.3)
Bolsonaro's allies	74 (19.6)
Professors or experts	27 (7.1)
Judiciary members	20 (5.3)
Opponents of Bolsonaro (non-congressmen)	7 (1.9)
Federal Government members	6 (1.6)
Lawyers/jurists	3 (0.8)
Minority groups	1 (0.3)
Businessmen or ruralists	1 (0.3)
Journalists	1 (0.3)

Source Guerreiro (2023)

Table 4 Frequency of news sources in the theme PT/political dispute

News sources	*Amount of news (%)*
Speech/action of Bolsonaro	138 (36.6)
Consequence or reaction to his speech/action	131 (34.8)
Investigative Journalism	54 (14.3)
Agenda	54 (14.3)
Total	**377 (100.0)**

Source Guerreiro (2023)

declarative journalism increasingly prevalent in the Brazilian mainstream media. The data from this thematic group reflects this reality. In the same vein, Colling (2006) reminds us that this type of journalism focuses on the mere collection of statements without concern for the necessary investigative aspects of the news. Table 4 shows how this practice of declaratory journalism is present in the news about Bolsonaro in the theme of political dispute.

It should be emphasized that, of the 21 news articles resulting from journalistic investigation/initiative or parliamentary agenda, 19 were published in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two media outlets regarding the origin of the news ($p < 0.001$). The Folha de S. Paulo dedicated more coverage to this theme with news that did not derive exclusively from the actions of Jair Bolsonaro.

Regarding the clickbait headlines, out of the 377 articles related to PT/political dispute, 105 (27.9%) had titles with this characteristic, and the frequency of clickbait in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper (64 articles) was significantly higher than in the Estado de S. Paulo newspaper ($p = 0.005$). There was no justification found for the lesser use of clickbait titles by Estado de S. Paulo newspaper within this thematic.

Regarding other variables (direct speech and controversial ideas of Bolsonaro in the texts), there was no difference in frequency between the two newspapers ($p > 0.05$), with direct speech found in 201 articles (53.3%) and the reproduction of controversial ideas by the former deputy Jair Bolsonaro occurring in 259 articles (68.7%). Once again, this category demonstrates how both newspapers provided space for Bolsonaro's literal speeches and disseminated his extremist thoughts on their pages, specifically within the PT/political dispute thematic.

By giving space to this type of speech without questioning, both newspapers directly contributed to the normalization of the politician's discourse, which is the main hypothesis of this research.

Thematic Group 2: Gender/Racism

In this thematic group, the articles related to Jair Bolsonaro revolve around two topics: gender and racism. As pointed out by Miguel (2021), these themes converge because the far-right considers feminist, black, and LGBTQIA+ movements as "partners in the strategy of subversion of the current order." The author argues that Bolsonaro and his allies, by

targeting these themes with their attacks, aim to normalize and perpetuate violence in Brazil.

Under the gender theme, there are news articles about Bolsonaro's attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community, the parliamentarian's misogyny against women, as well as other issues like rape culture and pedophilia. Under the racism theme there are racial issues addressed by Bolsonaro, mostly targeting descendants of slaves living in Brazil.

Figure 3 discloses a higher concentration of articles on these themes in the year 2011, with a significantly larger number of articles in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper compared to Estado de S. Paulo. This higher number of articles in the former newspaper may be to the extensive coverage of the "gay kit" theme by Bolsonaro throughout the year.

Another difference was found in the year 2017, with a higher number of articles in this thematic group in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper. This was when Bolsonaro and his allies from the evangelical caucus in the National Congress vied for control of the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, a space traditionally occupied by the PT, the main opposition party to the religious parliamentary group.

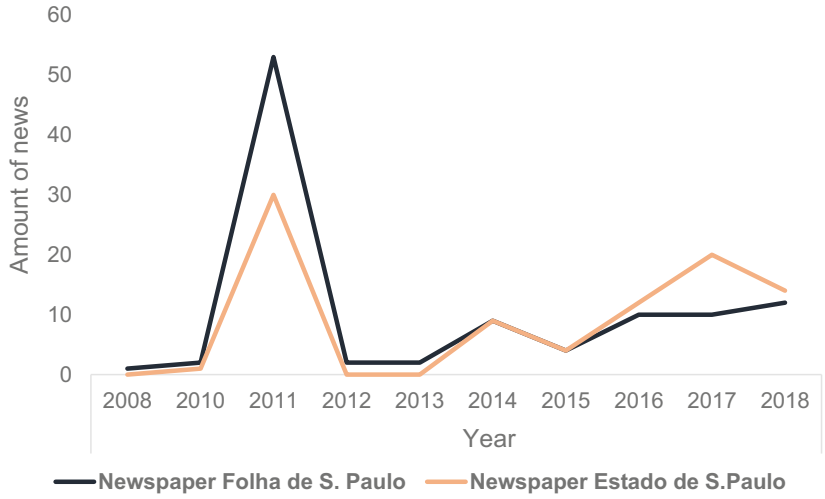


Fig. 3 Absolute frequency of news related to gender/racism per year (*Source* Guerreiro, 2023)

Out of the 194 articles published in this thematic group, Jair Bolsonaro was the sole source in 44 articles (22.7%). There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency of the "sole source" category between the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper (26 articles, 25.0%) and the Estado de S. Paulo newspaper (18 articles, 20%), with a p-value of 0.300.

Of the 104 articles analyzed in Folha de S. Paulo, there was a counterpoint to Jair Bolsonaro's statements in 70 articles (67.3%). In the 90 articles analyzed in O Estado de S. Paulo, there was a counterpoint in 68 articles (75.6%). From a statistical point of view, there was similarity in this aspect between the two newspapers ($p = 0.330$).

However, Table 5 shows that in more than 50% of the articles analyzed in both newspapers, there was either no counterpoint to Jair Bolsonaro's statements, or the counterpoint had less space than Bolsonaro's. This demonstrates that in the gender/racism thematic group, the candidate had ample space to present his controversial positions without diverging opinions in the text.

In the 194 articles analyzed related to Jair Bolsonaro in this thematic group, it can be observed that, in addition to the 44 articles where he was the sole source (22.7%), opposition parties were mentioned in 71 articles (36.6%), and the Judiciary in 31 articles (16%). The significant presence of opposition members in these articles can be explained by the fact that some figures from PT and PSOL (opposition parties to Bolsonaro) engaged in successive confrontations with the politician regarding the gender theme.

Exemplifies news published in both evaluated newspapers in the thematic group Gender/Racism. They were focused on Bolsonaro's clashes with politicians who opposed him.

Table 5 Distribution and characterization of the counterpoint in relation to Bolsonaro's speeches on the Gender/Racism dispute theme

Counterpoint	*Amount of news (%)*
There was no counterpoint	56 (28.9)
Counterpoint with more space than Bolsonaro	65 (33.5)
Counterpoint with less space than Bolsonaro	47 (24.2)
Counterpoint with the same space as Bolsonaro	26 (13.4)
Total	**194 (100.0)**

Source Guerreiro (2023)

Table 6 shows the absolute and relative distribution of all sources cited in the news related to the theme Gender/Racism, combining both Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo.

The analysis also revealed another significant result within the group of news articles related to gender/racism. Most of these articles (89.1%) were directly related to Bolsonaro's statements or actions, or they were a consequence or reaction to his statements or actions, as shown in Table 7. In other words, most of the news stories were centered around Bolsonaro's own actions and remarks.

It should be emphasized that, of the 21 news articles resulting from journalistic investigation/initiative or parliamentary agenda, 19 were

Table 6 Distribution of the sources cited in Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo related to the thematic group Gender/Racism

Sources cited	*Amount of news (%)*
Opposition parties/Congressmen opponents	71 (36.6)
Bolsonaro alone	44 (22.1)
Bolsonaro's allies	12 (6.0)
Professors or experts	5 (2.5)
Judiciary members	31 (16.0)
Opponents of Bolsonaro (non-congressmen)	16 (8.2)
Federal Government members	10 (5.0)
Lawyers/jurists	6 (3.1)
Minority groups	8 (4.1)
Celebrities	6 (3.0)
Journalists	2 (1.0)
International Associations	2 (1.0)

Source Guerreiro (2023)

Table 7 Frequency of news sources in the theme Gender/Racism

News sources	*Amount of news (%)*
Speech/action of Bolsonaro	48 (24.7)
Consequence or reaction to his speech/action	125 (64.4)
Journalism	11 (5.7)
Agenda	10 (5.2)
Total	**194 (100.0)**

Source Guerreiro (2023)

published in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two media outlets regarding the origin of the news ($p < 0.001$). The Folha de S. Paulo dedicated more coverage to this theme with news that did not derive exclusively from the actions of Jair Bolsonaro.

Out of the 194 news articles related to gender/racism, 82 (42.3%) were considered clickbait. For this variable, the frequency was similar in both newspapers, with no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$).

The rate of clickbait headlines was higher in the group of articles about gender/racism than in the other themes. This can be explained by Bolsonaro adopting successive extremist stances on this topic, making direct attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community and women, which naturally leads the mainstream media to use more sensational headlines in this context. The Estado de S. Paulo published headlines with clearly indicative of clickbait within this thematic.

Similarly, the Folha de S. Paulo published news with titles clearly aiming to attract the reader's attention. Therefore, in this thematic area, the use of sensational titles to attract clicks is evident.

In this thematic group, news articles that presented Bolsonaro's direct speech represented 87.6% of the total (170), and 93.8% (182) reproduced his controversial ideas. Both variables indicate a clear normalization by both evaluated newspapers, of Bolsonaro's discourses on gender/racism. Even in cases of extreme ideas presented by the politician, the newspapers provided space for his statements, indicating a clear normalization of Bolsonaro's discourse, even on such sensitive topics.

It is worth noting that in Brazil, racism is a crime defined by law.[5] In 2019, the Supreme Federal Court ruled that homophobia is also an imprescriptible and non-bailable crime, extending the effects of the anti-racism law to such crimes.

Despite this legal provision Bolsonaro, throughout his political history, has made a series of racist and homophobic remarks reproduced by the mainstream media. This clearly reinforces the hypothesis of normalization presented in this research.

[5] The crime of Racism is provided for in Law No. 7,716/1989, which criminally typifies discriminatory conduct directed at a certain group or community. The penalty provided for is 1 to 3 years of imprisonment, non-bailable, and non-prescriptible.

Final Remarks

The findings of this analysis highlight important aspects of the media coverage related to Jair Bolsonaro in the newspapers Folha de S. Paulo and O Estado de S. Paulo, especially in the thematic groups of political disputes (PT) and gender/racism. The data indicates the increasing presence of the politician in the mainstream media over the years, particularly from 2015 onwards, with a significant rise in news about him, reaching its peak in the election year of 2018 when he became President of Brazil.

The results point out to a process of constructions of "otherness" through both newspapers marked by a normalization of Bolsonaro's speeches. In the case of the political dispute and gender/racism groups, the newspapers provided a significant space for his declarations and controversial ideas without thorough questioning or critical analysis. This could contribute to the dissemination and legitimation of hate speech and intolerance in the public debate.

In the political dispute thematic group Bolsonaro was the sole source of information in a considerable portion of the analyzed news, indicating a predominance of his speeches and actions as the basis for constructing the narratives. Furthermore, the news in this group showed a similar balance of counterpoints between the newspapers, but more than half of them did not provide any different perspectives to Bolsonaro's views or offered lesser space for contrasting opinions.

In the gender/racism thematic group the prevalence of Bolsonaro's speeches and actions as the primary source of news is once again evident, and the news also presented a significant number of counterpoints. However, the analysis of the headlines revealed a higher frequency of clickbait in this thematic group, indicating a strategy by the newspapers to attract readers' attention to sensitive and controversial topics.

It is essential that the Brazilian media re-evaluate its journalistic practices and adopts a more critical and balanced approach in the coverage of controversial political figures like Jair Bolsonaro to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate information for the public. The press has the power and responsibility to promote democratic debate, present diverse perspectives, and contribute to the formation of a more informed and conscious society.

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Journalistic Resistance Against Populist Othering of the Press in the Age of Polarization and Disinfodemic

Rui Alexandre Novais

The upsurge of the COVID-19 crisis across the globe brought with it large-scale online "infodemic" and toxic "disinfodemic." Adding to the significant pressures to counter disinformation (and misinformation) and the measures prompted to contain the pandemic that posed unprecedented challenges and threats to press freedom and journalistic safety worldwide, news professionals in Brazil had to simultaneously cope in 2020 with the worsening of the already tense and problematic relationship with President Bolsonaro.

Despite being an agent of information disorder, rolling back press freedom under the cloak of the pandemic and escalating his violence against journalists in the first few months of the health crisis, Jair Bolsonaro still accused the media of creating "hysteria" and causing panic ever since the start of the coronavirus crisis and claimed that it was "good for nothing" and "worse than garbage because garbage is recyclable." The well-oiled strategy—to encourage a lasting mistrust of the targeted journalists, destroy their credibility, and gradually construct a common

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enemy within an "us-versus-them" scenario in which the news is not acting in service of the public, sparked, however, a reaction by journalists and leading news media in the country.

Focused on the journalistic collective reactions to an outside attack by the political elite, this study offers a valuable opportunity for unpacking the risks to the press during a period of health crisis and political polarization and their respective threats and manifestations that challenged the Brazilian press sector. Drawing on the sociological variant of the new institutional theoretical framework complemented with the analysis of emblematic cases of counter-strategies to defend the press from an outside threat, it explores the effort of journalists to advance a competing narrative to the country's elite political attack of the industry that supports and enhances the myth of quality press during the already challenging context of the coronavirus pandemic.

Risks and Threats to (Quality) Journalism in Health Crises and Populism

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 crisis and the several measures to contain the pandemic posed unprecedented challenges and threats to press freedom and journalistic safety worldwide. Soon after the declaration of a state of emergency, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified another "as dangerous disease" accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic—a global large-scale online "infodemic" and "disinfodemic" with fake news spreading faster and easier than this virus—and called on journalists to address its deadly effects by "supplying credible information within the wider infodemic" and countering the proliferation of false content (UNESCO, 2020).

As acknowledged by the WHO, journalists and legacy media remain important platforms for conveying accurate information to the public during uncertain times of health crises with a substantial presence of fake news in social media. In a crisis such as COVID-19, people depend on media reporting on government measures and how to behave (avoiding becoming infected and spreading the virus) while making informed day-to-day choices and decisions (Sharma et al., 2020). Hence, the COVID-19 epidemic demonstrated the need for "accurate or accountability reporting" and offered journalism as a field the opportunity "to build on the renewed levels of mission, audience engagement and clearly" (Mello, 2020; Posetti et al., 2020, p. 27).

Because of their importance in disseminating vital information to the public and the effectiveness of government crisis management during the health crisis, journalists were expected to work with authorities to improve the quality of the information delivered to the public (Veil, 2012). In such extraordinary circumstances of the outbreak of novel infectious diseases, media tend to align or assume a more "cooperative" attitude with the health authorities but, in turn, require governmental support "to sustain and uphold" a strong journalistic infrastructure to maintain the "integrity and quality in news media" to the detriment of alternative "dangerous" or dubious content that potentially jeopardizes public health (Coninck et al., 2020, p. 65; Klemm et al., 2019, p. 1232).

In practice, however, it was not always the case and attempts to instrumentalize the media in health crises seemed to occur. While acknowledging the "media freedom erosion" alongside the "pernicious role of disinformation in the information ecosystem" during COVID's first wave, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) further identified politicians, elected officials, government representatives, and State-orchestrated networks as top sources of COVID-19 disinformation (Posetti et al., 2020, p. 3). Other scholarly works added to the extant literature on the multifaceted risks and pressures impinging journalism as an institution in health crises situations by identifying some of the macro-threats to the journalism practice associated with the specific Coronavirus context across both authoritarian states and Western democracies (Christofoletti & Oliveira, 2022; Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Klemmet al., 2019; Novais, 2024; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021; Pajnik & Hrženjak, 2022; Perreault & Perreault, 2021; Perreault et al., 2022; Raboy & Dagenais, 1992).

Of particular interest to this study are the inter-related political and cultural risks and their distinct manifestations or associated forms of threats. Derived from the critical analysis of media and public health (Henderson & Hilton, 2018), political and cultural risks are understood in this study as structural constraints that connect the pandemic reportage to the particular national context.

More concretely, concerning the former, and despite constitutional protections to the freedom of the press and access to information, restraining political environments and legal frameworks affected the journalists' ability to access reliable information and hindered their performance in the quality reporting of the pandemic. It often included both access to information limitations, such as preventing journalists from attending press conferences and daily briefings or delaying or not

answering requests for information as well as relegating them to online participation while limiting the opportunities to ask questions (CoE, 2020; IFJ, 2020; Novais, 2024; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021; RSF, 2020). Furthermore, threats of a political nature also assumed "censorship" contours comprising publication bans, take-down decisions, forced deletion, selective exclusion from funding schemes, and closure of media outlets and websites aimed at deactivating the monitorial function of the press and discouraging it from digging into sensitive COVID-19-related content (Holtz-Bacha, 2021, pp. 39–40; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021; RSF, 2021). Accordingly, several governments used legal or judicial restrictions on journalists' rights to verify the facts arising from the infodemic and took legal action against journalists to obstruct their coverage of the pandemic (Cooper, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Closely related to the political efforts to delegitimize the mainstream press are the cultural risks concerning, for instance, the continued erosion growth in levels of skepticism and distrust of the news by the audience (Aalberg and de Vreese, 2017; Bhat & Chadha, 2020; Engesser et al., 2017; Hameleers, 2020; Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Holt, 2018; Koliska et al., 2020. Krämer, 2017; Meyer-Gutbrod & Woolley, 2021; Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Robinson, 2019; Schulz et al., 2020; Whipple & Shermak, 2020). Not rarely, such disposition vis-à-vis the press carries over into open hostility toward journalists who have increasingly become targets of physical and psychological threats channeled through social media among radical groups (Brambila & Hughes, 2019; Hughes et al., 2017; Novais, 2024; Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021, 9–10). In April 2020, the International Federation of Journalists signaled a worldly increase in attacks against the press (IFJ, 2020).

Taking for granted that crises often impact the deterioration of work conditions for journalists and affect the quality of their journalistic performance, these conditions are likely exacerbated in contexts of restrained or authoritarian governments (Ferreira, & Christofoletti, 2024; Pajnik & Hrženjak, 2022).

Negotiating the Institutional Myth of Quality Journalism

Infodemic and disinfodemic situations coupled with restrained or polarized environments aggravate the diverse challenges to journalistic safety, accessibility to information, and performance in reporting health crises. Benefiting from an entropic ecosystem of the internet and riding the wave

of increased suspicion and social mistrust in the mainstream media, far-right populists, in particular, often strategically criticize the press, aiming to delegitimize journalism as the fourth estate and influence audience perceptions of journalism in democratic societies (Novais & Araújo, 2022; Novais & Leite, 2024; Cesarino, 2020; Egelhofer et al., 2021; Farhall et al., 2019; Graan et al., 2020; Lawrence & Moon, 2021; Mirowski, 2019).

When in power, right-wing populists expect the media to act as their mouthpieces and perform a facilitative function by opting for an uncritical uniform reporting indexed to the official version (Krämer, 2018; Novais & Araújo, 2022). Otherwise, the discrediting of journalists and news outlets emerges from the right-wing populists' playbook, along with legal or financial measures to discipline and exhaust those media that refuse to comply. Populists may, in the extreme, resort to physical and psychological threats to flout any unfavorable reporting by the press and bolster support (Asher-Schapiro, 2018; Mazzoleni, 2008).

Scholars have only recently begun to theorize on the reaction to outside threats of anti-media populism (Koliska et al., 2020; Koliska & Assmann, 2021; Krämer & Langmann, 2020; Macaraig & Hameleers, 2022; Whipple & Shermak, 2020). Whipple and Shermak (2020) offer one of those exceptional studies that employed paradigm repair for the understudied analysis of far-right populist attacks against the media in the familiar setting of the US. Notwithstanding the different focus—a sample of the tweets using the popular hashtag #NotTheEnemy published over 31 days following President Donald Trump's controversial statements on February 17, 2017, on Twitter of "FAKE NEWS" and the news media as "the enemy of the American People"—it is still of particular interest for illustrating the united effort by both journalists and non-journalists in responding to an elite political rhetoric attack of the industry. It explored the key themes and dominant sentiments of the #NotTheEnemy Twitter public discourse in defense and reinforcement of the journalistic paradigm. It concluded that journalists united with non-journalists via Twitter in contradicting Trump's accusations that the media are "FAKE NEWS" and "the enemy of the American people" with a shared goal to protect American journalism from a political elite attacker (2020, p. 190).

Despite their original breakthrough in unpacking a modern public defense of the American journalism industry mounted through Twitter to protect from an elite threat, the work of Whipple and Shermak is not beyond criticism. And that is primarily so for the emphasis it places

throughout the study on paradigm repair in accounting for Trump's "external intrusion," au lieu of considering the possibility of other unorthodox strategies to more aptly assess the responses to outside threats posed by contemporary crises like anti-media populism (Carlson, 2011, p. 270; Macaraig & Hameleers, 2022, p. 2091; Vos & Moore, 2020).

Moreover, in cases of outside elite attacks aimed at discrediting and undermining public trust in the press as an institution, unlike the threats posed by the discovery of internal "deviance" and "bad behavior" by journalists—such as errors, plagiarisms, and falsehoods or fabrications—I prefer the notion of the defense of the institutional myth of quality journalism as derived from the sociological variant of new institutional theoretical framework (Bennett et al., 1985; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014; Ogbebor, 2020; Scott, 2005). Instead of validating the prevailing journalistic paradigm, on these occasions, journalists seek to bolster the profession's idealized narrative and outside perception to garner legitimacy from external stakeholders and reaffirm the societal legitimacy of journalism as an institution (Koliska et al., 2020; Scott, 2005). I base my contention upon the assumption that the journalistic institutional framework is subject to continuous discursive negotiation and struggle between the professional community of journalists, other social players, and the public (Bourdieu, 1998; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). The discursive contestation by right-wing populists as powerful social agents that derive their authority by challenging journalism legitimacy illustrates it aptly.

Such a renegotiation of the principles and boundaries of the journalistic field while seeking social support, therefore, involves the adoption of problem-oriented adaptive coping strategies to transform or make changes to their reporting practices and overall role performance (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Hughes et al., 2021; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023; Vos & Moore, 2020). The coping approaches to respond to elite attacks, in turn, can result in continuing to perform their roles with autonomy and serving their societies. This resilient attitude allows journalists to resist adversity and prevail in threatening or stressful contexts (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, questions remain on whether responses like the ones verified in #NotTheEnemy to Trump's elite discourse by journalists and their supporters cut across other national settings. That seems expected, given that media traditions and the level of development of the democratic institutions in the US are likely to differ from alternative contexts. Yet, there is a need to continue exploring the degree of similarity or diversity of

responses, such as invoking the defense of the institutional myth of quality journalism. The exposition of journalists' individual and collective coping response mechanisms to deal with work-related elite state threats is also rather incomplete, and studies comprising empirical evidence of reactions to external threats against journalism in less mature democracies in the Global South also do not abound. This exploratory work addresses these gaps by examining how right-wing populist powerholders may eventually alter the nature of journalistic activity in some environments. Hence, it contributes to advancing both theory and empirical knowledge on the reaction to outside threats of anti-media populism in restrained or authoritarian governments and journalists' safety by raising a research question within the context of the impact of the COVID-19 global crisis on journalism in Brazil: What adaptative coping strategies have journalists used to defend the institutional myth of quality journalism from the external politico-cultural risks and their distinct associated forms of threats posed by Bolsonaro?

The showcasing of three "emblematic cases" achieves it. They are illustrative of the political and cultural risks and their respective manifestations of threats faced by journalists under Bolsonaro during the COVID-19 in the country, and both informative for the studied phenomenon and critical to developing their theoretical significance (Flyvbjerg, 2011). By so doing, it takes communication and populism research beyond the US in the Americas by presenting an interesting case of journalistic and public responses to another right-wing populist leader in Brazil, Bolsonaro, who, as the "Trump of the tropics," has imitated the strategy of his counterpart regarding the press. Brazil is also a relevant subject for being the first Latin American country to report a COVID-19 case and affected the most by the pandemic, with the second highest total number of confirmed cases at the time, ranking it as second place to America worldwide (Winterburn, 2020).

Before the actual assessment of the specific episodes of journalistic countering Bolsonaro's attacks on the media, however, some contextualization is offered on his disposition toward the press before and during the coronavirus crisis.

The Worsening Context for the Brazilian Press with Bolsonaro and the COVID-19

Following an unconventional and divisive campaign marked by hate speech and disinformation, relentless attacks (including violence) against journalists (Farias et al., 2022; RSF, 2018) Bolsonaro's antipathy toward the press was evident from the outset of his presidential mandate. Immediately after the results of the election confirmed his victory, he sent a message calling journalists "decoys" and "trash" through a WhatsApp list (FENAJ, 2019, p. 27). Therefore, it became clear that Bolsonaro would govern in a "manner similar to Trump" by "targeting the press" with a "constant barrage of criticism" to "further erode their credibility among his supporters and the public writ large" (Waldron, 2019).

His unjustified hostility and distrust of the press, particularly critical journalists and news media, were further manifested in the recurrent criticisms comprising accusations of partisan bias, falsehood, and reporting errors, with implications in terms of the journalistic identity and reputation (Christofoletti & Oliveira, 2022; Flores & Nicoletti, 2021; Novais & Araújo, 2022). For Marcelo Träsel, President of the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism, Bolsonaro decided "to act with hostility against journalists" from the outset by subjecting professionals to unworthy conditions for interviews, uttering personal offenses, criticizing the coverage, as well as questioning the sexual orientation, and belittling the physical appearance of reporters (Garcia, 2020b).

At the end of the first year of his mandate, press freedom was under threat in Brazil due to his systematic discrediting of the media and journalists and institutionalizing violence against the press (FENAJ, 2020). Bolsonaro was the "far-right authoritarian he promised he would be," given his relentless attacks against the media legitimacy, ubiquitous "fake news" cries, and threats to cancel government subscriptions and advertising contracts with the country's biggest news outlets (Waldron, 2020).

The already dangerous routine environment for Brazilians to work in worsened in February 2020 by the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic after the first case reported by the Ministry of Health (MOH) of a 61-year-old man who had traveled to Italy. It brought new challenges related to the presence of a then-unknown virus that forced journalists to work in confinement or with restrained access to sources of information. Bolsonaro often denied or held back information from journalists

in anticipation of critical or negative reporting. Likewise, he tried to jeopardize the quest for quality reporting by introducing legal and accessibility challenges. For instance, he changed Brazil's Access to Information Law, under which journalists can request access to any public information produced or held by the bodies and entities of the Public Administration, which the authorities have to respond to within 20 days (or extended for another ten days upon justification). Initially, he attempted to expand the authority to classify public information as "secret" and "top secret" at the start of his term, and then amid the COVID-19 "state of calamity" by suspending the 30-day deadline for public authorities and institutions to respond to requests for information and forbidding appeals in cases of denied requests. However, the Supreme Court suspended the measures on both occasions (CPJ, 2020).

The press also had to cope with Bolsonaro as the greatest threat to Brazil's ability to combat the spread of COVID-19 and the disinfodemic (Lancet, 2020). Aside from downplaying the dangers of coronavirus by referring to it as a "little flu" and criticizing local officials who are calling for a lockdown, Bolsonaro as the leader of the "coronavirus-denial movement," also became one of the main vectors of misleading content not backed by scientific evidence about the effects of COVID-19 and its possible treatments (Ricard & Medeiros, 2020). Fact-checking agency *Aos Fatos* (2022) identified more than 2197 false or inaccurate statements about COVID-19 made by Bolsonaro since the beginning of the pandemic. In a study on the content of misinformation about COVID-19 provided by 70 fact-checking agencies from different countries during the first year of the pandemic, Brazil was the only one to have displayed a continuous flow of fake news instead of the "waves of disinformation" found elsewhere (Machado et al., 2020).

What is more such misleading information and fabricated content were largely politically framed and polarizing. Bolsonaro mainly used it to minimize the pandemic and circumvent a politico-economic crisis that could have harmed his government while detracting from his opponents through connecting messages related to social distancing measures, health authorities, governors and mayors, the Brazilian Supreme Court, and by media outlets to the "left" and to "communism," and the pandemic to a conspiracy (Soares et al., 2021).

In addition to the aggravation of the overall working conditions under COVID-19, the president repeatedly blamed the media for creating "hysteria" and "artificial chaos" ever since the start of the health crisis

and "deceiving the population" (FENAJ, 2021, p. 52; Figaro, 2021; Friedman, 2020; Novais & Araújo, 2022; RSF, 2020). Even when abroad, such as during his intervention at UN General Assembly in September 2020, Bolsonaro accused "some segments of the Brazilian media of having politicized the virus, spreading panic among the population and advising people to 'stay at home' they almost brought about social chaos to the country" (FENAJ, 2021, p. 57). Hence, Bolsonaro used disinformation and conspiracy theories to mobilize fear and create "enemies," and chiefly among them the journalists (Kalil et al., 2021). Accordingly, Reporters Without Borders condemned the Brazilian President's shockingly irresponsible and inflammatory verbal attacks on the media as he continued to deny the coronavirus epidemic's importance despite having affected Brazil more than any other country in Latin America (RSF, 2020).

Moreover, Bolsonaro and his supporters frequently threatened and attacked journalists through social media with constant "virtual campaigns against news outlets and patrols of press professionals" (Garcia, 2020b; Lis, 2020). And the assaults eventually spread to face-to-face violence, as the aggressions of Dida Sampaio and Clarissa Oliveira illustrate during pro-Bolsonaro demonstrations in 2020 (Carvalho, 2020; Farias, 2020; Nicoletti et al., 2022) The situation in Brazil with high levels of harassment and violence (that increased over 100% in that year) against independent journalists, coupled with impunity, prompted concerns intensified by the fact that the president was personally responsible for most of the attacks (FENAJ, 2021; Freedom House, 2020).

Analysis of the Reactions to the Politico-Cultural Risks Posed by an Outside Threat

The analysis comprises three emblematic cases of the political and cultural risks and their respective forms of threats faced by the Brazilian press under Bolsonaro amid COVID-19 that prompted journalistic responses to resist and defend the institutional myth of quality reporting.

The first episode regards the joint decision of various media companies in late May to stop showing up for informal press conferences outside the official residence of the President—the Alvorada Palace (Palácio da Alvorada) in Brasilia known as "cercadinho." Bolsonaro had made a habit of

stopping at the entrance to comment to the journalists while also speaking and taking selfies with supporters. By then, the country's largest news media outlets Globo (*TV Globo* network and the newspapers *O Globo* and *Valor Economico*) and Bandeirantes groups, joined large-circulation dailies newspapers *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* in suspending their reporting at the Alvorada Palace owing to the "lack of security" to protect them from bullying and abuse by his supporters. The decision came after a series of verbal attacks on journalists from Bolsonaro and his supporters and aggression of the photojournalist Dida Sampaio weeks before—that culminated in the eve's presidential greeting of the journalists by saying "When you start telling the truth, I'll talk to you again," prompting angry verbal attacks from his supporters: "scum, rats, extortionists, rogues, crooks and sons of bitches."

The Globo group, for instance, justified on the grounds of the safety responsibility toward their employees while also assuring that they would find "safe ways to investigate and report what is happening there, without prejudice to the public" (Phillips, 2020). The May 26 Reuters report, moreover, noted that "attacks on journalists have intensified as Bolsonaro's political situation has deteriorated under criticism of mishandling the coronavirus crisis that has killed more than 20,000 Brazilians and paralyzed the economy," and confirmed the assaults as a manifestation of the cultural risk of reporting in such a context. But the second incident is even more rooted in the coronavirus pandemic.

The departure of two Health ministers (Luiz Henrique Mandetta and Nelson Teich) during the pandemic for questioning Bolsonaro, and the subsequent militarization of the post with the appointment of General Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty army officer with no medical training and no prior health experience, resulted in changes in the procedures of the data provision and the hiding of information. In practice, it amounted to the delay in releasing the daily numbers of the pandemic in the country in the first week of June 2020, with new records for deaths from the disease every day. One advanced possible justification for such a delay alluded to the possibility of making it impossible for the early evening TV news programs, such as *TV Globo*'s *Jornal Nacional* and printed newspapers the following day, to report on the data (Garcia, 2020a). Bolsonaro's response of "no more stories from *Jornal Nacional*" to the journalists who questioned the delay in releasing data on the COVID-19 pandemic revealed his intentions to undermine the work of the press (UOL, 2020).

Besides delaying the data release, a further manifestation of the political risks impacting the journalistic work came a few days later in the form of an attempt to suppress information about the spread of the coronavirus in the country by taking down the official data website. When it went back online, the portal no longer showed the accumulated total number of deaths and cases registered since the beginning of the disease in Brazil nor the regional distribution of data and the fatality rate, and it did not allow to download the complete data in an accessible format anymore. It started presenting only the deaths and cases registered in the last 24 hours, along with the daily number of people who had "recovered" from COVID-19 (Assis, 2023).

Six Brazilian news outlets responded to such a government data blackout by establishing a collaborative consortium dedicated to transparency in reporting COVID-19 (Barbosa et al., 2022; Ferreira, & Christofoletti, 2024). The consortium of news outlets united journalists from the online sites *G1* and *UOL*, and the newspapers *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Extra*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *O Globo* went after the data in the states that fed the system. They brought together the number of deaths and registered cases of COVID-19 in Brazil and each state in the previous 24 hours, and the accumulated total of cases and deaths since the beginning of the disease, which had disappeared from the Ministry of Health's dissemination portal. The consortium has released uninterruptedly since then the daily number of positive cases, deaths, and other statistics, such as the 14-day-moving average, which is widely used to understand how the virus spreads throughout the country.

A final significant occurrence regarded Bolsonaro being captured on camera threatening to punch the face of the *O Globo* newspaper reporter after being asked about alleged family corruption during a visit to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Brasilia. While seeking comment from the President about an investigation by the Rio de Janeiro Public Prosecutor's Office that would have identified a series of mystery deposits of $89,000 Real (roughly $16,000 US dollars) made by a former aide into a bank account supposedly belonging to his wife, Bolsonaro told the reporter: "I feel like punching you in your mouth." The President appeared irritated as the investigation had hounded his family members, conflicting with the promise he was elected on to stamp out corruption in Brazil.

In a statement published hours after the incident, *O Globo* repudiated the president's actions against the journalist while "performing its role professionally." Bolsonaro's threat of aggression against the reporter

would also become a viral political movement on social media. Numerous journalists from different news outlets and groups representing journalists (such as the Brazilian Press Association) sided with parliamentarians, influencers, artists, and anonymous in tagging Bolsonaro and tweeting the same question from the O Globo reporter that had bothered him: "President @jairbolsonaro, why did your wife, Michelle, receive R $ 89,000 from Fabrício Queiroz?" (Menezes, 2020). To dilute the effect of the public defense of the assaulted reporter, networks of Bolsonaro supporters spread the misinformation that, before being threatened, the journalist had offended Bolsonaro's daughter, which proved unsubstantiated (Fávero., 2020).

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

This work adds to the latest trend of research of studies that unpacks the critical but seldom discussed reaction of news professionals to the external attack on the industry by the right-wing populist political elite. The results allowed us to answer the research question by revealing that journalists in Brazil employed different adaptative coping strategies to defend the institutional myth of quality journalism from the several political and cultural risks and associated threats posed by Bolsonaro within the already extraordinary context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To start, they opted to abandon the informal news conferences outside the presidential palace in response to Bolsonaro's and his supporters repeated verbal harassment and intimidation that eventually escalated into actual aggression. Then, by rapidly creating a joint collaborative project to overcome the governmental data release delay and posterior blackout during a peak of the coronavirus in the country. The consortium of distinct news outlets allowed the press in Brazil to continue to accomplish their informative function through access to accurate information in real-time. And finally, by displaying professional solidarity to a peer threatened by the President by denouncing and criticizing the perpetrator, followed by a barrage of twitting of the same question that had triggered the attack in the first place.

Accordingly, more than validating the prevailing journalistic paradigm in reaction to internal 'deviance' and 'bad behavior' by news professionals, journalists responded to the political and cultural attacks by Bolsonaro with the shared goal of protecting Brazilian journalism and bolstering their profession's idealized narrative and outside perception.

Such a finding corroborates previous results regarding the new institutional theoretical framework. The usually expected continuous discursive negotiation and struggle between the professional community of journalists and other social players in reaffirming its societal institutional legitimacy was, on this occasion, further aggravated for involving the external stakeholder of the government leader as the powerful contesting subject of the press institutional legitimacy.

Regardless of their pivotal role in disseminating vital information to the public during the health crisis, Bolsonaro was unwilling to work with the country's press to improve the quality of the news content delivered to the public. Confronted with unfavorable reporting on the effectiveness of his government crisis management the president opted for limiting and delaying access to information while also resorting to physical and psychological threats to discipline and exhaust those media that refused to comply. Through strategically criticizing and attacking the press Bolsonaro aimed at discrediting institutional journalism and influencing audience perceptions of journalism in Brazilian society. At the same time, he absolved himself from his official duty to support the journalistic infrastructure and uphold the quality of the news media reporting already impacted by the COVID-19 deterioration of work conditions. By so doing, he added to an already hostile history of contempt and aggression toward journalists, posing new risks and threats to journalism in the country by taking the prior conflictual relationship with the press to a different level. Such a radicalization and intensification of the attacks against the media, whose news reporting "is now more essential than ever," was considered "extremely disturbing" by the head of RSF's Latin America bureau, Emmanuel Colombié, with President Bolsonaro again irresponsibly "targeting the messengers instead of the real enemy" (Lubianco, 2020). The journalistic collective resistance, however, proved stronger than Bolsonaro on these occasions demonstrating an important foil to populist intrusions.

Notwithstanding the usual limitations associated with case studies, in need of further verification elsewhere in a larger sample of media settings experiencing similar tensions, this work offers fresh empirical evidence of the journalistic individual and institutional reactions to external threats in restraining political environments of less mature democracies in the Global South. Above the political and cultural risks, as structural constraints impacting the journalists' ability to access reliable information and hindering their performance in the quality reporting of

the pandemic, this study displayed the disposition by large segments of journalists and the national media to solidarize against external attacks and to joint collaborative efforts among competing news outlets to withstand undue presidential interference in the course of their work.

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Superheroes as a Construction of Otherness from Street Demonstrations of the Brazilian Populist Right

Guilherme Smee Sfredo Miorando

Preliminary Considerations

Jair Messias Bolsonaro referred to the 2022 elections, in which he competed against Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, as a clash of "good against evil". The former president did not say this only once before the election result, but reiterated it in at least six public pronouncements between March and September 2022. The Manichaeism present in the rhetoric of the politician is a typical simplification of the superhero narratives, but also one of the main characteristics of the populist discourse that opposes the elites to the masses.

Bolsonarism, which sells itself as anti-system, anti-politics and anti-partisan, when finding itself in power, finds a paradox of these antagonisms. However, the enemies of Bolsonarism are well marked: those aligned with the left, with gender agendas, with human rights, with religions of African origin, those who preach against denialism, indigenous and quilombola peoples, anti-armamentists, among others, capturing

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a sense of resentment and victimization on the part of the Brazilian population present in the country since the arrival of the lefts to power.

What we can call the construction of the enemy in Bolsonarism is activated through subterfuges such as fake news, in which the cases of the "gay kit"[1] and the "dick baby bottle" stand out,[2] which raised Bolsonaro to popularity. The construction of the enemy was a strategy used by Bolsonarism to gain space and garner support. At the same time, the hero cult also served as a tool to praise the figure of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, helping elevate him to the presidency of the Republic. This relationship between allies and enemies becomes very clear when Bolsonarism appropriates the images of superheroes to sell itself as a force that will guarantee the safety and wellness of the Brazilian population.

The opposition between superheroes and supervillains also works by characterizing the enemy condition. This narrative element can be activated in the social imaginary for political purposes, contributing to the formation of meanings and identities with Manichean contours. Thus, one can speak of "enemy construction" as a set of articulatory processes that constitute and organize social relations. These identity-building processes are part of social life, political rhetoric and international conflict, but they are also deeply rooted in the way we structure the stories we tell (Soberon, 2020, p. 62). It is also possible to thematize its counterpart, the manufacturing of heroes, based on "structures of sympathy", mobilized in stages of involvement with the character through phases of recognition, alignment and alliance (Smith, 1995). According to Lennart Soberon (2020, p. 71), "hero cults and images of enemies are among the most effective instruments in conjunction with demagogic conditions that make people accept wars and endure injustice".

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2019) draws attention to the dangers of developing a unique story, that is, without looking at otherness. For the

[1] The governmental project School Without Homophobia, sometimes referred to pejoratively as "Gay Kit", was a non-governmental initiative proposed to compose the Brazil Without Homophobia Program of the Brazilian federal government. Fake news popularized by Jair Bolsonaro in 2010 said that Brazilian children would have sex education in schools that would teach them to "be gay".

[2] Fake news that circulated during the period preceding the 2018 presidential election in Brazil and brought a video in which a man showed a baby bottle whose rubber nipple was shaped as penis. This object according to the video was being distributed in schools as part of an action by the PT government. However, the item had been purchased at a sex shop.

author, the definition of a unique and, therefore, hegemonic story has to do with power. This characteristic may or may not lend the ability to tell a person's definitive story, that is, how they will fit and behave in the world. For Chimamanda, the unique story robs people of their dignity, emphasizing our differences rather than our similarities. This is what populist right-wing movements like Bolsonarism do: steal otherness and stipulate that central identities are more dignified than those that populate the peripheries of society. Pop culture is also capable of this, especially the superhero narratives, as we will see further on.

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the similarities between Bolsonarist rhetoric and that of superhero plots, both of which have gained prominence since the economic crisis of 2008. In this chapter, I will use the street demonstrations of Bolsonarism enthusiasts dressed as superheroes to corroborate the assumptions set forth here. I also seek to associate them with the role of the media, whether in pop culture or in politics, of their ability to create both "folk devils" and "folk heroes", from "moral panics" in the sense of Stanley Cohen (2011) and debaters of their theories.

Superheroes and Enemy Creation

The construction of "otherness" and therefore of the enemy, from superheroes can be verified in principle through a more obvious layer, in which these characters fight against moral and ideological opponents, reproducing the "us" against "them" of populism. At the beginning of these characters' popularization in the 1940s in the United States, the declared enemy was the powers of the Nazi-fascist Axis. This rhetoric was responsible for the largest number of sales of superhero comics, reaching sales of more than 2 million copies during World War II (Wright, 2003). Also at this time, ethnicities such as those of the Japanese were portrayed as people with an exaggerated and defective look, which also reflected their supposed character. In turn, the superhero was a virtuous being, with a healthy body and mind, who was an example of conduct.

On the other hand, a deeper layer of the superhero narratives will bring a different dimension of the otherness developed in these productions. The superhero is mostly a white male cisheteronomative of Anglo-Saxon descent and committed to the values and the United States' way of life. Therefore, all identities that escape this definition, such as women, non-white people, trans and homonormative people, who come from other

countries and hold other values, could not be associated with superheroism and, therefore, they lacked the virtues inherent to this function (Fig. 1).

This division between allies and enemies was also repeated during the Cold War, in which the persistent enemies of superheroes ceased to be Nazi-fascists and became communists, represented as the "red danger", especially in stories of superheroes linked to the arms race such as Iron Man and the Hulk. The ideological division between "us" and "them" in superhero comics only showed signs of fatigue in the face of the defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War, in which the government of that country was often painted as a villain, causing the themes related to American sovereignty to be rethought and reworked in more cynical and oblique ways. The absence of moral binaries between villains and good guys has spawned a profusion of anti-heroes like Wolverine and Punisher.

However, it is in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 that the roles of superheroes take yet another turn. With George W. Bush's War on Terror speech, the role of the superhero and the victims end up merging and elaborating a new confusion in the minds of his readers and consumers. In this direction, superhero films, which began to be produced in the late twentieth century, have become popular and the relationship that is established with enemy attacks also changes.



Fig. 1 Representations of Japanese in United States' comic books Air Fighters Comics, starring Airboy and Action Comics, starring Superman (*Source* Edited by the author)

Thus, in superhero films, "first, the United States have been the innocent victim of these attacks; and second, despite its traumatic victimization, its survivors have been instantly identified as transcendent and mythical heroes" (Hassler-Forest, 2013, p. 30). This shift in the paradigm of heroic storytelling and the confusion between hero and victim roles has been the vogue of cultural discourse around the world. Far-right platforms rely on nostalgic sentiments, which are reflected throughout global culture and not just in superhero-related products.

As of March 2023, 30% of the world's top 50 box office grossers are performed by superhero films. When looking at the top 10 box office, this percentage increases to 40% (Box Office Mojo, 2023). In these films, the rhetoric of enemy-building mostly brings extra-terrestrials and artificial intelligences as antagonists. The one who comes from elsewhere, the alien, or the outsider, is also a soft metaphor to denote that those who do not belong to a certain hegemonic identity represented by superheroes, are not welcome. In these productions, the way to deal with difference is, indefectibly, the annihilation of its presence.

In Brazil, the popularity of superhero films is even higher, since 70% of the country's top ten box office come from superhero films. In addition, the popularization of these films coincides with the rise of Bolsonaro in Brazil. They reverberated during and after 2018, the year of the election that put him as the country's president and that survived the stabbing. Such an act generated a messianic aura around Jair Bolsonaro, a style of narrative that serves as the basis for many superheroes, among them Superman, considered the model of the genre. As such, the imaginary of the time, its zeitgeist, turns to superheroes and associates them with the image of Bolsonaro and also of some of his allies.

Creation of the Enemy in the Bolsonarist Populist Right

After World War II, Brazil developed a historical construction of the communist enemy as a result of its alignment with the capitalist bloc. This construction comes attached to an idea of chaos and degeneration of society, such as the myth that communists "eat little children". The persecution of people aligned with communism was popularized during Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo and had its greatest expression during the military dictatorship. All these movements were supported

by Catholic doctrine and its leading figures, as well as by the interests of the Brazilian economic elite. These movements elucidate that the Brazilian anti-communist movement had as ideological matrices Catholicism, liberalism and nationalism (Sá Motta, 2002). These same matrices and persecution of enemies, associated with the concern of messing up or degenerating society, are present in Bolsonarism, considered by many authors as a form of right-wing populism.

In populism, some characteristics conceptualize and structure it as: (a) the antagonism between good (the people) and evil (the elites); (b) the presence of an eschatological thought that centralizes a crisis (be it of any kind) that threatens and makes the current political system inadequate; (c) the solution pointed to this crisis is of a "magical" and emotional order and not of a practical order; (d) at the center of the movement there is a charismatic figure, a great leader, a strong man; (e) it is aesthetically transgressive, appealing to the coarse and the rustic, it is irreverent and culturally "popular", where intersections with pop culture would be involved; (f) it is a force capable of transforming institutions and (g) it turns to confrontation appealing to clarity, frankness and direct speech (Tormey, 2019; Zicman de Barros & Lago, 2022). Populism rejects the complexity, or even the gray areas between what is considered "good" and "evil":

It is no wonder that the great rise of populist campaigns in the world coincides with the success of Hollywood-produced Manichean superhero films, which also feature charismatic figures solving crises between "good" and "evil", which are presented without nuance and whose conflict resolution between these forces takes place through supernatural and human powers. The populist leader radiates an unusual charisma, which surpasses the other "enemies", inspires others as superheroes, and thus, apparently, within the logic of populism, the correct thing would be to bring the powerful to power. If the powerful represent the people and the power they deserve simulates a natural order, that power would also radiate to the people.

For Tomás Zicman de Barros and Miguel Lago (2022), the problem of this antagonism is the emergence of a "scapegoat", in this case liberal democracy, with the promise that, by eliminating this obstacle, pacification can be established. In this case, the elites are presented as a group without morals, with a tendency to corrupt itself and which must be eliminated for the good of the people category.

However, both "the people" and "elites" are what Ernesto Laclau (2004) calls "empty signifiers", since there are several meanings for these words in different contexts. As we will see, the meaning of who "the people" and the "elite" really are diverges for antagonists such as Lula and Bolsonaro, for example. The antagonistic expressions, as we will see in the guilty and victim binomial, serve political projects, in fluctuating senses toward values, concepts, narratives, agendas and claims that build collective identities and belongings.

In addition to the "good" and "bad" binaries related to the "us" versus "them" discourse built by Bolsonarist populism, there is also the messianic vision, which brings superheroes closer to the populist repertoire. Some theorists point out that populism is a kind of "political theology" that portrays opposing political positions as "good" and "evil". Although not every form of populism follows this line, Bolsonarism resorts to this discourse, targeting the majority of its audience who identify as Christian. For example, "in Bolsonaro's speech, we find direct appeals to the messianic idea that a miracle had saved him from death by stabbing to defeat the left, presented as an anti-Christian force to be annihilated" (Zicman de Barros, Lago, 2022, p. 106). Therefore, the representation of Bolsonarism as a force for "good" seeks to reinforce, at the same time, the appropriation of signifiers linked to Christian and superheroic senses.

The "good" and "bad" duality of populism and fascism tends to classify itself and its superiors as "us" and its inferiors as "them". A division is similar to "the people" and "elites" of populism or the "culprits" and "victims", and therefore "superheroes/good guys" and "super villains/bad guys".

To oppose the marginal logic (both in the semiotic and spatial as to moral senses) of Brazilian society, in recent years the figure of the "good citizen" has emerged, a virtuous being also belonging to an exceptional collective. However, the image of the "good citizen" is another of the inversions of meanings that we have already seen present in Bolsonarism. The "good citizens" use this comprehensive racism and the structured mentality of domination and superiority, of exceptionality, imprinted in the collective unconscious to metamorphose into "defenders of morality". As Souza (2020, p. 125) points out, the racist in its expanded version starts to be considered "the nation's moral reserve":

> The Brazilian secular racism, the cowardly hatred of the fragile and the unprotected, the pleasure of daily humiliation, typical of the privileged

> classes of all slavery, become not only justified, but celebrated as moral sensitivity, decency, honesty and intelligence.

The same author proposes a broad definition of racism that happens in Brazil, but not only in it, in which "superior humans" and "inferior humans" are contrasted. This contrast is well evidenced, as we talked about in the second chapter in the productions of American cultural sovereignty, which sells its exceptionalism in which its Hollywood productions—here including especially superhero films—books, series, contain narratives in which values and traditions are consumed from childhood by its people, but also by those whom Souza calls the "new black folks", audiences located on the global periphery, in the eternal colonies, such as Latin Americans, Africans and a good part of Asians.

The inclusion of these impressions of values in the global collective unconscious results in a structured mentality in which "ideas cease to be just ideas and also become automatic and pre-reflective emotions, against which no rational defense is anymore possible" (Souza, 2020, p. 33). The separation between superior and inferior humans will also occur within nations such as Brazil, when this pattern of domination is so well mirrored that the national elite starts to feel as if from the United States and adopts the same worldview.

The logic of the "good citizen", which follows this Manicheism of the individuals "good" and "evil" is linked to the adherence to colonialist ideas, especially in the relationship of the Brazilian people when consuming products from English-speaking cultures such as the United States, whose relationship speaks loudly when we analyze the absorption of superheroes by Brazilians as their own. I will then start to exemplify some of these appropriations of United States' superheroes by Brazilians, highlighting street demonstrations, in which the "good citizen" embodies these characters, wearing their clothes.

Superheroes Appropriated by Brazilians in Bolsonarist Street Demonstrations and Other Situations

There were not just a few times when the traditional Brazilian media, as well as the social imaginary of Brazil, linked Bolsonarism to superhero figures. One of the first controversial figures of Bolsonarism, in which it is emphasized that one of the controversies lies in its belonging or not

to such a movement, is the then judge Sérgio Moro. He was responsible for Operation Car Wash that resulted, among other factors, in the arrest of the current president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Because of this action, Moro was considered by many a national hero. During the conduction of Operation Car Wash, in many places, drawings, flags, T-shirts, inflatable dolls, among others, related the figure of Moro with the image of Superman.

Lynch and Casimiro (2022) believe that the exacerbated judiciarism present in the Brazilian state from the Lula government on was one of the causes of the rise of the conversational reactionaryism that elected Jair Bolsonaro. This judiciarism is mainly present under the figure of the ministers of the Federal Supreme Court (Superior Tribunal Federal—STF), who have bequeathed a sense of justice need in the Brazilian population, guaranteed by the judiciary through figures ranging from Joaquim Barbosa, through Sergio Moro and, currently, Alexandre de Moraes. For the authors, judiciarism encouraged "the myth of a virtuous 'civil society' that should take over the reins of the country as opposed to the corrupted political elite" (Lynch & Casimiro, 2022, p. 58).

Lynch and Casimiro say that the judicialization of Brazil was a kind of revolution that left the political system with a "scorched earth", and that along with the economic crisis, demoralized politicians and liquidated the credibility of the New Republic, propitiating the advance of Bolsonarist forces and the rise of Bolsonaro to the executive power of the country. "The process of 'politicization of Justice', of which Car Wash would have been the supreme expression, should preferably be contained by the Supreme Court itself" (Lynch & Casimiro, 2022, p. 161).

Currently, the great exponent of the Brazilian "judicial revolution" is Sérgio Moro, who, with Operation Car Wash tried to mirror the Clean Hands Operation that expropriated the mafia and corruption of the Italian government. Examples of Moro's comparisons with Superman are ubiquitous on the internet and even surpass such references made to other public and political figures with superheroes, even Bolsonaro and Lula. This is because Moro's transformation into a superhero surpasses memes and other user-generated contents (UGCs), and materializes into objects that can be consumed by the public.

Also in 2016, the website UOL Notícias published a photo gallery claiming the emergence of a "MoroMania", in which the former judge turned into products such as T-shirts, dolls and even Easter eggs. In the city of Sorriso, in the state of Mato Grosso, Sérgio Moro was honored

with a giant inflatable doll dressed as Superman on November 24, 2016 (MT Notícias, 2016). Near the 2017 carnival, Saara department stores in Rio de Janeiro sold Super Moro costumes (Blower, 2017). In September 2017, it was Curitiba's turn to win its giant inflatable Super Moro, in which the red color of Superman's uniform was replaced by patriotic green and yellow. The inflatable Super Moro of Curitiba strangled a serpent with his hand, which symbolized corruption (Franco Ramos, 2017).

The Curitiba newspaper Gazeta do Povo was largely responsible for Moro's transformation into a superhero (Prado Junior, 2020), as in Fernando Martins' (2019) article that compares the former judge not only to Superman, but also to Spider-Man and Batman. As for the Batman, the jurist has already revealed himself not only as a great fan, but an assiduous comics reader (Lísias, 2020). General Augusto Heleno, military of the Bolsonarist base, declared in 2019 that Moro is the "symbol of Batman against the Joker" (Estadão Conteúdo, 2019) (Fig. 2).

However, the supervillain sometimes considered anti-hero, Joker, brought more comparisons to Bolsonaro by the media, than to any of his antagonists, such as Lula, Fernando Haddad and Alexandre de Moraes.



Fig. 2 Montage with some of the various portrayals of former judge Sérgio Moro as different superheroes available on the internet (*Source* Prepared by the author on Google Images)

The covers of IstoÉ magazine of November 11, 2020, and Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil, of April 2021, presented Bolsonaro as a Joker. In 2019, actor Joaquin Phoenix plays Batman's archenemy in theaters, Joker, bringing the character to prominence worldwide due to his promotion as the protagonist of his own film.

That same year, Filipe Martins, Jair Bolsonaro's international affairs advisor, criticized the film and accused the character of being a "Godless leftist" (Bolsonaro's Adivisor…, 2019). As I have already analyzed in another opportunity (Smee, 2021), the Joker is a character who resorts to *camp*, but mainly to the absurd, in the sense of Albert Camus (2004), which associate him with amorality and unethical behavior.

In this sense, far from the spectrum of the left that aims at the well-being of plurality, the Joker can be associated with Bolsonaro and his disregard for human life during the COVID-19 Pandemic, in which more than 700,000 people died as a result of the president's actions. As I discussed on that occasion, "placing suicide, homicide, or even genocide in fictional terms is not a way of judging and stipulating whether or not life is worth living, but it is a way of understanding the absurd situation in which the Joker lives" (Smee, 2021, p. 120). Bolsonaro also puts genocide in fictional terms, becoming analogous to a comic book supervillain who values the absurd as a technique of shock and contempt for human life.

Allying the Joker with a political spectrum is part of this absurdity in which Bolsonarism immersed the existences of Brazilians. As part of this sentiment, the Reactionary Joker (Coringa Reaça) appeared on the streets during the March for Jesus on July 9, 2022. He is the alter-ego of the merchant Renato Nascimento, who believes that his character is a "Joker of good". Fighting for a "free Brazil", Nascimento was once dependent on narcotics and, according to him, found salvation in the word of God (Matias, 2022). Under the pseudonym of Reactionary Joker, Nascimento ran for the position of federal deputy in the state of São Paulo for the PRTB (Brazilian Labor Renewal Party) in the 2022 elections (Fig. 3).

Political position candidates that "borrow" the fame of superheroes to seek to be sworn in are not new in Brazil. The portal of the Portuguese newspaper Diário de Notícias highlighted the following about "superhero candidates" in the 2018 election in Brazil:

> Superheroes are a classic. But given the moral crisis exposed by Operation Car Wash, they are more fashionable in the 2018 elections than ever. There



Fig. 3 Covers of the magazines IstoÉ and Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil bringing Bolsonaro as Joker and, in the center, the Reactionary Joker, Renato Nascimento (*Source* Prepared by the author)

> are two Batman and one Robin in the race to one of 513 seats in the House of Representatives. A Hulk, a Flash, a Captain America, a Robocop and even a SpongeBob. This time, contrary to what is usual, there is only one Superman, but the candidate Clark Crente (Believer Clark) can enter the same category, who has the face of actor Christopher Reeve, the usual glasses, and uses a pun in his nom de guerre to demonstrate that he is religious. (Almeida Moreira, 2018)

In São Luís, Maranhão, in the pro-Bolsonaro demonstrations on June 30, 2019, another superhero emerged, the enthusiast and defender of the Brazilian monarchy, Captain Brazil, embodied by businessman and cosplayer[3] Walter Melo. According to an interview with Veja SP (Rosário, 2020), Melo informed that the suit cost 2,400 BRL and was made to order by a cosmaker[4] from Goiânia.

Among the symbols present on Melo's superhero uniform is the Cross of the Order of Christ, which dates back to the Knights Templar. The

[3] Cosplayer*:* neologism that comes from the joining of the English words costume and player. These are people who often dress up as fictional characters and often play them.

[4] Cosmaker*:* derives from the word cosplayer and joins the words costume with maker. It refers to those who produce the cosplayer costume. The cosplayer and cosmaker are often the same person.

monarchical Captain Brazil also brings in his clothing references to the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) and contains green in honor of the house of Bragança and yellow in allusion to the house of Habsburg, to which belongs the Empress Leopoldina. He wields a flag of Brazil from the times of the Empire and bears the letter "B", from Brazil, replacing the "A" of Captain America on his helmet. In addition, of course, to carrying a toy pistol (Fig. 4).

Still in the field of anonymous characters who use superheroes to promote their figure, is cosplayer Agatha Isabel, who dresses as the superheroine Rogue, of the mutant team X-Men, and calls herself "Right-wing Rogue". Agatha first came to media attention in a photograph of Reuters news agency's Ueslei Marcelino, which served to illustrate the report on demonstrations for and against Bolsonaro in June 2020 (Reuters, 2020).

The cosplayer took advantage of the fact that the colors that the character Rogue wears, green and yellow, relate to the Brazilian flag, a symbol appropriated by Bolsonarism, to express its support for the politician.



Fig. 4 Walter Melo, Captain Brazil who supports the return of the Brazilian monarchy (*Source* See SP. Available at: https://vejasp.abril.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/capis.jpg)

She then founded a Facebook fan page called "Mutants of the Right[5]", which had the description "heroes and heroines in pursuit of democracy and freedom of speech. "The right-wing nerd page". On the page you can find misogynistic and LGBTQIA+-phobic publications, which stand against the "gender ideology". The Right-wing Rogue is one of the few women who use the iconology of superheroes to defend the agenda of the new right and Bolsonarism (Fig. 5).

The appropriate superheroes in all their productions are a sample of emerging Bolsonarism, but established Bolsonarists seem to be more enthralled with the superheroes of the seventh art. Even with the disagreements between Jair Bolsonaro and Mark Ruffalo, whom Bolsonaro made fun of by calling "Mark Ruffles", his movie character, Hulk, inhabited the then president's imaginary. During the 2022 Brazilian presidential race, big names in the Brazilian economy, such as the creators of the Plano Real, supported the candidacy of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. In response to this, Bolsonaro, on his Twitter account,made a reference to a dialogue from the film Avengers (2010), to praise the qualities of his Minister of Economy,Paulo Guedes. In the dialogue, posted as a meme on Twitter



Fig. 5 Agatha Isabel, the Right-wing Rogue, in a Pro-Bolsonaro Demonstration (*Source* Adapted by the author from photos collected on the Facebook fanpage "Mutants of the Right")

[5] Facebook Fan page, available at https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=mutantesareita. Accessed on October 28, 2022.

on October 6, 2022, Hulk's name is replaced by that of Paulo Guedes (Fig. 6).

Two days before the decisive vote of the second round of the 2022 presidential elections, several actors who played superheroes in the cinema joined Mark Ruffalo to declare their rejection of Jair Bolsonaro's victory in the election. The first of these was Jason Momoa, who plays Aquaman in theaters, posting an Instagram story declaring his support for Lula. Then, instigated by netizens, it was the turn of Samuel L. Jackson



Fig. 6 Meme published on Jair Bolsonaro's Twitter account, parodying the first Avengers movie. Image translation: Loki: "I have Arminio Fraga, Meireles, Edmar, Malan, Ciro and Persio Arida". Tony Stark: "And we have Guedes" (*Source* Twitter)

(Nick Fury), who called "Avengers, assemble!", to call his fictional teammates Robert Downey Jr.(Iron Man), Chris Hemsworth (Thor), Don Cheadle (War Machine) and Benedict Wong (Wong) to speak out against Bolsonaro's re-election.

Before the actors of the Avengers film series and the Aquaman star spoke, in addition to Ruffalo, other Hollywood celebrities had also spoken in aversion to Bolsonaro's victory. Leonardo DiCaprio and Mark Hamill. The latter played hero Luke Skywalker in the worldwide hit sci-fi film series, Star Wars (Ramon, 2022).

In a report for The Telegraph about the use by netizens of Marvel superheroes to satirize the Ukrainian War through memes, the author of the article reached the following conclusion, which can be extended to superheroes manipulated by Bolsonarism:

> The online obsession with fictional superheroes as a reference point shows us two new things: first, that young people have become so obsessed with a cultural invention that their sense of reality has become blurred; and second, that these same people struggle to have faith in the abilities of forces that, without their intention, exist on a planet full only of cannons and tanks, rather than multiverses and super-strong hammers. (Platt, 2022)

Folk Devils and Folk Heroes

Everything in the Bolsonarist way of thinking seems to aim at the development of a moral panic, according to the theories developed by Stanley Cohen (2011) when analyzing the constant altercations between the mods and rocker tribes in the United Kingdom of the 1950s. For Cohen, moral panic is a state of generalized and collectivized alarm, motivated by events and understandings that cause a disruption in the daily lives of the public. This moral panic would be instilled by the media. In Cohen's analysis, newspapers, magazines and television, in short, the journalism in general of the time that, when discussing these topics exhaustively, develops a feeling of insecurity in the population. At the same time as moral panic grows, the media and the public choose their folk devils who would be the embodiment of that feeling of dread and who could only quell the state of alarm in which the community finds itself.

Some examples of moral panic in the discourse of Bolsonarism are the dissemination of the fake news of the "gay kit" and the "dick baby bottle". Its goal was to foment fears of alleged indoctrination by left-wing

leaders in building an agenda labeled "gender ideology". The purpose of this preaching would be to convince children to become feminists or LGBTQIAPN+, thus shaking the traditional Brazilian family as the basis of society (Vicardi, 2020).

Bolsonarism has also largely used digital platforms to spread fake news and moral panic to manufacture the enemies of this movement. At the same time that Bolsonarism created "folk devils", it also gave rise to the "folk heroes" who fight against them. One of the first heroes of Bolsonarism was former judge Sérgio Moro, who incarcerated Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and prevented him from running in the 2018 elections. But this conception has extended to Jair Bolsonaro and other allies who follow his mindset.

As Flinders and Woods (2015) establish, politicians have traditionally been identified as a "moral barricade" and the current democratic system has witnessed a cycle of heroic expectations, in which they occur through explosions and implosions, causing the image of politicians to alternate between folk heroes and folk devils. These Manichean cycles of politicians denote the fragility of democracy. Davis (1985) brings to the discussion that when moral limits undergo reassessment or review by attacks, for example in the wake of a type of revolution, moral uncertainty can lead to great anxiety or "moral panic" and require a reaffirmation or redefinition of moral limits.

Thinking about the case of superheroes appropriated by Bolsonarism, the themes of borders or moral barricades are emphasized when Jeffrey A. Brown (2011, p. 78) points out that "in essence, the superhero genre deals with borders [...] Specific plots are almost irrelevant, what superheroes repeatedly enact for readers is a policing of boundaries between key concepts of culture: good and evil, right and wrong, us and them". Therefore, superheroes and politicians are the guardians of morality, which separate good from evil in society.

Flinders and Woods (2015) establish a contrary process, but intrinsic to the demonization and creation of folk devils during periods of moral panic. For them, the identification of politicians as folk heroes creates a process of deification in times of moral euphoria, promoting a mirroring of the process defined by Cohen. Both processes are catalyzed by mainstream media and digital platforms. The definitions of these processes and their mirroring can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1 From folk devils to folk heroes: developments of the mirror image

Theory Moral Panic—the momentarily intense, disproportionate, and dramatic manifestation of shock, anxiety, and hatred within society concerning the presumed morally deviant behavior of "folk devils" *Concept Folk Devil*—the agent of social concern (group, community, individual) that is feared by society due to the presumed moral deviancy of its behavior *Process Demonization*—the process of symbolization, framing, and discursive commentary through which certain agents become associated with almost devil-like qualities	**LINE OF REFRACTION**	*Moral Euphoria*—the momentarily intense, disproportionate, and dramatic manifestation of joy, relief, and hope within society concerning the presumed morally righteous behavior of "folk heroes." *Folk Hero*—the agent of social concern (group, community, individual) that is loved and held in awe by society due to the presumed moral fortitude of its behavior *Deification*—the process of symbolization, framing, and discursive commentary through which certain agents become associated with almost God-like qualities

Source Flinders and Woods (2015, p. 644)

Final Considerations

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has already been seen in Brazil as both a devil and a folk hero, in a cycle of repetitions, proving what the semioticist of culture Iuri Lotman (2021, p. 91) postulated saying that "the constant change between one's own and another and another and one's own is one of the most fundamental mechanisms of the dynamics of cultures". Through the mirroring system between heroes and folk devils of Flinders and Woods (2015), I understand that otherness is also built through the construction of hegemony. The latter understood here as "a multi-layered system from which a dominant group achieves power not through coercion, but through the production of a system of interconnected ideas that convinces people of righteousness of any set of ideas and perspectives often contradictory" (Halberstam, 2000, p. 22).

Hegemony also constructs the marginal identities of society, which are discarded from positive representations and which do not present them as heroes, but as devils, either by the entertainment media, by the information media or even by UGCs of digital platforms. Hegemony undoes the feeling of otherness, creating a look at the other distorted, supremacist

and loaded with prejudices creating parallels between heroes and folk devils in extreme cases, such as those related to politicians and topics of interest to society. The association of Bolsonarist protesters with superheroic figures is a reflection of this portrait, in the case of Bolsonarism, especially a portrait widely reiterated on digital platforms.

On the other hand, Bolsonarism, built through the logic of mockery and trolling, absorbs at the same time senses of villainy, as in the Reactionary Joker, superheroic senses presented by the Right-wing Rogue or even diffuse, without a direct relationship with a specific character, such as the case of the monarchist Captain Brazil. The relationship woven between the Joker and the absurd is also something to be highlighted about the thematic street demonstrations of the superhero universe. Trolling and mocking deal with humor that also has roots in that which baffles, which breaks with the established and, for this reason, is reproduced, or even goes viral, to use a language of the digital age.

Also for Bolsonarism, what fits within the scope[6] of trolling[7] is "mitagem" (mythation), the act of "mitar" (mything), so widespread by Bolsonaro, elevated to the role of Myth or Bolsomito (Bolso-myth). The act of "mitar" (act as a myth) is, at the same time, synonymous with the closure of a discussion, as its mirror, the "lacração" (similar to wokeism), as an act in which a certain imaginary of superiority is evidenced. "Mitar" and "lacração" are similar to Gerson's Law, in which the Brazilian always needs to have an advantage over the others or even have an advantage against the other and the collective "us" subjugates "them". They are also similar to exacerbations of feelings involved in the development of moral panic or moral euphoria.

In this direction, the imaginary of Bolsonarism seems to work in a way as paradoxical as its discourse, that sells itself as anti-system, anti-political and anti-partisan, but at the same time co-opts with hegemonies

[6] The culture of mocking is approached by Gabriela Monteiro Lunardi and Jean Burgess (2020) as a typically Brazilian way of breaking down social barriers through humor. Such behavior approximates Bakhtin's concept of carnivalization, in which lower-class cultures are extolled during this time interval and can be equated with elites through jokes and pranks.

[7] Troll culture, as defined by Claire Hardaker (2010) is a system where troll identity is built through a desire to belong to a group, whose actions involve professing or transmitting intentions that purport to be sincere, but which have the real intention of causing disturbances and/or triggering or exacerbating conflicts for the purpose of having fun of their own.

without seeking to break them, but to revert them in favor of itself. The construction of an "otherness" in many quotation marks, which structures both the senses of those who are allies and those who are adversaries, outlining quite prominently the boundaries between oneself and others, between us and them, between what they consider good or evil. However, when they seek spread and virility in traditional media or digital platforms, what is worth seeking is attention, whether through an imaginary or distorted discourse. This distortion mirrors the street demonstrations in Bolsonaro's own actions in his speeches and ways of presenting himself in political life and on digital platforms.

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Populism, Enemies and Threat Construction, and Otherness: How Populists Use Othering Rhetoric to Get Reelected to Remain in Power. The Case of Viktor Orbán 2028 Election

Erica Resende and Camilla Monteiro Freire

Introduction

Populism has gained increasingly attention in recent times. Frequently associated with the personalization of power and of decision-making, it is often characterized by "direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001, p. 14). In general, authors point to the anti-elitist and anti-pluralist character of the phenomenon, as well as rhetoric adopted by populist leaders that they alone represent the will of the "people" (Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Weyland, 2001, 2017). Regardless of their

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ideology, populists present themselves as the authentic representatives and defenders of their peoples against real—or imagined—enemies and threats. This has led several authors to focus on the features of charismatic leadership by populists in power (Subedi & Scott, 2021). Indeed, the scholarship tells us that populist leaders will rather be more personalistic when compared to non-populist ones, as, according to their distinctive understanding of politics, "they, and they alone, represent the people" (Müller, 2016, p. 3).

However, looking at the most recent trends of the phenomenon, while plenty of populist leaders might be fast in rising to power through elections, only a few are successful in remaining in power. For example, while Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro received massive voting in 2016 and 2018, respectively, they failed to get reelected for a second term. At the same time, populists like Recep Erdogan, Viktor Orbán, and Vladimir Putin have been successful in securing reelections and remaining in power. Therefore, it is important to investigate how populism can sustain itself over time.

This article investigates the discursive strategies employed by populists to remain in power. More specifically, why do some populists get reelected while others fail to do so. Our working hypothesis is that successful populists will use Othering[1] rhetoric to create real—or imaginary—existential threats to the "people" based narratives of a permanent, social crisis that shatters the ontological security of the electorate. In short, they engage in Othering practices in order to mobilize popular support and thus build their own legitimacy as protector of the nation in peril. This would explain why Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro failed to get reelected in the USA and in Brazil, while Recep Erdogan and Vladimir Putin remain in power since 2003 and 2008 in Turkey and Russia, respectively.

As our case study, we explore the populist rhetoric of Viktor Orbán, respectively, during his election campaign of 2018. We will show how Orbán used a rhetoric strategy based on the (re)production of a populist logic predicted on an antagonistic divide in the social body that puts the "people" in opposition to the "elites" and any different "Other". More than understanding the conditions of possibility of populism in Hungary, we are interested in understanding how this phenomenon maintains itself

[1] Coherent with the Lacanian theoretical framework regarding social identity construction, we use the capital letter on purpose.

over time, hence our choice to looking into cases of successful reelection of populist leaders.

This chapter is divided is three main parts. First, we will present our theoretical framework. More specifically, we will discuss the concept of populism, how it relates to Otherness, and the social construction of threats and enemies. In the second part, we will present and analyze the data collected in the empirical cases. In terms of methodology, we will use Lynn-Doty (1993)'s model of presupposition, predication, and subject positioning to help me understand how populist leaders construct articulations of the "people" and their "Others". The third section of paper will discuss the empirical findings in regard to Othering practices adopted by Órban in 2018. At the end, we will offer concluding remarks.

Populism, Otherness, and the Social Construction of Threats and Enemies

The origin of the term populism dates to the late nineteenth century, first used to refer to political movements that took place on both sides of the Atlantic, such as the emergence of the People Party in the USA,[2] and of Boulangism in France.[3] Back then, "populism" conveyed the notion of how the "people", mostly rural in that period, could authoritatively take back power from corrupt and selfish elites (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). In the twentieth century, the term was mostly used to describe Latin American leaders, who, to respond to the 1929 economic crisis, adopted redistributive policies, and thus were able to build heterogeneous class alliances to remain in power (Germani, 1978).[4] However, it was only in the late 1990s, early 2000s—following a new wave of populist leaders both in Europe and in Latin America—that populism started to be treated as

[2] The People's Party, also known as the Populist Party, was a left-wing agrarian political party from the late nineteenth century in the Southern and Western United States. It collapsed after the 1896 presidential election.

[3] Boulangism was the movement that failed to put in power French general Georges-Ernest-Jean-Marie Boulanger (1837–1891). The Boulanger affair operated a major political realignment, leading indirectly to the creation of twentieth-century democratic socialism and directly to the constitution of a new right, beginning to free itself from the hopeless cause of restoring the monarchy.

[4] 1940s and 1950s leaders such as Getúlio Vargas (Brazil), Juan Peron (Argentina), and Larazo Cardenas (Mexico) illustrated what scholars called "classic populism" (De la Torre & Arnson, 2013).

global phenomenon rather than as isolated cases in a comparative perspective (De la Torre, 2015; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Krastev, 2016; Mudde, 2007; Weyland, 2001).

Over the last few decades, at least five definitions of populism stand out in current scholarship: populism as a political strategy (Weyland, 2001, 2017), as a political logic (Laclau, 2005, 2013), as a shallow ideology (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), and as a political style (Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). For the purpose of this article, we follow Ernesto Laclau's definition of populism as a phenomenon with a specific political logic. As further explained by his collaborator, Chantal Mouffe, populism should be understood as "a discursive strategy for the construction of a political frontier, dividing society into two fields and appealing to the mobilization of the "excluded" against "those who they are in power" (Mouffe, 2018, p. 25). As a result, this definition allows me to see populism as a "political process of construction of collective identities, with centrality to the idea of the people" (Lopes & Mendonça, 2013, p. 12), which is constructed against the notion of a threat or enemy.

As Laclau himself once clarified, populism is a three-side structure that involves "the unification of a plurality of demands in a chain of equivalence; the constitution of an internal frontier, which divides society into two fields; and a popular identity that is quantitatively greater than the simple sum of equivalences (Laclau, 2013, p. 128). Although the logic of equivalence allows for a new subjectivity, that of "the people", "there is no totalization without exclusion" (Laclau, 2013, p. 130). As a result, for "the people" to emerge, the exterior to this new subjectivity must be articulated as well. Therefore, the exterior must be differentiated and excluded. As Laclau explains: "[t]he only possibility of having a true exterior would be that this exterior was not neutral element, but excluded, something that the totality expels from itself to constitute itself" (Laclau, 2013, p. 118). Hence, from this perspective, the identity of the "people" and the "Other" are political constructions, and "symbolically constituted through the relationship of antagonism" (Panizza, 2005, p. 3).

Unlike other approaches to the concept of populism, Laclau's definition posits it as an ontology, that is, it is presented as a being in itself, as having its own logic. Populism is a way of "constructing the political" (Laclau, 2013, p. 28). From this point of view, Laclau does not consider populism as being inherently good or bad. As a result, populism is seen as a bottom-up political logic, built from the equivalence between popular demands, which builds a new identity of "the people" that is

antagonistically opposed to its "Other". This allows us to understand how populists engage in politics of antagonism mobilizing affect and emotions to unify the "people" against imaginary threats and enemies. In this sense, "there are neither people nor their enemies constructed a priori, as both are product of the antagonistic relationship itself. The people and their enemies are political constructions" (Mendonça & Resende, 2021, p. 12).

We seek to explain the way in which othering rhetoric, that is, the language that converts mere difference into Otherness based on binaries and hierarchies, thus (re)constituting subjectivities by creating existential enemies and threats. Simply put, populist leaders bring forth "the people" by giving them a radical, threating Other. As a result, they mobilize the electorate that, seized by fear, and anxieties, comes together and unifies around the call to defend the nation under peril. The success in constructing threats and enemies in political campaigns would then explain why some populists are able to get reelected and stay in power—like Orbán—while others fail reelection, like Trump and Bolsonaro.

Following Lacan's mirror-stage model (Lacan, 1977), the construction of the Self is seen through its representation in the mirror, where the signifiers rejected by its identification are given to an imaginary Other, that is, in the search for such a subjective constitution, by recognizing itself as an "I", inevitably, would recognize what it was not. The Other, therefore, is understood from a series of differences in relation to the "I", whether from the individual point of view, of a certain group or at the national level. Within this perspective, as the Other is constituted by everything that is not recognized in the Self, depending on the quality of such differentiation, positive or negative, the Other is affirmed as worthy of love or as undesirable.

In the same way, Laclau (1996) suggests that identity, including collective identity within the antagonistic logic, is constituted through relations of difference with the Other. Thus, the Other must have within itself the signifier of threat, chaos, instability, and negativity so that the Self can articulate itself in its opposition. And considering that identity is not a fixed category, it needs continuous reaffirmation (Lacan, 1977). From this perspective, the Self sees itself inserted in a reality of uncertainties, contingencies, and weaknesses regarding the status, power, and opportunities that are granted to it (Connolly, 1991). It starts to experience more and more uncertainty and anxiety that, in turn, end up generating a generalized resentment toward the Other, who is then recognized in opposition

to everything that is constituted and recognized in the Self. Differences become Otherness: something bad, essentialized, and stereotyped. "Identity requires difference to be and converts difference into Otherness, in order to guarantee its own certainty" (Connolly, 1991, p. 54).

The challenges, anxieties, and fears associated with the socio-political challenges of the new times—fear of unemployment, fear of strangers, fear of losing values and traditions, fear of climate change, disappointment and disgust with dominant politics and corruption, anger about growing numbers of social inequality, in addition to culturally local fears (Pels, 2012), they are capable of instigating and producing ontological insecurity. From there, around national, religious, mythological, and ethnic narratives, populist discourses can offer, in contrast to the insecurities previously presented, a sense of belonging, familiarity, and control, by rewarding personal and social ties, increasing the status and self-esteem of the "people" (Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Silke, 2008).

From this perspective, the use of a recurring discourse of crisis, via the presentation of enemies and threats, is capable of, by constructing gaps in people's sense of ontological security, "amplify the negative image that voters have of themselves, of the country they live in, and the challenges they face" (Homolar & Scholz, 2019, p. 346). This rhetoric makes people mobilize around leaders who present themselves as their true representatives, who will act and defend them against perceived existential. Curiously, this same rhetoric depends on the (re)production of the very ontological insecurity it promises to eradicate (Homolar & Scholz, 2019).

Analyzing Orbán's Rhetoric of Otherness

In this section, we will present the data collected on Orbán's election campaign of 2018. In terms of methodology, we use Lynn-Doty's model of presupposition, predication, and subject positioning to help me understand how populist leaders construct articulations of the "people" and their "Others"—the elite or any other (re)constructed subjectivities in antagonism to the "people". Here I will identify the constitutive elements of the enemy and threat construction discourses employed by Orbán in his 2018 electoral cycles. This will allow us to demonstrate that the use of rhetoric based on Otherness has proven to be a successful strategy for populists to remain in power.

In her article on US counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines in the 1950s, Lynn-Doty (1993) pointed that the power inherent in language is not centralized nor derived from a pre-constituted subject: rather, it is dispersed and produces the subjects and their realities. She applies the concepts of presupposition, predication, and subject positioning as textual analysis mechanisms to understand "how discursive practices constitute subjects and objects and organize them into an 'intelligibility grid'" (Lynn-Doty, 1993, p. 306). In this sense, discourse not only creates subjects, and their respective identities, but positions them among themselves. By using this method, we can identify subjects, identities attributed to them, relationships established between them, and the expected behaviors for each one, as well as insights about agency.

Our analysis seeks to understand how Orbán's electoral discourses construct his own populist logic, that is, how does he create, characterize, and position the "people" and their antagonistic "Others". Furthermore, we will also investigate how this strategy of construction of Otherness is instrumentalized through discursive constructions that foster a perspective of permanent crisis by creating fear and a sense of ontological insecurity in the electorate, guaranteeing them not only the necessary support regarding elections, but also the maintenance of the populist logic. After looking into the context of such discourses, we mapped the subjects that fall within the constructions of the "people" and their "Others", as well as their floating signifiers.[5] Afterward, we will identify the modes of presupposition, predication, and positioning of subjects. For this purpose, we have selected a sample that contains three speeches delivered by Orbán during Fidesz's 2018 election campaign: the State of Nation Address, held in Budapest on February 8 (Hungary, 2018a); the speech for the 170th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, held on March 16, also in Budapest (Hungary, 2018b); and the speech made by

[5] The theory of mapping floating signifiers, as formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), concerns the analysis of articulatory practices that build and organize the social environment. In this sense, a given discourse seeks to articulate discursive elements in order to bring them together within a single totality. As Laclau (2005, 2013) shows us when analyzing populism as a political logic, so that the "people" can constitute a new identity, it is necessary to crystallize a chain of equivalence, via naming by identifying a "empty signifier", that is, a form without a determinate content. Because it has no a priori meaning, the signifier floats and can then be filled with any meaning. In this way, floating signifiers make it possible for something particular to come to represent totality.

Orbán at the closing of the campaign, which took place on April 7th in Székesfehérvár (Hungary, 2018c).

In the discourse on "the people", the terms Hungarians, Hungarian people, and Hungary are among the 10 most cited nouns in the analyzed speeches, representing respectively 0.28% of the sample (26 times), 0.48% (45 times) and 0.57% (54 times). Furthermore, the frequent use of personal and possessive pronouns related to such nouns as we, us, our, ours—we, us, our(s), our(s)—which together represent 5.98% of the sample (564 times) (Table 1).

The modes of presupposition and predication of the subjects who refer to the "people" in the sample—Hungarians, Hungarian people, and Hungary—point to the construction of the Hungarian identity as a Christian one: brave, resilient, generous, hardworking, honorable, but at imminent risk. In this sense, "the people" must continue to fight for

Table 1 Presupposition and predication of subjects related to the "people" in Orbán's electoral speeches

Hungarians *Hungarian people*	*Hungary*	
better trained	decent	well
better educated	loved	organized
more employable	under	nation of
opposing migration	invasion	culture
false modest	threated	Christian
united	free	land of
generous		Hungarian
deep tolerant		
the heirs of the 1848 revolution		
freedom fighters		
calm		
good-humored		
hard working		
resilient		
have nothing to fear		
have an obsessive desire to look the future		
have something to defend		
are up against media outlets maintained by foreign concerns and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking protest organizers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator, summed up by and embodied in the name "George Soros"		

their freedom and independence, as well as to remain united to be able to enjoy prosperous future.

> I believe that we, Hungarians, have a future if we remain Hungarian: if we cultivate the Hungarian language, defend our Christian and Hungarian culture, and preserve independence and Hungarian freedom. Well now, dear friends, this is the Hungarian model, and – as far as I can see – it works. Appreciating hard work, supporting families, retaining national identity, and preserving independence: this is the future – and this future can be ours. (Hungary, 2018a, s/p)

At the same time, other subjectivities are constituted (Table 2) in contrast to the notion of "the people"—*George Soros, Western Europe/European Leaders, Brussels, Opposition Parties, Islamic civilization/Muslims, and (Im)migration/(Im)migrant/Mass population movements*.[6] Among the 10 most cited nouns in the speeches, George Soros appears 18 times (0.19% of the sample). Furthermore, *Western Europe/European Leaders* appear 8 times (0,08%), *Brussels* appears 10 times (0,11%), *Opposition Parties/Opposition Candidates* appear 7 times (0,07%), *Islamic civilization/Islamic World/Muslims* appear 5 times (0,05%) and *(Im)migration/(Im)migrant/Mass population movements* appear 23 times (0.25%). Oppositional pronouns (they, them, theirs, as well as they, them, their(s), their(s))—reflecting the deixis—represent 1.15% of the sample, with 109 repetitions.

In contrast to the positive qualifications bestowed to "the people", the terms above are qualified in a negative way. Adjectives such as "liar", "dangerous", "weak", "failed", "opposer" as well as verbs such as "to threat" (the people), "to endanger" (women, the people), "to cast aside" (the European culture), "to fight" (Hungary) are used to characterize actions carried out by Soros, EU/Brussels, EU institutions and leaders, as well as political parties in the opposition, thus constructed as the radical Other in opposition the Hungarian people.

In this sense, the modes of predication and presupposition indicate the construction of a grid of intelligibility for making sense of the upcoming general elections: Hungary is composed of good, honorable, honest, and warrior "people", endowed with unique qualities, in contrast to evil

[6] Certain words with similar meanings were grouped for the purposes of the analysis.

Table 2 Presupposition and predication of subjects related to "Others" in Orbán's electoral speeches

George Soros	*Western Europe* *European Leaders*	*Brussels*
international speculator	are losing their countries	is not defending Europe
opposition ally	migrant zone	it is not halting migration
opposition force	looks at migration flows with its hands raised in surrender	wants to support and organize migration
forces acceptance for migration and migration	have no intention of defending the borders	wants to dilute the population of Europe and replace it
finances a network of international NGOs	want to let in the migrants	wants to cast aside Europe culture, way of life, and everything which separates and distinguishes Europeans from the other peoples of the world
has picked a fight with Hungary, British, president Trump and Israelis	place of forced coalitions and liberal media dictates	wants that Hungary adopts policies that open the way for the decline of Christian culture and expansion of Islam
	under dark clouds	
	will soon come under horrendous pressure	
	have become migrant countries	
	is occupied without realizing it	

Opposition parties	*Islamic civilization* *Muslims*	*(Im)migration* *(Im)migrants* *Mass population movements*
liars Soros' candidates do not fight for Hungarian people sow hatred anemic serve outside interests will dismantle the border fence and accept the mandatory resettlement quotas handed down from Brussels threat people with prison, nationalization and a new change of system come up with the idea than Islam is the last hope for humanity denied the reality of migration failed to understand the mood of the times denied the reality of the mandatory migrant quota and the Soros Plan	has always seen its mission as the conversion of Europe to what it calls the true faith majority of migrants that will arrive	is the rust which would slowly but surely consume our country threatens the everyday security that we take for granted brings with it the increased threat of terrorism endanger women from violent attacks invaders imminent danger

"Others", invaders, conspirators, who put at risk the independence, prosperity, identity, and future of the Hungarian nation. Thus, it appears from the analysis that the meanings for the subjects who refer to the "people" and their "Others" depend on binary oppositions such as: Hungarians/(im)migrants, national/international, we-us/they-them.

> **[T]he greatest threat of all is posed by the millions of migrants** coming from the South, **and Europe's leaders** – in partnership with a billionaire speculator – have no intention of defending the borders, but want to let in the migrants. **We are up against media outlets maintained by foreign concerns** and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking protest organisers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator, summed up by and embodied in the name "George Soros". This is the world we must fight with in order to defend that which is ours. **[T]hey want us to voluntarily hand our country over to others**, over a period of a few decades. They want us to hand it over to foreigners coming from other continents, who do not speak our language, and who do not respect our culture, our laws, or our way of life: people who want to replace what is ours with what is theirs. (Hungary, 2018b, s/p, our stress)

The presupposition that anchors the above binary oppositions is the assumption that there would be an imminent danger (mass Islamic[7] migration) that would not only threaten Hungarian Christian life, values, and culture, but the whole of Europe. At the same time, international institutions, Western European governments, and opposition parties would be associated with "elites" and are presented as defenders of international interests, since they "defend migration" and, therefore, are presented as enemies of the Hungarian "people". Elections are constructed discursively as a key moment for defining the future. "Everyone who wants to preserve Hungary as a Hungarian country must go out and vote, and must cast both their votes for Fidesz. Only this is safe. Everything else is a gamble, and could sweep our future into danger" (Hungary, 2018c, s/p).

[7] In terms of rhetoric, Orbán appears not to distinguish between "Islamic" and "Muslim", broadly favoring the former in his political campaign. Although we do recognize that both groups are distinct, we have opted to use "Islamic" to be more reflective of the sample.

The affective dimension of this Othering rhetoric is also present here. In addition to inciting fear in the electorate regarding migration of Muslims, as well as fear about the possibility of the opposition's victory, there is an emotional, passionate, country-loving tone in the language used by Orbán to constitute the identity of the "people".

> We passionately love Hungary, and are ready to do everything we can for it. Being Hungarian means that we love our homeland and respect one another. The good soldier does not fight because he hates that which is facing him, but because he loves that which is behind him. He loves Hungary and Hungarians. (Hungary, 2018c, s/p)

The binary opposition Hungarians/(im)migrants is based on a narrative that creates insecurity in the electorate in regard to the arrival of—supposedly—Muslim migrants that would threaten not Hungary's progress and security, but of Hungarian families. Islamic migrants are presented as an existential threat to the very Hungarian national identity and its Christian values.

> The situation is that those **who do not halt migration at their borders are lost: slowly but surely, they are consumed**. (…) **The young of Western Europe will see this when they become minorities in their own countries**, and they have lost the only place in the world that could be called home. (Hungary, 2018b, s/p, our stress)

> Tell everyone that **migration is the rust which would slowly but surely consume our country**. Tell everyone that we would have to provide for migrants. If resettlement commences, economic growth will be for nothing: there will be nothing from which to support families; and there will be nothing from which to pay pensions. Tell everyone that **mass migration threatens the everyday security** that we take for granted. **Mass migration brings with it the increased threat of terrorism**. It is as clear as day: where there is mass migration, women are in danger from violent attacks. (Hungary, 2018c, s/p, our stress)

The national/international binary opposition is based on a narrative that Western European governments, represented mainly by Berlin, Paris, and Brussels (here broadly understood as EU institutions), rather than fighting Islamic migration, would facilitate their arrival in Hungary by

"letting migrants in", "forcing migration", or even because they display no "the will and ability to stop these processes or reverse them".

> So please do not forget that we must not deliver the fate of the country into the hands of the **internationalists**. (…) **Brussels is not defending Europe** and itis not halting migration, but wants to support it and organise it. It wants to dilute the population of Europe and to replace it. (…) **This danger to us comes from politicians in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris**. (...) They want us to also accept migrants and to also become countries with mixed populations. (Hungary, 2018a, s/p, our stress)

George Soros is constantly brought up by Orbán as synonymous with an international conspiracy that wants to bring migrants into Hungary. Curiously, Soros seems to embody all the subjectivity opposed to "the people": migrants, the opposition parties, media and international NGOs, Brussels, and the governments of Western Europe. In a way, which borders on conspiracy theories, Soros is presented as the ultimate existential enemy of a Christian Hungary.

> [W]e shall fight against what **the empire of George Soros** is doing to Hungary, and what it wants to do to Hungary. (Hungary, 2018b, s/p, our stress)

> The forces opposing us, **George Soros's network** and the international bureaucrats he has bought, have in no way given up. We understand that **George Soros's organisations** have not only installed themselves in Brussels and Budapest, but also in New York, at the UN. We understand that they are spending incalculable sums of money on pushing through acceptance for migration at a global level. We understand that Soros has picked a fight not only with us, but also with the British, President Trump and the Israelis. **And everywhere the topic is the same: forcing acceptance for migration and migration**. (Hungary, 2018a, s/p, our stress)

Finally, the binary opposition We-us/They-them is built not only by opposing Hungarians against migrants, and Hungarian interests against international ones, but also opposing "the people" to the domestic "elite", here represented by the parties of opposition. They are described as "oligarchs", "liars", "candidates of Soros", always against the interests of the Hungarian "people".

> [M]ost absurd of all is that (…) there is **a national party** which has seen better days, and which **has now come up with the idea that Islam is the last hope for humanity**. **Today our political opponents in Hungary are in a hopeless situation**. They have failed to understand the mood of the times. **On the most important issues they have not stood by us, and have not stood by the country**. They did not support us when the fence was being built. They withdrew to the side lines during the referendum on the mandatory migrant quota. They did not support the amendment to the Constitution. **They denied the reality of migration. They denied the reality of the mandatory migrant quota and the Soros Plan**. The people can see this and know the truth. (Hungary, 2018a, s/p, our stress)

Orbán's othering rhetoric positions subjects not only along antagonistic lines, but within a specific hierarchical arrangement as well. Subjects connected to "the people" are positioned as agents, that is, capable to take charge and change the future of Hungary. At the same time, they are also positioned, in relation to migrants, as superiors. "[I]t's clear that, compared to migrants, we Hungarians are better-trained, better-educated and more employable" (Hungary, 2018a, s/p). In other words, any enemies and threats could be fought by the brave Hungarian "people" if they voted and secured the Parliament's majority for Fidesz in the upcoming general elections.

Otherness as a Rhetorical Strategy of Populists to Remain in Power Over Time

Looking at the results from the analysis above, the first conclusion is that Órban's use of a Othering rhetoric has proven to be a successful strategy to get political support in elections. Orbán transforms differences into antagonistic relationships by positioning "the people" against radical "Others". As a result, the way he has constructed existential threats and enemies to "the people" in Hungary confirms what Laclau (2005, 2013) had already determined about the populist logic: it is necessarily antagonistic. But it is not the only element in this equation. Othering needs crisis in order to be. For this reason, we suggest that the clue to clarifying the strategical use of Othering rhetoric in populist electoral campaigns is to investigate crisis narratives that capable of producing a sense of ontological insecurity in the electorate. As already demonstrated by Moffitt (2015, p. 190), "instead of just thinking about the crisis as a trigger for

populism, we must also think about how populism tries to act as a trigger for the crisis". The case analyzed here seems to confirm this dynamic.

Orbán (re)produces the antagonistic frontier in Hungary with the insertion of new enemies, in addition to maintaining the old ones. The increase of migration flows is presented as a crisis that threatens the Hungarian "people", specifically, their own Christian values. In this sense, to act against (Islamic) migrants is to defend "the people" from international forces led by the European Parliament, George Soros, opposition parties, NGOs, and the media. Paradoxically, while migration flows to Hungary did in fact increase in recent years, migrants still represent less than 2% of its total population.[8] And the main origin of such flows it not from African nor from the Middle East, but rather from Romania (the vast majority), Ukraine, Serbia, Germany, and Slovakia. This scenario is very far from the so-called anti-Christian, Islamic invasion of migrants proclaimed by Orbán. He creates fear in the electorate by describing an even worse future if he does not win the elections. As a result, he puts himself in the role of savior of the people. In this sense, his chosen rhetoric fuels a sense of impending doom, creating anxiety and insecurity toward the future. As the leader chosen by the people, Órban would be the only one in the position to save the people for he represents the only alternative capable of restoring stability and security in chaos.

Indeed, Orbán uses a narrative of crisis built based on an imagined threat posed by Islamic migrants trying to impose their own values on a Christian nation such as Hungary. At the same time, he also builds as enemies those who facilitate migration, such as European institutions, NGOs, and George Soros. These would be traitors to the "people" for defending interests that are foreign to the Hungarian nation in this true civilizational struggle. He constructs a crisis in order to feed collective anxiety and insecurity about the future. His strategy of creating social antagonism posits the upcoming 2018 elections as a unique moment for defining the country's own future, and places his name, and that of his

[8] According to Eurydice (a database compiled by the European Commission), in the beginning of 2018, the number of foreign nationals residing legally and permanently in Hungary was 156,000, this is 1.6% of the country's population. And 65% of the foreigners living in Hungary has come from Europe, mainly from the surrounding countries, such as Ukraine (15.41%), Romania (11%), Germany (9.14%), and Slovakia (5.2%). 26% is from Asia, 3% from Africa, and 3.79% from the Americas. See: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-35_en. Access: 20/06/2022.

party, as the legitimate representatives of the Hungarian "people". Orbán presents himself as the only one capable of protecting the "people" and guaranteeing a haven for Hungarians.

By creating crisis, in addition to attributing all the blame for to their enemies, Órban presents simplistic solutions to very complex problems. Building fences and discriminating against Muslim migrants would not solve the problem of declining birth rates in Hungary, nor stop the flux of forced displacement from Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, by simplifying complex problems and playing the blame-game, Orbán will not restore the sense of stability to the Hungarian people. First, those changes are structural, and cannot be domesticated and solved like this, as if a return to a previous status is possible. Second, one should ask if the previous status quo is even something that should be aspired, even restored at all. Finally, Orbán offers centralization and authoritarianism as a solution, which only obscures the underlying challenges facing an increasingly diverse and plural Hungary.

The case of Órban's right-wing, autocratic populism points beyond personalism and the centralization of power, and more to the (re)production of a nativist, ultranationalist subjectivity based on a religious moralism that presents itself as incontestable and totalizing. Differences are not accepted and are therefore turned into enemies to be eradicated. At the same time, the top-down bias of Orbán's populist logic allowed for the emergence of a state where liberties are being crushed. It is an illiberal political project opposing the Hungarian "people" against universal values of equality, human rights, diversity, and social inclusion, which has, at its core, a discourse of fear that emphasizes the exclusivity of a particular culture of a single social group, that is, values such as Christian faith, fidelity, charity, and nativism. Anything that deviates from this norm is made the enemy of the nation and must therefore be eliminated. Once again, the logic of Otherness stands out.

In this sense, the constant (re)production of a narrative of crisis ends up normalizing the designation of "Others" that are transformed into scapegoats. "They", who are morally different from "the people", need to be excluded, expelled, silenced, barred, rejected. And although Orbán's main *enemy* in 2018 was mass Islamic migration, and the danger posed by Islamic faith, also feeds into a distorted moralism that equally affects the government's relationship with other internal minorities such as the LGBTQIA+ community and women. Furthermore, this religious moralism also leads to anti-intellectualism, since not only the monolithic

notions of "the people" cannot be questioned and/or criticized, but, equally, their moral characteristics are not open to academic critique. It was not surprising, in such a context, the approval of several laws that try to restrict the academic autonomy of scholars and universities.

Thinking about populism as a political logic allowed us to locate new possibilities for building the social environment, even more democratic ones. However, for this to be possible, it is necessary, and here we agree with Mouffe (2018), to understand that the polarization itself, or the construction of political boundaries between us and them, would necessarily be integral parts of any logic, including that which is intended to be democratic. In this sense, what we need to keep in mind when envisioning an inherently conflictual social environment is that it needs to be understood and constructed from agonistic and non-antagonistic conflicts, as we see in contemporary populist logics.

Concluding Remarks

Populism has indeed become the buzzword of the twenty-first century (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). All over the world we see a climb in populist rhetoric, the emergence of new populist leaders, and even the creation of populist parties, which warrants the characterization of populism as a new global phenomenon. Especially if one considers how populism seems to emerge as a response to equally global transformations such as neoliberalism, economic crisis, and the decline of representative democracy. As a result, populists from both sides of the political spectrum have taken the center stage in recent times. Regardless of their ideology, they present themselves as the authentic representatives of "the people", the sole defenders against enemies and threats against the nation. Here the narrative of crisis becomes key.

This article investigated the rhetorical strategies employed by populist leaders to gain political support to remain in power. Examining the case of Viktor Orbán's electoral campaign in 2018, we have shown how populist leaders successfully remain in power through the mobilization of voters when constructing threats and enemies through Othering discourses. More specifically, we have shown how to get reelected—and thus remain in power—populists instrumentalize difference to create social antagonism that transforms minorities into a radical Other, who is made the enemy to be eliminated for the assurance of "the people". For this, the constant (re)articulation of a crisis narrative capable of creating gaps in

the "people's" sense of stability and security not only enables the transformation of difference into Otherness, but the unification of multiple subjectivities under a mythical "the people".

Indeed, contemporary populist leaders are caught in a legitimation trap. They claim to carry out a popular revolution that will bring about rapid changes and achievements, especially when their popularity stems from economic and institutional crises. However, as in the overwhelming cases of populist regimes explored in the literature, they cannot deliver the expected outcomes, at least not as quickly as they have promised to their national constituency. As result, and in order to avoid betraying their audience's hopes regarding their crisis problem-solving abilities and skills, they seek alternative sources to legitimize their policymaking performance. The strategy is then to create threats and enemies, and to assign them the blame for the current crisis. The way out for "the people" is then to reelect them once again and thus continue and expand the populist revolution.[9] As long as the crisis exists, the populist should remain in power.

Therefore, crisis should be hence understood not only as an enabler of the populist rupture, but as an integral part of the populist logic itself. Populists emerge and strive by offering national, mythological, and ethnic narratives capable of providing some sense of belonging, familiarity, and control to "the people" they claim to represent. Furthermore, populists commonly tend to present simplistic solutions to very complex problems. The Other—that is, the deviant from the norm that gets converted into a radical Other, and who historically has been dehumanized to begin with—are presented as the one responsible for all problems. As we have demonstrated, Viktor Orbán uses Otherness to maintain the antagonistic frontier between "the people" and "the elites". The result, in addition to his own reelection, is the use of extraordinary measures, such as the building of new fences on the southern border of Hungary, and the persecution of minorities.

[9] We would like to thank Daniel Wajner for pointing out this argument for us in an early draft.

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Othering 'Downward' by Scapegoating the Outgroups or Excluded Outsiders

Poland's Right-Wing Constructions of the Others at the Polish-Belarussian Border (2021–2023)

Alina Rzepnikowska and Eva A. Duda-Mikulin

Introduction

In an era of resurgent right-wing populism across the Western world, little attention has been paid to the complex constructions of Otherness by the populist right within Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially in countries such as Poland, guarding the Eastern border of the European Union. While the Mediterranean migratory routes have received considerable attention, the migratory routes through land, which we focus on in this chapter, have received less consideration. This chapter explores the discourses of the former right-wing government in Poland about

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people on-the-move[1] at the Polish-Belarusian border and how this relates to broader geopolitical tensions. We apply the critical discourse analysis lens to this relatively new research setting with the migratory route through CEE. This introductory section sets the scene for the chapter by explaining the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border and the Polish authorities' response.

In the light of the so-called refugee crisis[2] in Europe in 2015, immigration and refugees, which were previously hardly mentioned in public and political debates in Poland, have become the leading topics. Anti-refugee rhetoric became very common in the politics of the ruling right-wing populist, nationalist and conservative party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) (Cywiński et al., 2019; Krzyżanowski, 2018). The figure of a Muslim refugee started to be used in the political discourse to create a sense of threat and to build social divisions (Pietrusińska, 2022). This is in the context of the growing populist ideologies with anti-immigration stance across Europe (Duda-Mikulin, 2019), including the nationalist and Christianist populism of Poland. This is often based on the notion of a civilisational threat from Islam, crucial in construing the opposition between self and other (Brubaker, 2017; Solomos, 2020).

Starting from August 2021, in response to the sanctions imposed on Belarus after falsified presidential elections, Belarusian government enabled people mainly from the Middle East to travel to Belarus by facilitating tourist visas and allowing them to travel to the border area with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. As a result, people from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, as well as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea attempted to cross the Polish-Belarussian border, including multiple attempts (Gall, 2021; Łoboda & Czarnota, 2023). Initially, both liberal and right-wing media referred to them as refugees, but this narrative shifted to 'illegal immigrants' (Pietrusińska, 2022).

This migratory route through the Polish-Belarusian border is different from other migratory routes. While it is seen as one of the safest, the

[1] We use the term 'people on-the-move'. Using 'refugees' and 'migrants' (the latter associated with voluntary migration) implies they are representatives of both categories, prompting questions about their status and if these terms are synonymous or denote a category of people seeking help (Wagner, 2022).

[2] An ideologically charged notion developed in media and political discourse (Krzyżanowski, 2018).

border area is forested and marshy, with rivers and lakes. Although this means that controlling these sections of the border is difficult, crossing it is dangerous. Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis until 17 February 2023, at least 37 deaths have been confirmed, but the number of fatalities could be higher, since between September 2021 and June 2022 the border area was closed to independent investigators, and some parts are very hard to reach (Łoboda & Czarnota, 2023, p. 3).

The initial response of the Polish authorities to the opening of the new migratory route through the Polish-Belarussian border included setting up razor-wire fences along large parts of the border and imposing the state of emergency on 183 towns and villages within two miles of the border, blocking access to journalists, humanitarian and civil society organisations and volunteers. This enabled the practices of violent bordering to be largely invisible and kept out of the public eye (cf. Mitrović et al., 2020). The border area became rapidly militarised. This fits into wider debates on securitisation[3] and militarisation of the external borders of the EU (Graban, 2022).

In October 2021, the Polish Parliament passed an amendment to the Act of Foreigners providing legal cover for pushbacks, a border strategy of the state involving forcibly returning migrants to the country from which they have crossed the border without allowing them to apply for international protection or considering their individual circumstances. Pushbacks often lead to endangering the lives and health of those pushed back, constituting violations of international law and the Polish Constitution. In December 2022, the Polish border force admitted to more than 50,000 pushbacks (BiBnG, 2022, p. 9). These pushbacks have been marked by violence, including beatings, threats, pepper spray use, confiscation of belongings and phone destruction, as reported by people on-the-move (Łoboda & Czarnota, 2023). It has been reported that Belarusian authorities have employed even more brutal forms of violence (BiBnG, 2022; Gall, 2021).

The construction of the border wall at the Polish-Belarussian border started in January 2022. In June, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced the completion of the wall which is 5.5 metres (18 feet) high and 186 kilometres (115 miles) long. The discourses on building the

[3] Securitisation is understood as a radical form of politicisation, accompanied by the use of extraordinary measures in the name of security (Graban, 2022).

wall (Garcia, 2019; Silaški & Đurović, 2019; Wodak, 2017) are closely linked to discourses on defence and securitisation aiming to exclude non-white and non-European 'Others' represented as enemies.

Imagining the Threatening Oriental Other

The discourses on Muslims, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and subsequently across European countries, have been repeatedly reproduced constructing this heterogeneous group as 'culturally distant strangers' (Buchowski, 2017), and a threat due to assumptions about terrorism, presumed threat to national identity and security, and assumed inability to integrate. These historically rooted Orientalist representations (Hall, 1997; Said, 1978) have resurfaced in public, media and political debates on Islam, migration and integration policies across Europe. The New Year's Eve 2015/2016 sexual assaults on women in German public spaces in Cologne, Hamburg and Stuttgart marked the emergence of the 'sexual nationalism' portraying the nation or Europe as an innocent white European woman assaulted by Arab/Muslim migrant men re-imagined as sexual predators (Triandafyllidou, 2018; Vieten, 2018). This is illustrated by a controversial image in the right-wing weekly magazine in Poland *wSieci* (February 13, 2016), featuring a white woman draped in the EU flag, with a terrified expression, being assaulted by dark-skinned male arms.

Abbas (2019, p. 2450) argues that the conflation of "the 'Muslim refugee' and the 'terror suspect' as threatening mobilises racialised biopolitics present in intersecting counterterrorism and asylum regimes that prioritise security concerns above human rights". Poland is not exempt. In April 2023, in Poznań, police held anti-terror drills featuring a woman in a hijab as an aggressor, exemplifying racialisation and state-driven Islamophobia that fosters mistrust towards Muslims. While debated and criticised, this incident demonstrates Poland's racially charged perceptions of terrorism and Muslims.

The perceptions of the East, Muslims and Arabs in Poland have been influenced by orientalist discourses (Said, 1978), having impact on Polish culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.[4] According to the discourse of Muslim invasion of Europe, Poland is seen "as a fortress of

[4] See Lewis (2021) for similarities and differences between the colonial Orientalism described by Edward Said and Polish Orientalisms.

the Western civilisation" against the "barbaric, cruel, militant and chaotic East" and the powerful civilisation of Islam (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2007, p. 232). Romantic Polish literature links the Oriental Other to cruelty. Some of the literature with Orientalist themes shaped twentieth-century Polish education (Kuligowski, 2019).

Negative perceptions of Muslims, strongly related to the belief that Muslims are a threat to Polish culture, persist in Poland despite their marginal numbers—less than 0.1% of the total population (Narkowicz & Pedziwiatr, 2017). Research on Arabs and gastronomy in Warsaw reveals that "Cruelty of Arabic husbands and Muslims pictured as terrorists are the two most common stereotypes highlighted by the interlocutors as the most harmful in Polish society" (Nowaczek-Walczak, 2011, p. 120).

There has been a shift in perception of Muslims from an external enemy, linked to global events, to an internal enemy posing threat to Poland (Narkowicz & Pedziwiatr, 2017). This transformation is particularly pronounced in recent discourses on people on-the-move at the Polish-Belarussian border. The othering process extends beyond Muslims, encompassing non-white and non-European groups and individuals. Having darker skin is often synonymous with being associated with Muslims and a threat to Polish nation and culture (Buchowski, 2017).

Anti-immigration Rhetoric Before August 2021

Anti-immigration discourse, promoting anti-immigrant and Islamophobic views, was a strategic move to "politicise the topic of immigration in Poland" (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 613). The Law and Justice (PiS) party used the so-called refugee crisis as "the main point of reference for building its anti-immigration stance, and as a reason to incite discourses of hateful othering of immigrants and refugees", which was also adopted by other Polish populists (Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 77). In a parliamentary speech in September 2015, before the elections, Jarosław Kaczynski, PiS leader, presented a vision of a possible Muslim invasion of Poland referred to as "a serious danger":

> First the number of foreigners increases rapidly, then they do not comply … they will not obey our laws, our customs … And then they impose their sensitivity and their demands in the public space in various areas of life, and in a very aggressive and violent way … Let's look at Sweden. There are 54 Sharia law zones and there is no state control … What's happening in

> France? Constant fights, Sharia law introduced, and patrols that guard the observance of Sharia law. The same applies in London, as well as in the strongest and toughest Germany, in this respect. Do you want this to also happen in Poland: that we stop being hosts in our own country? Is that what you want?[5]

The narrative about people seeking refuge as Islamic 'intruders' and 'invaders' aimed to increase opposition towards the EU and legitimate Poland's reluctance to accept any refugees as part of its legal commitment to the EU's relocation programme. As a result of the reluctance of the Polish government to comply with the programme, the European Commission launched a legal case against Poland in June 2017, which was then found to be in violation of EU law in 2020 by the European Court of Justice.

In 2017, several PiS politicians, including the former Prime Minister Beata Szydło, and Joachim Brudziński (Member of the European Parliament, Vice-President of PiS), endorsed a collective prayer under the slogan *Rosary to the Borders* including 4,000 'prayer zones' located along the full length of the Polish border, including international airports. The intention was to pray the Rosary to protect Poland, Europe and the world, and to return to Christian roots (Kotwas & Kubik, 2019).[6] "Rosary to the Borders"has become symbolic in the context of setting the razor-wired fence at the Polish-Belarussian border. It marked the symbolic boundaries of Poland imagined as sacred and reinforced an ethnoracial division of 'us' (Polish/Europeans/Whites/Christians/Catholics) and 'them' (threatening dark-skinned Muslims). This serves as a symbolic act of reinforcing the idea of Fortress Europe and it echoes *Antemurale Christianitatis* (Bulwark of Christendom), a label used for a country defending the frontiers of Christian Europe from the Ottoman Empire, and "a means of self-presentation both internally to Poles themselves and to the rest of Europe" through linking Poland with western Christianity and the Occident (Lewis, 2021, 138). While there are similar trends

[5] The Polish Parliament speech on 16/09/2015 (https://sejm.gov.pl/Sejm7.nsf/wypowiedz.xsp?posiedzenie=100&dzien=1&wyp=007).

[6] The rosary prayer was organised on the feast commemorating the Battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571, when the Holy League, a coalition of Catholic 'states' organised by Pope Pius V, defeated the Ottoman fleet in the Gulf of Patras, Western Greece. The victory was important in the defence of Europe against Ottoman imperial expansion—the protection of Christendom against Muslims.

in anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim public and political discourses across Europe and beyond, there is a specificity about how the Polish right-wing politics and religion intertwine in reconstructing Poland as a Christian/Catholic saviour-nation against Muslim invaders.

Conceptual Considerations

Dehumanisation and Racialisation as Part of the Process of Othering

People-on-the move at the Polish-Belarussian border have been constructed as a tool of a wider geopolitical game between Belarus and the EU. The right-wing politicians and media have frequently referred to them as a weapon of a hybrid war, removing individual qualities and agency. Using such language constructs these people as a threat to the Polish nation and the EU, not as subjects, as less than human, often being exposed to dehydration, hypothermia and other serious health complications threatening their life. This mistreatment and violent ignorance are often justified as they are viewed as "legitimate political reactions to the political action of an enemy" (Bender, 2021).

Racialisation plays a key role through categorisation and classification of people from the Middle East and Africa finding themselves at the Polish-Belarussian border. The characteristics such as threat, danger, invasion and burden are ascribed to these groups because of their physical and ethno-religious traits. This feeds into racism, Islamophobia and Arabophobia.

Othering, as part of the process of racialisation, entails mutually opposing the self and the other based on contrasting attributes. The Polish right-wing discourse establishes a superior self against an inferior Other. This process draws on Orientalist and racist discourses from both Western and Eastern Europe. Yet, a distinction exists between legitimate Ukrainian war refugees and those labelled 'illegal migrants' from outside of Europe. Borders here serve not just to divide sovereign states, but as a mobility governance extending within the state, racially hierarchising EU, non-EU, non-European groups (Mitrović et al., 2020).

Discursive Elite Racism

Racism is not limited to ordinary citizens in everyday situations but can also be propagated by elite groups through their discourses (van Dijk,

1993). Discourse can be understood here as a particular way of talking about people on-the-move at the Polish-Belarussian border, which does not neutrally reflect identities of these people, but plays an active role in creating a representation of them as part of the process of othering. Elite racism, rooted in white supremacy ideology tied to Europeanness and Christianity, has spread swiftly across Europe, including Poland (ibid).

The discursive elite racism may appear as harmless, normalised and widely accepted. It operates discreetly, dissociating from overt violence seen in traditional racism (van Dijk, 2000). The new forms of cultural racism adopted by right-wing political elites draw on the concern of "defending their nation" from the threatening Other rather than "attacking them as such" (Solomos, 2020, p. 65). Nevertheless, the implications extend beyond discourse, negatively impacting the lives of people on-the-move who face entry denials, violent pushbacks, poor conditions in detention centres, illness or even death in the woodlands.

We follow the argument that elites controlling public discourse in politics and media bear responsibility for these forms of racism. Their dominance empowers them to influence public opinions and exert control over migrant or minority groups' lives through discourses and policies (van Dijk, 2000). Poland's right-wing populism, evident in the discourses concerning the Polish-Belarussian border, highlights elite racism and Islamophobia. It draws on simple and unchanging images of the Other and adapts it to the changing socio-political environment (Solomos, 2020).

Methodology

This chapter employs critical discourse analysis rooted in social constructionism, approaching knowledge and representation not as objective truth, but rather shaped by categorisation and discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). It highlights the importance of historical and cultural context in shaping understanding and representation, with a focus on the enduring historical discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). It considers how social processes shape and sustain this understanding, resulting in various social actions and consequences (Barker & Galasinski, 2001).

Language and discourse are closely linked to knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972). Language helps in creating representations of reality gaining meaning through discourse that forms social identities and relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 15). This chapter focuses on the

racial and gendered constructions of Otherness by Polish right-wing elites by examining their influential talk, text and images used for "the legitimation of their own power" (van Dijk, 1993: 8).

Critical discourse analysis is used to explore discursive practices through which right-wing elite in Poland has used specific language to reproduce and transform discourses to construct the representation of the self and the Other at the Polish-Belarussian border as part of the struggle over power (cf. Fairclough, 1995a). We recognise that these political discourses are part of a dialectical relation with other structures like the institutional structure of the media (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002), and that the discursive practices examined in this chapter perpetuate unequal power relations.

We draw mainly on van Dijk in examining discourse "as a social practice of racism" influencing people's racist beliefs, policy-making and electoral success (2000, p. 36). Anti-migrant political discourses construct meaning and shape understanding about people on-the-move as threats to security, economy and culture, legitimising restrictive policies and racist bordering practices.

For this chapter, three communicative events (Fairclough, 1995b) are examined, encompassing political speeches and statements about the Polish-Belarussian border crisis between August 2021 and February 2023, disseminated through various channels of political communication, including online media. We identified key terms, metaphors, images and sounds, as two events contain multimodal discourses using different semiotic systems (cf. Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Following the transcription and translation of the events, we examined which discourses were used, how they were used, and how they drew on others to construct a particular narrative about people on-the-move. The most prominent discourses in the speeches we analysed are dehumanisation discourse, defence and securitisation discourses and saviour-nation discourse. All these discourses seem intertwined in the analysed speeches.

Our privileged status as white, European, female social scientists with voluntary migration experience is different from that of people on-the-move trying to cross the EU borders. We both have been following the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarussian border and became increasingly aware of the harmful right-wing and media discourses which prompted our research. We bring our own values, assumptions and positions into research and we are aware that this affects our analytical choices (cf. Barker & Galasiński, 2001) and the way we present the results.

The challenge of taken-for-granted and common-sense understandings in discourse analysis (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002) is mitigated by our social constructionist understanding and analysis of discourse, anti-racist stance and drawing on migration, race, ethnicity and gender scholarship. Critical discourse analysis does not aim to be critically neutral but politically committed to social change and to uncover the role of discursive practices in creating and maintaining unequal power relations (ibid).

Right-Wing Elite Discourses About the Other

The Conference of the Polish Ministers on 27 September 2021

On 21 September 2021, a press conference was held which featured Mariusz Błaszczak, the former Minister of National Defence (Poland's Deputy Prime Minister from 22 June 2022), and Mariusz Kamiński, the former Minister of the Interior and Administration, both affiliated with the ruling PiS party.[7] During this event, they made allegations of terrorism, paedophilia and zoophilia against Muslims at the Polish-Belarussian border. The event was reported by TVP Info, a state-operated Polish television news channel influenced by PiS. This took place in the context of the Polish Parliament's approval of a state of emergency along the Polish-Belarussian border, which remained in effect until June 2022. Throughout this period, reporters were prohibited from accessing the 3 km border zone, limiting public access to information about the challenging conditions and pushbacks.

The right-wing government officials appeared alongside slides featuring key points titled: "Findings about illegal migrants". Stanisław Żaryn, the spokesperson for the Minister Coordinator of Special Services (currently Secretary of State, Government Plenipotentiary for the Security of Information Space of the Republic of Poland), combined the discourses

[7] Press conference with Kamiński and Błaszczak about the Polish Belarussian border, TVP Info, 27/09/2021 (https://www.tvp.info/56069625/konferencja-prasowa-transmisja-na-zywo-kaminski-i-blaszczak-o-granicy-polski-i-bialorusi-wazne-informacje-strefa-stanu-wyjatkowego-27-wrzesnia-2021).

of the war on terror,[8] securitisation (which defined Muslims as a terrorist threat), criminalisation and othering:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, so far the identity of several hundreds of illegal migrants, who are staying at the border force detention centres, and the route of their arrival to Poland have been verified. Based on preliminary information, two-thirds of those examined were subjected to an in-depth verification procedure since the information so far indicates a threat to the security of the Republic of Poland linked to the presence of these persons on our territory. Current information on every fourth respondent indicates their dangerous connections and participation in illegal practices. The findings show that every tenth person has possible links with terrorist organizations, crime, people smuggling, as well as falsification of documents. Materials proving combat experience and the use of weapons were identified. Some of the surveyed people were associated in the past with various types of uniformed authorities or military combats. Twenty percent of the surveyed had connections with the Russian Federation territory (…) The authorities investigating the identity and credibility of people in detention centres have also identified evidence of paedophilia and evidence of zoophilia.

This was followed by examples displayed on the slides, which included a photograph of an individual described by Żaryn as an Iraqi citizen who allegedly had contact with an individual suspected of having affiliations with Islamic State fighters.

Drastic photos of execution, and with paedophilic and zoophilic content, were also presented at the conference. Subsequently, TVP Info published an online article titled "*He raped a cow, he wanted to enter Poland? Details about migrants at the border*".[9] Sitnicka (2021) from OKO.press[10] reported that the photograph displayed at the conference, depicting a man engaged in a sexual act with an animal, was taken from

[8] The war on terror discourse was created as a global discourse to justify international military interventions and domestic counter-terrorism measures causing considerable harm and leading to the construction of Muslims as the global enemy and threat to national security (Ahmed, 2014).

[9] TVP Info: https://www.tvp.info/56071419/zoofilia-wsrod-imigrantow-zgwalcil-krowe-chcial-dostac-sie-do-polski-szczegoly-ujawniaja-polskie-sluzby-konferencja-mon-i-mswia-27092021.

[10] OKO.press is an independent internet portal reporting current events and investigating misconduct.

an older recording available on the Internet. Sitnicka stressed that the government officials utilised this unverified material to perpetuate the racist stereotype of sexual bestiality to dehumanise people on-the-move and to strategically create the atmosphere of fear, danger and cognitive shock amongst the public. This was to justify state actions under the pretext of defending against the perceived threat from Muslim and dark-skinned Others.

Minister Błaszczak reiterated Żaryn's narrative with particular attention to "those storming the Polish border" ("*Ci, ktorzy szturmują polską granicę*") and implying connections with terrorist organisations, criminal elements and sexual disorders, all posing a threat to Poland.

Furthermore, Minister Kamiński stated:

> We are not talking about refugee movements. We are talking here about politically motivated mass, illegal migration. Those who are trying to force through our border are in no way threatened in Belarus. They are there completely legally. In fact, they are invited by the Lukashenko regime and used as a weapon, as ammunition, purely for political reasons. The scale of this phenomenon is large. Since August [2021], we have had about nine thousand four hundred attempts to illegally cross the Polish border (…) We have about twelve hundred detained refugees. Excuse me, illegal migrants. I get it wrong myself sometimes, but it's really important to use that distinction here. We have about one thousand two hundred illegal migrants detained in detention centres. They are scrupulously examined by our services (…) in terms of examining whether they pose a threat to the security of our state and our citizens.

People on-the-move at the Polish-Belarussian border are represented in a stereotypical way as male sexual predators and as terrorists, drawing on (neo)orientalist discourse about sexually abusive Muslim men, contributing to the construction of racialised and masculinised threat and reflecting sexualised racism (Bhattacharyya, 2008).

These representations, constructing people on-the-move as a threat through presenting them as animalistic, evil and dangerous, are contrary to the idea of 'suffering body' of refugees (Mokre, 2022). The real suffering bodies of men, women and children have been hidden from the public eye and absent from the political discourses, as the state of emergency was used to conceal this suffering and to create a sphere of hidden violence beyond the reach of cameras and witnesses (Czarnota, 2022). The minister emphasised their non-refugee status, employing the

modality of truth through committing himself completely to the statement and claiming this to be true and unquestionable, regardless of evidence (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The refugee image is often feminised and imagined through traditional gender roles of helpless, innocent and therefore worthy of protection *womenandchildren* (Enloe, 1990), excluding males, especially those who are racialised, from refugee status (Mokre, 2022). Showing images of women and children at the border area would contradict the discourse of threatening 'illegal migrants' at the Polish-Belarusian border. Therefore, any sign of refugeehood is not present in the political discourse.

The term 'refugee' is deliberately replaced with 'illegal migrant' to exempt the politicians from the obligation to help (Wagner, 2022). 'Illegal migrant' label discriminates and deprives individuals of their humanity and dignity (Pietrusińska, 2022). This label has been commonly used by right-wing media and politicians across Europe and North America to associate undocumented migrants with crime and breaking the law.

The discourse on illegal migrants is used together with numbers game discourse implying the size of the threat and signalling credibility. They are associated with military and combat implying that they are violent and organised. All this gives a sense of invasion and a considerable threat.

People on-the-move at the Polish-Belarussian border were further dehumanised by being referred to as weapons and ammunition, stripping them of human qualities. This follows Bandura's (1999, p. 179) argument, that "once dehumanised, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes and concerns but as subhuman objects". This language reinforces the dehumanisation of the suspect population at the border which becomes the normative discourse, aiming to justify pushbacks and other use of force by the Polish authorities.

The discourses used at the conference contribute to populist and racialised conceptions of potential terrorists and criminals which rely on established stereotypes. The idea of the Muslim figure has come to represent the threat of violent death amid fears of Islamist terrorism (Abbas, 2019), reinforcing racist and Islamophobic discourses, an integral part of biopolitics that reduce masculinised and racialised refugees from Muslim countries to a dangerous mass. These discourses were used to legitimise racist state actions.

#WeDefendEurope Speech by the Polish Prime Minister on 21 November 2021

On 8 November 2021, in his post on Facebook, the former Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, referred to the Polish border as "not just a line on the map" but as sacred, because "the blood of generations of Poles has been shed for it".[11] This reinforces the discourse of sacred/holy Polish borders, as mentioned earlier. Then, following the confrontations between the Polish authorities and groups of people attempting to cross the Polish-Belarussian border at the crossing in Kuźnica, Morawiecki released a YouTube video in English titled "#WeDefendEurope".[12] The video opens with the Polish flag and "POLAND #WEDEFENDEUROPE" text. Throughout Morawiecki's speech, various images are displayed: planes approaching Belarus with war-like sound effects, groups of males attempting to cross the border forcefully by pulling fences, facing the Polish authorities and water cannons. A warning in English is played through the speakers. There is a particular representation of the passively standing Polish authorities and the portrayal of aggressive, brown-skinned men at the border area. These images, sounds and speech construct a multimodal discourse, strategically illustrating Morawiecki's rhetoric on people from the Middle East as threatening to Poland and Europe.[13] This also reinforces the right-wing political and media discourses about the sole presence of 'young, strong men at the border', even though the presence of families and people of different ages and abilities at the border area is well evidenced (BiBnG, 2022; Gall, 2021; Lanselle, 2022; Tondo, 2022).

Morawiecki used the narrative of Europe as "our common home" which "is threatened". He talks about forming alliances with the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States which should serve to "be together" and protect "our common home": "When

[11] Facebook post: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=420141502810246&set=a.322039355953795&type=3&ref=embed_post.

[12] YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST4HOPEWdb0—this material, which at the time of writing received 1.2 million views, highlights the digital character of political discourses crucial in understanding how discursive elite racism operates today.

[13] Some parallels can be drawn with the controversial Breaking Point poster used by former UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, as part of the Leave campaign during the 2016 EU referendum in Britain, which played on fears of being invaded by people from the Middle East (Abbas 2019).

someone tries to break into our home, we defend our home. This principle also applies to national borders, the borders of the European Union and NATO, our common home. Let us stand together. Let us defend Europe".

Morawiecki reinforced 'us' vs. 'them' discourse, portraying Poland as superior to the East and aligned with the West, despite its peripheral geopolitical position and the social construction of Eastern Europe as incompatible with the West, because of its proximity to the Orient and a communist past stigma (Boatcă, 2006; Kalmar, 2023; Rzepnikowska, 2023). Morawiecki's discourse served to shift the Oriental stigma to the East (Kuligowski, 2019), and projecting own racialisation to affirm threatened whiteness and Europeanness (Kalmar, 2023).[14]

In the speech, there is a defence discourse linked to the special mission over centuries in defending Poland and Europe: "*Poland will do everything to stop the evil threatening Europe*". These words also appear in capital letters and bold font, along with the footage of people shouting and throwing stones at the Polish authorities through the barbed wire fence that separates them. The combination of text and images implies the construction of men, primarily from the Middle East, as threatening evil to Poland and Europe, thereby contributing to the demonisation, dehumanisation and criminalisation of migrants.

The defence narrative used in the speech has gained political traction in Poland, linking migration to security risks (Reszko, 2021). This narrative contributed to politicisation of migration, with Morawiecki stating that these events are not an ordinary crisis but a "political crisis with a specific purpose". This narrative justifies further militarisation of the border and inhumane pushback operations. Consequently, the Polish government contributed to the EU's creation of a "violent and deadly migrant deterrence regime" (Reszko, 2021).

The 'hybrid war' discourse is ever-present. Yet, Graban (2022) argues that pushing people on-the-move into the European Union through Belarus does not align with the classic notion of hybrid war. While no armed fighters or special forces entered Poland, Graban emphasises that

[14] This echoes Sienkiewicz's narrative about the Polish Borderlands—the border region between Poland and the Tatars, Walachia and later the Cossacks, and the space of 'war of cultures and civilizations', with the opposition between civilization and savagery, the West and the East (Kuligowski, 2019, p. 126). There is an intertextual link in Morawiecki's discourse to other historical discourses to construct a national and European identity.

"the only fight observed was for the survival of the unarmed people pushed out by the border guards of both countries". Morawiecki's discourse, coupled with imagery and sounds depicting Middle Eastern men as a threat, holds the potential to sway the public towards the notion of the hybrid war.

The Polish President's Speech in Brzeziny on 10 February 2023

The speech by the Polish President, Andrzej Duda, in Brzeziny in February 2023,[15] must be placed in the context of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia which marked a shift in discourses on migration (Pietrusińska, 2022). Andrzej Duda started his speech by giving thanks to the Polish citizens for opening their homes to Ukrainian refugees and praising them for openness, Christian values of brotherly love and understanding of the hardship of Ukrainian refugees referred to as "our neighbours" and "our brothers". This positive portrayal builds a narrative of compassion towards one group of war refugees, highlighting a sense of unity and special bond based on geographic and cultural proximity.

The Polish President emphasised the positive contributions of Ukrainian refugees to the Polish economy and society, by depicting them as model migrants who are hardworking and co-creating the prosperity of Poland. This representation humanises Ukrainians in Poland and positions them as valued and deserving members of society, worthy of passing legislation especially for them, allowing integration into the nation's workforce and daily life. Krivonos (2023) offers a more nuanced debate on the shifting racial positioning of Ukrainians in Poland, who, on the one hand, are perceived as more desirable white workers in the context of anti-Muslim and Black racism in Poland, but on the other, they experience everyday and structural racism.[16]

Furthermore, Ukrainian refugees in Poland should not be seen in gender neutral terms, as priority at the Polish Ukrainian border was given to women and children, and as discussed earlier, the *womenandchildren* phenomenon is associated with deservingness of protection. The public, political and media discourses initially constructed the representation of

[15] President's speech in Brzeziny, 10/02/2023 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6KXjuUvPpY).

[16] This, in turn, is similar to racialisation experienced by Polish migrants in Britain (Narkowicz, 2023; Rzepnikowska, 2023).

Ukrainian women and children as model refugees, which is now gradually eroding.

The President's speech shifts when discussing people on-the-move at the Polish-Belarussian border. He referred to them as "primarily from the Middle East, who arrived in Belarus by planes" and "were pushed towards our border". The language changes, with mentions of "pushing" migrants onto Poland, implying a forced and unwelcome entry. This contrasts with the welcoming narrative about Ukrainians. This also indicates that people who found themselves on the border with Belarus have become a tool of a wider geopolitical game between Belarus and the EU. The political nature of the crisis legitimises state's denial of the right to protection from persecution and pushbacks of people at the Polish-Belarussian border. Pietrusińska (2022) argues that the Polish authorities' propaganda deliberately shaped the public debate around migration in a dichotomous way which leads to the division between forced migrants who deserve support (Ukrainian refugees) and those who do not deserve such help (constructed as illegal migrants from the Middle East at the Polish-Belarusian border).

The former President explained the situation at the Polish-Belarussian border as a test conducted by Belarus, pushing people from the Middle East towards Poland. While he did not directly label these migrants as a threat (in contrast with previous speeches), the mention of Putin and Russia in relation to the border defence discourse can be interpreted as a subtle link to the broader geopolitical tensions in the region and the idea of the hybrid war.

The speech highlighted the sacrifices made by the border guards and soldiers in defending the border, portraying them as heroes deserving of respect and support. This portrayal serves to garner public support for border defence efforts to protect not only Poland, but also fulfilling European obligations. Furthermore, it disguises human rights violations concerning the Polish authorities engaging in pushbacks and in some cases failing to prevent death (Boczek, 2021; Klimowicz, 2023).

The speech constructed a nuanced narrative that portrays Ukrainian migrants positively, emphasising their integration and contributions to Polish society. However, the discourse changed when referring to Middle Eastern people at the Polish-Belarussian border, subtly invoking othering. The speech also draws on the defence discourse to position Poland as a responsible EU member, countering any doubts about its commitment to border protection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the right-wing constructions of Otherness at the Polish-Belarusian border are emblematic of a broader resurgence of constantly reinvented racist ideologies across Europe. This is evident in the rise of right-wing populism embracing racist ideologies, long-standing stereotypes and state-driven propaganda. The new forms of racist politics with the entwining of racialising discourses with policies, as well as the securitisation of borders have significant consequences for those on the move, leading to violence and threats to their well-being (Solomos, 2020; Tyler, 2020).

The right-wing discourses on immigration at the Polish-Belarussian border explored in this chapter helped to justify the decisions of the Polish authorities about the state of emergency, building fences, restricting asylum rights, militarised border enforcement and pushbacks without regard for the real consequences, including the erosion of protection and rights. This is coupled with the exploitation of anti-immigrant sentiments and fears about the impacts of immigration on national and European identity for political gains and contributing to divisions, which is a worrying trend that has been observed around Europe and beyond.

Following from Foucault (1972), the chapter encourages a deeper analysis of the structures that influence people's understanding of the world. It contributes to discussions on the role of borders in reproducing global inequalities and racial hierarchies. It calls for improvement of humanitarian conditions of people on-the-move, regardless of their origin.

The debate surrounding people attempting to enter the EU via Belarus highlights the discrepancy between the perceived threat posed by these people and the reality of their situation, which calls into question the rationale behind their vilification. The assumed threat they pose to Poland and Europe is often exaggerated, contributing to their racialisation, criminalisation and dehumanisation, especially when they are referred to as weapons of war or ammunition. Politicians, government representatives and the media play a crucial role in constructing them as unworthy and undeserving of receiving assistance.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights the urgent need to address the suffering, violence, and loss of health and life endured by people at the Polish-Belarusian border. Many people attempting to or crossing the

Polish-Belarussian border remain hidden, risking their lives in inhospitable conditions.

Amid these challenges, a silver lining emerges in the form of rising solidarity among some Polish citizens, ethnic minorities and NGOs. These individuals and groups, often represented by political elite as traitors and outcasts, counter official portrayals of people at the Polish-Belarussian border seeking better quality of life as security threats by offering support, medical assistance and compassion, demonstrating that humanity can prevail even in the face of exclusionary discourses. Further attention is needed to the forms of resistance of people on-the-move to the right-wing discourses, state racist practices and their consequences to avoid presenting migrants as passive victims.

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"They Should Not Have Left". The Italian Government's Discourse on the Cutro Shipwreck: How Populists Have Shifted the Discourse from People Who Lose Their Life to Responsibilities of "Others"

Dario Lucchesi

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the migrant shipwreck that occurred on the night between 25 and 26 February 2023 off Steccato di Cutro on the coasts of Calabria, a region of southern Italy. The wooden vessel was allegedly carrying 200 people, including adults, minors and family mostly coming from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and Pakistan. The boat had left four days earlier from Izmir, Turkey and it aimed to cross the Aegean Sea, pass under Greece and land in Italy. The event led to the confirmed death of 94 people, including 35 children.

The shipwreck of Cutro represented an event that hadn't occurred for years in this scale representing the most serious shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea after 2013. The images provided by the media were impactful,

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mainly for the remains of the boat that reached the shore together with the bodies of the people. From the hours after the shipwreck a lively public and political debate ensued for several weeks. The focus was on inconsistencies in the reconstruction of the rescue operations followed by a blame-shifting between the Italian Coast Guard, Guardia di Finanza (militarized police force), and Frontex about delays in rescue operations. Italian authorities were under criticism over delayed responses and poor international coordination on search-and-rescue: Frontex informed that had warned Italian authorities of a boat carrying a large number of people before the shipwreck occurred, but the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni claimed that Italy did not receive any emergency communication from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Generally, after tragedies at sea, specific public rituals have been activated by politicians, media, and public opinion. In the aftermath of Cutro shipwreck reactions and declarations of the right-wing Italian government have only partially reproduced these rituals, setting new standards in the definition of anti-immigration policies and strengthening the communicative repertoire of the populist right-wing parties. Indeed, the government constructed a discourse that attempted to hold together a humanitarian frame, the condemnation of the culprits, the de-accountability of the government, and the policies implemented by it.

Since there is a lack of literature on the topic, this paper is interested in understanding in what ways the Italian right-wing populist government have shaped the discourse around the Cutro shipwreck by analyzing discursive strategies throughout days and weeks following the event. Politicians' statements and voices played a central role in constructing the discourse on immigration and migrants often in continuity with the past, recontextualizing the discorsive pattern and normalizing securitarian positions about migration phenomenon.

Drawing on the approach of Critical Discourse Studies, the research aims to analyzed the different strategies that progressively shifted the focus by the attention from people who lose their life to other "enemies", allowing to identify different types of "Othering" and re-articulating the dichotomy that characterizes the anti-immigration discourse. Precisely, analysis focus on language and argumentative structures reproduced by the politicians at government that aimed to deny its responsibilities, legitimize the "Other" exclusion and blame new and old scapegoats as out-groups. The case study is based on different material, putting

together politicians' posts on social media, statements in parliament, and press conferences.

The Cutro case appears to be a decisive watershed in the evolution and the long-term implications of the discourse on immigration by populist parties, reproducing traditional patterns and developing new ones. The study contributes both to the existing research on populist anti-immigration communication and to the discursive construction of "Them" as the "dangerous other".

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section, I introduce some basic elements of the literature concerning Italian right-wing populism together with the Critical Discourse Studies on the topic. Section 2 focuses on media representation of migrant shipwrecks and the introduction of the humanitarian frame. In Sect. 3, I present the case study and the methodology adopted, while Sect. 4 focuses on the main results of the discourse analysis. In conclusion I highlight the main outputs of the analysis reflecting on possible implications of the discourse on the representation of the "other" by populist actors together with the legitimation of their anti-immigration discourse.

The Italian Right-Wing Populism and the Discursive Construction of the Otherness

The so-called refugee crisis catalyzed a rising wave of anti-immigrant sentiments that have been considered a driving factor behind the vote for the Italian right-wing populist parties in the 2018 and 2022 national elections (Combei & Giannetti, 2020). Considering only the last six years, Italian governments applied strong exclusionary migration policies. In 2017 Interior Minister Minniti (left-center government) signed the first agreements with Libyan potentates and began the fight against NGO boats engaged in rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean. This line was tightened by the Conte I government (2018–2019) with Salvini' security decrees, slightly eased by the Conte II (2019–2021) and Draghi government (2021–2022), and further strengthened by the current Meloni government.

The shipwreck of Cutro happened a few months later of Meloni government was formed in October 2022. The latter represents the maximum expression of the far-right alliance composed by the main party *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) followed by *Lega* (League) and *Forza*

Italia (Go Italy) in a government that has been defined as the most right-leaning among all governments ever formed in post-war Western Europe (Garzia, 2023). Indeed, the latter has taken a hard line on migration since coming into office passing a law that restricted the ability of NGO rescue ships to make more than one rescue at a time.

Considering the last few years, immigration and arrivals have become a fundamental symbolic resource for the storytelling of the Italian populist parties (Nicolosi, 2019). Recent Italian studies agreed on a "monopolization of the debate" by the populist leaders Matteo Salvini (*Lega*) and Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*) as "issue-owners" (see, e.g., Casaglia & Coletti, 2021; Cavallaro & Pregliasco, 2021; Combei & Giannetti, 2020; Lucchesi & Romania, 2023; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018; Milazzo, 2020; Pirro, 2022) who increased their electoral support due to their anti-immigration stance.

The literature concerned with the phenomenon of populism has taken on enormous dimensions in the past decade. Populism has been interpreted as both a thin ideology[1] (see, e. g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) and a communication style (Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Bracciale et al., 2021; Ernst et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016) that promotes a reified "will of the people" against the "global conspiring elites" where the first is pure and the second corrupt (see, e.g., Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

The field of Critical Discourse Studies[2] (CDS) have widely analyzed populism as a phenomenon that places itself at the intersection of a range of both traditional and new forms of political action and political behavior (Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2017). However, there is a wide agreement that populism is largely based on anti-migration positions, xenophobia, criminalization of migration and migrants, exclusionary politics, demand for border protection, and measures of securitization (see, e.g., Ruzza, 2018; Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2017).

[1] The conceptualization of populism as ideology is based on three fundamental elements: (1) the 'pure people'; (2) the 'corrupt elite' who manipulate the "people" (Mudde, 2004); (3) the "dangerous others" who threaten the 'pure people' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008).

[2] CDS represents an interdisciplinary field aimed to understanding how discourse figures in social processes, social structures, and social change. CDS refers to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a critical, interdisciplinary approach focused on the role of the language within the society and the political process, analyzing how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations (Fairclough, 1989).

At the communicative level, Ruth Wodak identified micro-politics of populist parties which, especially in relation to migration phenomenon, tend to reproduce simple dichotomies of "us" versus "them" (see, e.g., Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Indeed, researches in CDS agreed that refugees and asylum seekers tend to be merged into one larger category of "Others" (see, e.g., Baker et al., 2008; Wodak, 2001) reported widely by media and politicians by means of reproducing the "fear of the stranger" (Viola & Musollf, 2019; Wodak, 2019). Also in the Italian scenario, researches agreed on a media coverage characterized by an inherently negative representation of migrant people (see, e.g., Binotto et al., 2016; Combei & Giannetti, 2020; Dal Lago, 2012; Maneri, 2001), using the "emergency frame" and the "securitization frame" (Binotto, 2020; Buzan et al., 1998) which strengthen the differences between two highly polarized groups: the ingroup ("us", "Italians") and the out-group ("them") framed as "illegal", "undocumented", or "irregular" migrants (Viola & Musollf, 2019; Wodak, 2019). From a discursive point of view, metaphors such as *tide, flood,* or *wave* (El Refaie, 2001; Hart, 2010) are often used contributing to migrants dehumanization (De Genova, 2002; KhosraviNik, 2010). Thus, the Cutro shipwreck provides an opportunity to investigate how populist politicians have discursively construed the different actors involved in the dramatic event, also revealing the discursive shift from people who lost their life to new scapegoat to blame.

Migrant Shipwrecks, Their Media Representation, and the Humanitarian Frame

The shipwreck of Cutro adds to an endless list of tragedies that have occurred in the Mediterranean sea that have killed thousands of migrant near or off Italian coasts. For space reasons, we mention only two shipwreck, which occurred in the last ten years. The first, called "Lampedusa tragedy", was the sinking of a Libyan boat on October 3, 2013, a few miles from the port of Italian island of Lampedusa. The shipwreck resulted in 368 confirmed dead and about 20 presumed missing. The second one is called "the tragedy in the Sicilian Channel": a shipwreck of an Eritrean boat occurred on the night of April 18, 2015, off the coast of Libya. The shipwreck resulted in between 700 and 900 presumed missing, numbers that place it as one of the most serious tragedies in the Mediterranean since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

According to data from the ISMU Foundation, from 2014 to September 2022, nearly 25.000 migrants have died and gone missing in the Mediterranean Sea while attempting to reach Europe. In particular, the journey to Italy is confirmed as the most dangerous and it continues to represent the first European country for the number of sea arrivals. Data from The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)[3] show a peak of the arrivals in Italy in 2014–2017 period when between 100,000 and 180,0000 people arrived in Italy per each year. Between 2018 and 2021 statistics registered an average of 34,000 arrivals yearly, followed by a significant increase in 2022 (105.131) and in 2023 (114.231 updated September 2023).

The Cutro shipwreck has brought renewed media and political attention to the phenomenon of migration, which in recent years had declined sharply in the Italian political, social, and media context. In fact, from 2020 to 2022, at least from a media point of view, there was a sharp decline in attention to the migration issue (Associazione Carta di Roma, 2020, 2021, 2022). Pandemic and war between Russia and Ukraine diverted attention from the migration flows that had affected the European Union from 2014 to 2020 in the so-called refugee crisis. However, from the perspective of infotainment, "tragedies at sea", constitute moments of greater intensity and spectacle in the media condensed into a shorter period of time attracting a large number of readers and viewers (Pantti et al., 2012).

At the same time, over the past two decades, the representation of migratory phenomena by Italian media and politics appears to be blocked. As suggested by Musarò and Parmiggiani (2022), when discussing immigration, the discourse is mainly focused predominantly on a few issues: (i) boat landings and the shipwrecks in the Mediterranean; (ii) scenes of urban decay; (iii) crime cases involving immigrants, and (iv) stories of exploitation and social conflict suffered by migrants. Moreover, Binotto (2020) identities three main frame devices in the media's discursive space on migrations: the "security frame", the "migrant landings frame", and the "humanitarian frame". The latter is particularly important for the purpose of this chapter, as it is the frame most commonly used by the media in the aftermath of shipwrecks. An extensive Italian literature (see, e.g., Binotto et al., 2016; Binotto, 2020; Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022;

[3] https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean.

Nicolisi, 2015) agrees that tragedies at sea, are recounted by media from a humanitarian point of view framing the migration phenomenon as a social "problem" that sees violence and generalized forms of discrimination and racism suffered by migrants. In this narrative, people who migrate are generally narrated as slaves of traffickers, victims of discrimination while women, children, and family are particularly represented (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022). Moreover, a specific lexicon has developed by media for migrant shipwrecks such as "humanitarian catastrophes", "ecatombe", "apocalypse", "humanitarian shipwreck", "tragedy of the sea", "Mediterranean cemetery", and "barges of hope", which Boltanski (2000) calls the "spectacle of pain" proposed by media (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2014). Thus, migrants are generally represented and labeled as "desperate people", victims of processes of depersonalization and invisibilization (Nicolisi, 2015). This humanitarian frame has been reinforced and widely reproduced with the shipwreck happened the September 2, 2015, that resulted in the death of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old Syrian child. Thanks to the collective media exaltation, the picture of the body on the Turkish beach in Bodrum, provoked an emotional wave that contributed to partially changing the journalistic representation of immigration and the perception of migrants in European public opinion (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022).

Case Study and Methodology

As mentioned, the research aims to reconstruct the discourse of Italian politicians at the government following the Cutro shipwreck, analyzing their statements in order to identify discursive strategies of "Othering" capable of reproduce or modify the anti-immigration discourse.

The case study is based on the reconstruction of the most important statements of three ministers: the Premier Giorgia Meloni, Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, and Guido Crosetto, Minister of Defense. I considered statements published via social media, interviews, and press conferences from February 26 to March 16, 2023. Figure 1 resumes the main statements selected due to their salience within the time frame considered.

From the material selected, the research asks the following macro-questions: what arguments are employed in the government discourse on Cutro shipwreck? What characteristics, qualities, and features are

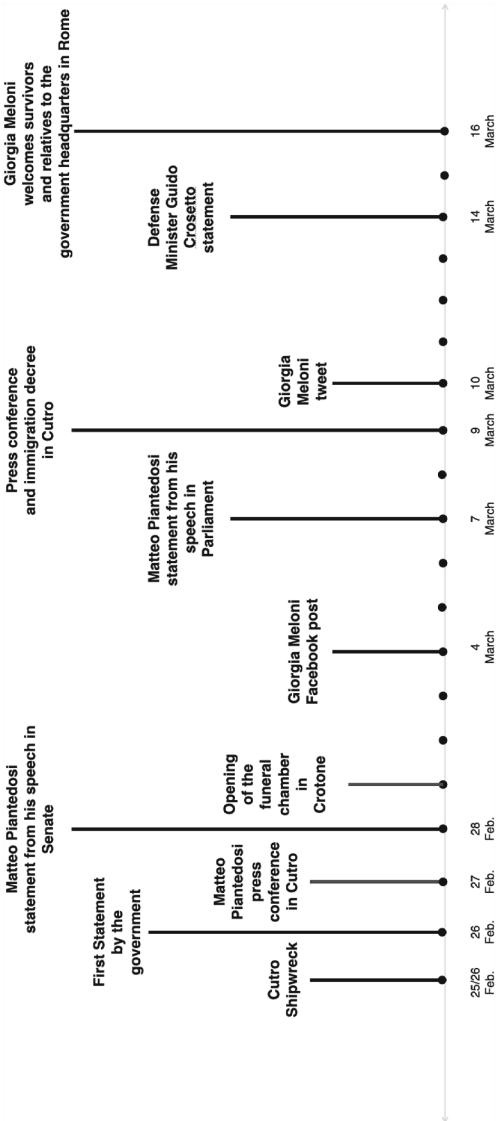


Fig. 1 Main events and statements of Italian Government after Cutro tragedy

attributed to social actors involved? Which discursive strategies have been used to legitimize the politics adopted by the government?

In order to answer these questions, I referred the well-known scheme that resumes the main discursive strategies elaborated by Wodak and Mayer (2009) (Fig. 2).

Finally, I referred to discursive legitimation strategies elaborate by Van Leeuwen and Wodak (see, e.g., Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Wodak & Van Leeuwen, 2002) who developed three types of legitimation which can occur in various combinations: (i) "Authority legitimation" is a legitimation by reference to authority of people who can exercise power, or authority of documents that bestow that power; (ii) rationalization legitimation, is legitimation by reference either to the utility of the social practice or some part of it ("instrumental rationalization"), or to "the facts of life" ("theoretical rationalization"); (iii) moral legitimation, is a legitimation based on moral values distinguished in two kinds: the first

Discursive strategies

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/ nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	• membership categorization • biological, naturalizing and depersonalizing • metaphors and metonymies
Predication	Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of • negative or positive traits
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	• *topoi* used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	• reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	• intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of (discriminatory) utterances

Fig. 2 Discursive strangers scheme elaborated by Wodak and Mayer (2009)

based on abstract moral values (religious, human rights, justice, culture, and so forth), and the second established by means of straightforwardly evaluative claims.

Analysis. From Rescue to Control: Discursive Strategies Related to the Cutro Shipwreck

In the following pages, through the perspective of the CDS, the main statements of the members of the Italian government related to the Cutro tragedy are analyzed. Analysis show that a consistent part of the government discourse remained anchored to "blocking departures", shifting the responsibility for the death of people to the smugglers and traffickers and by implementing the victim-blaming mechanism against the victims.

The first reaction to the shipwreck came on the morning of Feb. 26 with a statement in which Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni summarized in a few lines the central elements of the government's discourse on the Cutro shipwreck, as reported in Fig. 3.

The statement condenses the central elements of the government's discourse that is composed by 4 distinguishable arguments: (i) expression of condolences to the victims; (ii) identification of the responsible; (iii) intention and intervention of the government; and (iv) attacking the left-wing politicians who blamed the government. These elements represent a consolidated discursive pattern that shaped the government discourse about Cutro shipwreck and the first three will deepened in the following sections.

The Expression of Condolences Toward the Victims

The expression of condolences toward the victims is present in the most of government statements analyzed and can fit into the humanitarian frame in which migrants are generally labeled in the passive role of "victims" and desperate people, particularly focusing on children (see the statement of "Giorgia Meloni Facebook post, March 4"). However, these expression of condolences appears to be strategically constructed in "relation to" or as a "prerequisite for", placing attention on the other discursive elements. Indeed, in the following sentences the expression of condolence is closely related to the identification of the perpetrators, or to the government action:

Statement by Palazzo Chigi on the tragedy in Crotone

26 February 2023

The President of the Council of Ministers, Giorgia Meloni, expresses her deep sorrow for the many lives cut short by human traffickers. It is criminal to put a boat that is barely 20 metres long out to sea with as many as 200 people on board and with bad weather forecast. It is inhumane to trade the lives of men, women and children for the price of the 'ticket' they have paid with the false prospect of a safe journey. The Government is committed to preventing departures, and with them the unfolding of these tragedies, and will continue to do so, first of all by calling for maximum cooperation from the countries of departure and of origin. The actions of those who today speculate on these deaths, after heightening the illusion of unregulated immigration, speak for themselves.

Fig. 3 Written statement posted by Italian government after the tragedy of Cutro, February 26, 2023

> …Giorgia Meloni, expresses her deep sorrow for the many lives cut short by human traffickers…The government is committed to preventing departures, and with them the unfolding of these strategies.
>
> First Statement by the government, February 26

> The body of another child victim of the Cutro shipwreck was found on the beach today. It is a heartbreak that strikes me to the core. A prayer for this little one and for all the other victims of this tragedy. The government will fight with even greater determination to stop human trafficking and prevent other tragedies like these from happening again.
>
> Giorgia Meloni Facebook post, March 4

> It is a tragedy that grieves us deeply and challenges our consciences to act to stop such dangerous crossings and find concrete answers to the migration issue.
>
> Matteo Piantedosi statement from his speech in Senate, February 28

Expressions such as "*deep sorrow for the many lives cut short*"; "*tragedy that grieves us deeply*"; *"heartbreak that strikes me to the core. A prayer for this little one and for all the other victims of this tragedy",* not only pose the attention on the humanitarians and moral language, but they prelude the government action in order to intervene and block the departure. Indeed, these words are followed by: "…*The government is committed to preventing departures, and with them the unfolding of these strategies";* "*The government will fight with even greater determination to stop human trafficking*"; "…*challenges our consciences to act to stop such dangerous crossings and find concrete answers to the migration issue*". In the government discourse, the expression of condolences toward the victims never stands alone. In the discursive construction, condolences do not represent the main content of the statements, but they always play the role of introducing the following elements of the discourse that are the identification of the culprits and measures adopted by the government.

The Identification of the Culprits: "Smugglers and Human Traffickers Are the Responsible of the Tragedy"

The humanitarian frame, that initiates the government's statements, is systematically followed by the identification of the responsible to blame for the deaths of people and it represents an element present in all the statements analyzed. As noted by Binotto in relation to tragedies

concerning migration they «exacerbate one of the increasingly peculiar thematic factors in the representation of catastrophe and calamity in the media: the search for those responsible» (Binotto, 2020, 55). Traditionally, the enemy to be defeated symbolizes the criminal aspects of immigration, which take on different faces and names in relation to the event covered. In fact, in relation to episodes of crime or landings, media and politics nominalize immigrants focusing on their state of "clandestine" appealing to their presumed "illegality" by legitimizing discourses and policies designed to exclude refugees and asylum seekers (Hart, 2010; Maneri, 2001). On contrary, in the Cutro case, from the first statement the government identified the so-called smugglers as the main responsible for the tragedy personifying the criminal aspect of migration:

> …human trafficking responsible for this tragedy"; … "Reiterate that we are determined to defeat human trafficking responsible for this tragedy.
>
> Giorgia Meloni statements from Cutro Press Conference, March 9

It should be noted that the figure of human traffickers is not new in the Italian anti-immigration discourse. As noted by Binotto, over time in the journalistic and political representations, the figure of the "*scafista*" (smuggler) took on the characteristics of a folk devil, an unscrupulous, and often faceless, criminal. Therefore, the solutions combine the militaristic language of the emergency frame of the migrant landings with the identification of a public enemy to be fought against (Binotto, 2020). However, what it needs to be highlighted here is that in the discourse reproduced by the Italian government, there is an overlap between the use of words "smugglers" and "traffickers" which are used as synonyms creating a misunderstanding around these figures and the roles they play in the management of sea voyages.

> … the dynamics of the events confirms its direct dependence on the criminal management of unscrupulous traffickers who do not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of others for blatant personal profit. … And I want to remind… the smugglers kept the migrants hidden under cover throughout the crossing in inhumane conditions…
>
> Matteo Piantedosi statement from his speech in Parliament, March 7

"Smugglers" fill the role of driving the boat from the port of departure to the port of destination and they represent, more often than not,

migrants who have been forced by the human traffickers to take the wheel of the boat having paid, like the other migrants, the cost of the voyage to the traffickers. In that case, such "smugglers" find themselves filling the role without really having anything to do with the management of illegal migration often under threat and themselves victims of exploitation. In other words, they would represent the last link (and the most fragile one), of the illegal immigration management system. As witnessed by Italian journalist Annalisi Camilli in an article of "Internazionale" magazine, some smugglers been imprisoned in Italy because they volunteered to drive the barges in exchange for free travel; others have ended up in jail for mistaken identity.[4] Specifically, in a report produced by "Arci Porco rosso" of Palermo in collaboration with Borderline Europe, it emerges that in 2022, 264 alleged smugglers were arrested following their landing in Italy: one person for every three hundred who arrived.[5] In contrast to the smugglers, "human traffickers" are those who usually do not undertake the journey, but organize the trafficking benefit from the money of the people who board the boats. Very often, as the report stated, they are also those who benefit from the funds derived from agreements with single European states and the European Union that legitimize them as "authorities". In other words, the criminalization of smugglers brought forward in the government's discourse demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the migration phenomenon in its complexity by criminalizing people unrelated to the systemic structure of human trafficking.

As we see in the next section, this misunderstanding could not be accidental, but a calculated strategies chosen by the government in the construction of its discourse. Indeed, the definition of the smugglers, as the primary enemy to be defeated, helps to define a new discourse on the event and at the same time, retort a new policy agenda. In other words, policies of exclusion of migrants themselves are legitimized.

From a discursive perspective, it is interesting to focus on the strategies of nomination and predication used (Wodak, 2001, 2015). Nomination process is clear in the government's discursive construction: migrants are

[4] https://www.internazionale.it/essenziale/notizie/annalisa-camilli/2023/03/17/scafisti-italia?fbclid=IwAR3swGPZdIUuEIbYQ93TrDwQ4PwRWKEHtoWnM6qgtAVwTnYbylNVrOyauJo.

[5] https://fromseatoprison.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/from-sea-to-prison_arci-porco-rosso-and-alarm-phone_october-2021.pdf. https://arciporcorosso.it/finche-puoi-ascoltare-la-criminalizzazione-dei-cosiddetti-scafisti-nel-2022/.

victims, passive actors, while traffickers are the criminals responsible of the tragedy. Criminality is not referred to the "traditional out-group" (migrants) but to "smugglers" and "traffickers", and it is implies further passivations of people that lose their life and receding the humanitarian frame into the background. Concerning the strategies of predication, in statements reported above, it's possible to see what characteristics are attributed to smugglers which are described not only as "*responsible for this tragedy*", but also as "… *unscrupulous, who do not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of others for blatant personal gain*…".

Looking at a broader context, it is useful to recall the campaign of criminalization that different Italian governments have carried out against the work of NGO ships rescuing people in distress in the Mediterranean in the last years (Cerase & Lucchesi, 2022; Cusumano & Bell, 2021; Lucchesi & Cerase, 2023; Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2018; Reggiardo, 2019). One of the most effective arguments sought to "prove" the collusion between them and the smugglers/traffickers (Cerase & Lucchesi, 2022). The latter, together with NGOs, represent interchangeable and often co-present actors in identifying those responsible for the criminalization of migration. Indeed, in the weeks following the tragedy, the repertoire of perpetrators to blame is enriched with a new actor namely the "Wagner", that is, Putin's mercenaries.[6] The thought is well expressed by Defense Minister Guido Crosetto (*Fratelli d'Italia*) who in a note sent to news agencies states:

> It can be said that the exponential increase in the migratory phenomenon starting from African shores is also … part of a clear strategy of hybrid warfare that the Wagner division, mercenaries in the pay of Russia, is implementing, using its significant weight in some African countries.
>
> Guido Crosetto statement, March, 14

Crosetto's narrative falls in line with a series of arguments widely used in recent years with respect to those responsible for an alleged increase in the number of landings on Italian shores. As mentioned, NGOs have been criminalized by being singled out as a pull-factor pushing migrants to embark on Mediterranean journeys. They were also accused of being

[6] The Wagner Group is a private company in the service of the Russian government, made up of former military personnel, former policemen, and former security agents, which is currently fighting on various fronts in the war in Ukraine.

financed by George Soros, a businessman, philanthropist, and banker who, along with other "strong powers", acted to implement to an alleged "invasion" aimed at an "ethnic replacement" (Lucchesi & Cerase, 2023).

Attributing the responsibility for the tragedy to the smugglers and the increase in landings to external actors serves as a communicative device designed to ward off criticism and suspicion with respect to the government's coordination of the rescue chain and thus its responsibility to save the lives of people at sea.

The Government Is Ready to Take Action: The "Cutro Decree"

A third element in the discourse is the action taken and the immediate operability of the government in order to reply to the tragedy and provide concrete measures. Indeed, contrary to journalists and commentators, politicians must show operativeness through effective policies. The most significant and ritualistic event to communicate such politics was the Council of Ministers led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Cutro on March 9 where the main norms that make up a new immigration decree, called "Cutro decree", were announced and they can be summarized as follows: (i) simplification of expulsion procedures for irregular migrants; (ii) restriction of special protection; (iii) increasing jail time for smugglers to 30 years; (iv) new funding for detention centers. The function of the press conference was to appear ready in addressing the situation after the "trauma" with strong, effective measures that are positioned in line with the policies to fight irregular immigration pursued by previous Italian governments. The argumentation is constructed by invoking a principle of causality for which these tragic events, having perpetrators, impose specific and necessary "therapies". In this case, because a group of people (smugglers) is responsible for a specific problem (deaths at sea and illegal immigration), the government has a duty to counter them by stopping and preventing departures.

> Government is committed to preventing departures, and with them the unfolding of these tragedies, and will continue to do so…
>
> First statement by the Government, February 26

> …We will do everything need to fight these criminals……there is no more responsible policy than the one aimed at breaking the smugglers' trade….
>
> Meloni statements from press Conference in Cutro, March 9

If departures and deaths are placed in the same level by building a direct and causal relationship, it follows that preventing departures means preventing deaths at sea. This argument is based on a moral legitimation (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) for which procedures that facilitate expulsions, repatriation, and restriction of migrants' rights are legitimized on the basis of a paradoxical defense of deaths at sea as prove by the text of a Meloni tweet, the day after the press conference:

> …The decree law approved in the Council of Ministers reaffirms our determination to defeat human traffickers, fight illegal immigration and stop deaths at sea…
>
> Meloni Tweet, March 10

With the press conference and the immigration decree, the government attempts a legitimization whereby it seeks normative approval for its policies through strategies designed to demonstrate that such actions are consistent with the moral order of society (Rojo-Martin & Van Dijk, 1997). Moreover, one of the supposed innovations of the decree is to explicitly state a change in the approach of Italian immigration policies that highlight a shift from rescue to control.

> … It completely changes the approach of the Italian government from what we have seen in recent years. We are used to see other governments occupied in looking for migrants across the Mediterranean. What this government wants to do is looking for smugglers all along the globe…
>
> Meloni statements from press Conference in Cutro, March 9

We are facing a legitimization of exclusionary policies in order to keep migrants defined as illegal out of the possibility of being protected. The contents of the Cutro Decree are the result of the shipwreck that claimed nearly 100 lives, it should not be forgotten that out of the tragedy at sea came a law that favors repatriations, speeds up the execution of deportation decrees, modifies special protection, and introduces rules to manage reception centers and hotspots according to emergency principles. This becomes explicit when Premier Giorgia Meloni talks about special protection:

> Special protection is again restricted (...), the government's goal is to abolish special protection and replace it with a common sense standard.
>
> Meloni statements from press Conference in Cutro, March 9

The government's discourse on the Cutro tragedy hints at an evolution of the anti-immigration discourse consistently pursued by Italian populist right-wingers. Migration as a structural phenomenon and its management are perceived and handled as a matter of policing, control, prohibition instead of humanitarian and relief.

Victiming Blaming: "They Should Not Have Left"

In the discursive elements analyzed so far, the representation of migrants has been mainly characterize by an humanitarian frame and specifically by the passivity of the figure of asylum seekers. However, the day after the shipwreck, during the press conference in Cutro, Interior Minister Piantedosi shifts the frame with his statements that have been largely criticized by the left-wing politicians. Precisely, the main phrases were:

> …Compared to tragedies like today's, I don't think you can argue that first comes the right and duty to leave and depart in this way…The only thing that needs to be said and affirmed told…they don't have to leave…this message that is ethical first of all: you don't have to leave, you don't have to expose women and children beyond whoever they are to the dangerous conditions…
>
> Matteo Piantedosi statements from press conference in Cutro, February 27

Preventing departures is the central element in the government's discursive construction following the tragedy. The minister argues that one cannot equate rescue at sea with the importance of "not leaving": preventing departures is a priority to be enforced above the right to be rescued. Once again, the government's main argument is based on the principle of legitimacy that "if stopping departures means preventing deaths at sea, departures must be stopped". From a discursive point of view, the rhetoric of stopping departures to avoid deaths implements a mechanism of blaming the victims depicting them as "irresponsible". The phenomenon of *victim blaming* refers to assigning fault to people who experience violence or wrongdoing and is used as a tool to discredit

people of marginalized groups[7] (Johnson et al., 2021). The blame is thus placed on those who leave "without prudence" and condemns people fleeing wars, hunger, and misery to remain in their condition. The alleged irresponsibility of migrants is made explicit with the response given by the minister to a journalist who asked: "*if you were desperate, would you try to reach the other side of the world even with these sea conditions?*" Piantedosi's response was as follows:

> No, no, no, and I'll even tell you why. Because I was brought up to be responsible. To not always ask myself what I should expect from the place and country I live in but also what I can give to the country I live in for the redemption of it.
>
> Matteo Piantedosi statements from press conference in Cutro, February 27

One effect of the victim blaming is to place migrants in a subordinate position to an "us" embodied in the minister's words "*the message is ethical first*", "*I was brought up to be responsible*". With this argument the intent is to teach to migrants that these journeys should not be undertaken making evident once again the moral legitimacy underlying the discourse.

Piantedosi's words emerge as the most dehumanizing in the discourse around the Cutro tragedy. However, the statement stands in continuity with previous ones when Piantedosi had called "residual cargo" people who were not granted disembarkation following a rescue carried out by an NGO boat. Although Piantedosi's statements were widely criticized, Giorgia Meloni also reproduced the same narrative weeks later. After the shipwreck, the prime minister did not go to pay her respects to the victims at the funeral chamber opened on March 1 in Crotone, however, on March 16 she invited some survivors and relatives of the victims to the government headquarters in Rome. On that occasion Meloni asked whether the victims were "*aware of the risks involved in crossing the Mediterranean Sea*", fueling a narrative that those who die are victims of bad luck and their irresponsible decisions to leave.

[7] Although the phenomenon occurs in discourse about a wide range of issues, much of empirical work regarding it has largely centered on rape incidents and violence against women (Dukes & Gaither, 2017).

Similarly to the identification of the culprits, blaming the victims reinforces the Italian government's exemption from the responsibility for the tragic event. On the other hand, the argument reassumed in "*they should not have left*" morally legitimizes exclusionary policies in terms of saving lives, thus of the moral values of a humanitarian frame.

Conclusions

The chapter analyzed the discursive construction of the right-wing Italian government following the Cutro shipwreck, one of the most serious that occurred near the Italian coast that claimed the lives of 94 people attempting to reach a safe country. For the sake of space, the chapter did not report on the multiple suspicions about the reconstruction of the event and in particular of the responsibilities of the Italian government in coordinating the rescue effort. However, it should be specified that from the earliest reconstructions it already emerged that the captain of the Crotone harbormaster's office said the migrants "could have been rescued". Months after the shipwreck, between May and June 2023, further investigations by Lighthouse Reports[8] delivered indications that the Italian government and Frontex were aware of the vessel precarious conditions. The Cutro tragedy risks being yet another consequence of the Italian and EU's securitarian policies that reproduce an ideological framework that Cutro helped normalize: since the shipwreck the government has not strengthened sea rescue in any way, not even reviewing its procedures, rather the right to migrate and to be rescued are openly questioned and translated into privileges of which one is a beneficiary (Dal Lago, 2012).

From a discursive point of view, the main results of the study suggest that the government reproduced a discursive pattern in strong continuity with the past, reinforcing the anti-immigration discourse even in the aftermath of such a dramatic event. Firstly, the need to identify and reiterate the perpetrators of the tragedy is positioned in continuity with the criminalization of migration. As noted by Italian sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago in relation to the migration of Albanian citizen to Italian shores 25 years ago, the obsession with traffickers and smugglers appears to be an alibi for not talking about the significance of migration recognizing its

[8] https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/the-crotone-cover-up/.

complexity (Dal Lago, 2012). Moreover, this criminalization allows the government presenting itself as *not* responsible for the tragedy: the death of the people is the result of a criminal strategy external to the responsibilities of "us". This discourse confirms a construction of migration as an inherently criminal phenomenon (declined to migrants, NGOs, or smugglers) that has legitimized and helped reproduce a uniquely criminalizing vision. Secondly, analyzing the statements of the Ministers, I highlighted a recurring discursive structure around the representation of migrants as otherness. Precisely, the nominalization and the predication strategies have shifted from migrants to traffickers. Similarly to how the criminalization of NGOs has been constructed and legitimized (Lucchesi & Cerase, 2023), the "dangerous other" coincides with a new "Them" represented by the smugglers and human traffickers, while migrants become "Those" as problematic and passive subject of discourse. Indeed, the humanitarian frame has been frequently used in the government discourse through the passivation and victimization of migrants, embodied in the expression of the condolences to the victims and retiring the priority to avoid these tragedies. This argumentation has been strategically organized in the discourse and it allowed to legitimize both the criminalization of immigration and strengthened securitarian policies.

Finally, in the government discourse, the survivors have been blamed and treated as irresponsible people who ignore the risks of crossing the sea, reinforcing what Ruth Wodak and colleagues called "Shameless normalisation of impoliteness" as part of the far-right populist agenda (Wodak et al., 2021). The study confirms the symbolic de-individuation in the representation of migrant people when shipwreck happened (Nicolisi, 2015) as a structural process that allowed turning people's gaze away from migrants and the causes of migration processes avoiding giving space and visibility to faces and stories of people reinforcing their dehumanization (Cerase & Lucchesi, 2022). Once again, these narratives legitimize inequal power relations connected to the right to move and mask unjust and hegemonic treatments.

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Communicating Otherness as Political Action: The Case of Syrian Refugees and the Populist Right in Türkiye

Sümeyye Sakarya

Introduction

On 9 May 2023, Aljazare reporter Rokaya Çelik was covering the upcoming 14 May 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections when she was attacked in Umraniye, Istanbul. A representative of the İyi Parti (Good Party), a nationalist right-wing opposition, walked upon her from the party booth by yelling, "Do not speak Arabic here; this is Türkiye." When Çelik responded by saying, in Turkish, "You cannot speak to me like this. I am a Turk, I am a citizen, like you," he replied with, "*You are not a Turk, you are an Arab; what is your business here (Türkiye)*?". With the mounting heat of the argument and increasing number of people, Çelik was accompanied by the police to carry on her work (Ahmet & Smith, 2023). İyi Parti was the second largest party of the opposition block, the Millet (Nation) Alliance led by the main opposition CHP (Republican People's Party), which is secular and considered left-wing.

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When none of the presidential candidates could secure %50 in the 9 May election, this anti-refugee stance of İyi Parti became the primary campaign of the Millet Alliance for the runoff elections to be held on 28 May 2023. Posters with the slogan "Syrians will go!" ("Suriyeliler gi-de-cek!" with an emphasis on "will-go") alongside a photograph of their presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu were dotted all over the country. The anti-refugee discourse has been part of the Millet Alliance agenda since its inception in 2018, and sending refugees back was one of their significant promises. However, it was not the main propaganda till the runoff campaign, where the two remaining candidates could appeal to the electorate of the ostensibly nationalist Ata (Ancestoral) Alliance, whose presidential candidate was eliminated in the first round as the third place. The leading party of Ata Alliance was the populist right Zafer Partisi (Victory Party), which was established in 2021 with an ultra-nationalist and anti-refugee agenda. Although the Western right-left distinction is not much helpful in understanding Turkish politics, Zafer Partisi is an exception in this sense. For, it is the first Turkish party that can be considered an epitome of the Western populist right parties, constituting their identity exclusively through antagonizing their putative non-national other in pursuit of a homogeneous nation.

Although this snapshot only covers one month election period in Türkiye, it reveals that the putative non-national other, Syrians, plays the central role in the self-construction and garnering support of *particular* populist political projects. To explore the experience of and opportunities for Syrian refugees under the given conditions in Türkiye, in this paper, I question the potential of Hannah Arendt's political action to communicate otherness for marginalized groups. To this end, I initially examine Jürgen Habermas' communicative action as an interpretation of Arendt's political action (1977, 1998). While Arendt's (1998) political action does not deliver a theory of communication and otherness in politics per se, it has inspired works on the topic and Habermas' communicative action and discourse ethics are the most prominent examples of this. I argue that Habermas' procedural reading is distorted (Canovan, 1983) and hinders communication by further othering non-hegemonic actors. For, it presupposes already constituted identities and structures that consolidate the existing power relations between self and other, obstructing any ontological opening that can enable communicating otherness in its otherness. Then, I present an alternative reading where I maintain that political action as the unpredictable disclosure of self via speech in

public and the open-ended construction of self in political action provide the tools for communicating otherness in its otherness. Nonetheless, Arendt's assigning of spectators as the sole witnesses of political action and not counting violence as political action limit political action's potential in threatening circumstances, where the disclosure of self as the non-hegemonic other is perceived as a threat to the hegemony of the spectator other, and spectators may prefer to play the blind or respond with a backlash to the extent of extermination. Likewise, speech or the means of communication of the actor as non-hegemonic other might be unintelligible due to existent hegemony and communication may be halted, or the actor may resort to violence as the only way of communication. Finally, I test and mobilize those interpretations by analyzing the conditions of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. In this part, I focus on the Syrian discourse of Zafer Partisi as the only populist right party in the conventional sense. I argue that while structural issues already demonstrate procedural interpretations' inefficiency, the increasing influence of the populist right shows limitations and opportunities of the alternative interpretations of political action.

Habermas and Arendt: "Communicative" Action

Arendt defines political action as the unanticipated disclosure of "who" in public through action and speech. This conceptualization of political action is a renewal, as rightly put by Habermas (1977, p. 7), of Aristotle's "praxis." Aristotle differentiates between making (poiesis) and acting (praxis) based on their telos. While making means producing something new by transforming things, acting does not produce anything separate from itself. Acting (praxis) means realizing and performing skills in a public space (polis). As a good performance, action is an end in itself. Arendt revises Aristotle's division and separates human activities into three: labor, work, and action. Labor considers necessity and nature by meeting the fundamental needs for survival. As an activity realized in isolation, it is pre-political and corresponds to the human condition of life itself. Work, akin to Aristotle's making, provides an artificial world of things by producing lasting products that ensure the permanence and durability of the world beyond an individual human lifespan. Therefore, work corresponds to the human condition of worldliness. In this sense, their value comes from their outcomes, and they are not self-sufficient and intrinsically valuable. However, action does "not pursue an end and leave

no work behind" (Arendt, 1998, p. 206). As it exhausts its full meaning in the performance, Arendt places it as the highest-ranked human activity in the Aristotelian sense: it is an end in itself. Because this action has to be in a public space, it is the only activity that happens directly among human beings. In this case, action is political action and corresponds to the human condition of plurality. This connection that Arendt establishes between action and political through plurality derives from Aristotle's division between household (oikos) and city (polis). Aristotle situates the household as the realm of necessity where people fulfill their basic needs. Household relations are hierarchical, and the heads of the households are responsible for managing everything in the house. However, in the city (polis), these heads of households interact with each other and realize their full human capacity in this performance as equal citizens free from household concerns. This relation between oikos and polis makes polis whole, perfect, and therefore superior to oikos. The reflection of this division in Arendt is between private and public. She argues that modernization resulted in the rise of the social as a realm between public and private by moving the economics—household business—to the public. This domination of the social eradicated the difference and plurality in the public by blurring the public–private division. The eradication of difference and plurality hampers political action, which is conditioned on human plurality. Therefore, to save the "political," Arendt reclaims the public–private distinction by critically restoring Aristotle's praxis as action. In political action, human beings come together in the space of appearance, where they appear to each other by revealing their unique distinctness through speech and deed. This revelation, like a second birth, inserts human beings into the human world. This insertion is the only way of being and remaining a human because "A life without speech and without action … is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men" (Arendt, 1998, p. 176). This moment of human togetherness also generates power, according to Arendt.

In his paper, *Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power*, Habermas presents Arendt's political action exclusively as a "communicative" action. He argues that power is "the formation of a *common* will in a communication directed to reaching agreement" (1977, p. 4). Reaching *agreement* and *consensus* reappears throughout the paper several times as the primary purpose of Arendt's political action. More significantly and interestingly, Habermas details the communication process in reaching

agreement and consensus: "The strength of a consensus brought about in unconstrained communication is not measured against any success but against the claim to rational validity that is immanent in speech" (1977, p. 6). Then, he extracts rational procedures and political institutions from Arendt's work. These rational procedures organize "the intersubjectively shared life-world" that communicative action forms and proceeds through (Habermas, 1977, p. 8). Habermas' take on Arendt's political action could be best summarized in the following words:

> In communication, individuals appear actively as unique beings and reveal themselves in their subjectivity. At the same time, they must recognize one another as equally responsible beings, that is, as beings capable of inter-subjective agreement - the rationality claim immanent in speech grounds a radical equality. (…) Hannah Arendt (…) wants to read off of the formal properties of communicative action (or praxis) the general structures of an unimpaired intersubjectivity. (Habermas, 1977, p. 8)

This reading of Arendt is distorted as it substitutes "talking for acting, consensus for disagreement, and unity for plurality in politics" (Canovan, 1983, p. 108). In other words, Habermas does "read his own theory into" Arendt's work (Canovan, 1983, p. 107). However, the above excerpt from Habermas provides a good starting point for his theory in the context of communicating otherness as it enables us to mobilize Arendt's political action as a theory of communication and otherness from the reverse. For, although it would be unfair to define Habermas theory of communicative action as merely an interpretation of Arendt's political action, he accepts that "I have learned from H. Arendt how to approach a theory of communicative action" (Habermas, 1980, pp. 128–129). Furthermore, Habermas' theory of communicative action is not intended for a hypothetical original position but for real-life practices. Therefore, it offers a practical device to understand and improve the case of Syrians as others to be communicated. Although there is a thoroughly detailed reasoning and background Habermas mapped for each step, concept, and version of the theory, I will limit myself to the initial procedures that Habermas developed to govern the process of communicative action as the most relevant part to communicating otherness.

Habermas' theory of communicative action explores the conditions in which rational actors communicate with each other through speech acts—argumentation—to reach a mutual understanding, a consensus. With this

theory and discourse ethics that governs its procedures, Habermas aims to resolve a dilemma encountered by the modern, post-traditional society. He argues that with the transition to a modern pluralistic society, the traditional religious foundations shattered as a shared background to moral judgments and beliefs. However, this creates a dilemma as we still deliberate with reasons relying on moral judgments and beliefs. He maintains that we need a shared moral basis as people who wish to resolve their conflicts through communication not violence. As it is not possible to ensure "a substantive agreement on particular norms" in a pluralistic society, Habermas attempts to derive this moral basis from the very process of communication, "the form and perspectival structure of unimpaired, intersubjective socialization" (1998, p. 40). This universalistic conception of morality based on socialization should treat persons equally "as irreplicable individuals and as members of the community." Therefore, this equal treatment should not be at the expense of individuality and should be in "the form of a *nonleveling* and *nonappropriating* inclusion of the other *in his otherness*" (1998, p. 40). To realize this goal, he identifies an ideal situation's four most significant features "that could have taken place under real conditions" (Habermas, 1998, p. 39). Firstly, no one who can make a relevant contribution has been excluded. Then, it should be genuinely public so that it includes all concerned. Secondly, all participants are given an equal chance to contribute. Thirdly, contributors must be sincere and honest in what they are saying. Thus, there is no manipulation or deception. Lastly, the process should be freed from any kind of coercion "so that the 'yes' or 'no' stances that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of better reasons" (Habermas, 1998, p. 44). All other aspects of the theory of communicative action proceed under these conditions. Therefore, analyzing these conditions will suffice to test the limits and potential of Habermas' theory for communicating otherness.

The most salient characteristic of Habermas' approach is proceduralism. As morality and legitimacy derive from the procedures, he carves out a very detailed structure where everything has its place. However, this highly procedural approach hinders communicating otherness, particularly in the context of marginalized others. For, it requires a pre-communicative system that decides relevant things in advance. The first drawback of this proceduralism is that it presupposes already constituted identities and automatically designs specific figures as others. Its pre-communicative system blocks the communication and construction

of identity as an active agent contributing to the transformation of society. This blocking happens in two ways. Firstly, because the pre-communicative system decides who is concerned and who can make relevant contributions, those regarded as non-concerned or who cannot make relevant contributions are excluded from the communication process. Therefore, the excluded are deprived of the opportunity to communicate, build, and transform their identity and otherness. Secondly, the included other is blocked from fully articulating and transforming their identity due to the pre-assigned procedures. For instance, the last feature about coercion is not only unfeasible but also prevents the inclusion of the other in their otherness. Most of the time, otherness is produced as an effect of both internal (like comprehensive beliefs) or external power dynamics, which frequently take the form of coercion. The otherness of the other that Habermas wants to include in the process may bring internal coercion, such as the internalized fear or threat of eternal punishment. In that context, we will have two options: either the other will leave their otherness—for example, religious obligation—outside the process, or coercion will be allowed. In both cases, Habermas' ideal situation will not be realized due to an internal contradiction in his theory. Furthermore, that rules as procedures and allowed argument types are pre-decided does not allow creativity in the process, which may facilitate the communication of otherness. For, in some instances, the required "neutral" and "rational" argumentation may not be the suitable way of conveying and communicating otherness for particular others.

The second problem of proceduralism and its pre-communicative system is the consolidation of the existing power relations between self and other. Who will decide the rules and the included or the excluded? Furthermore, who will supervise and check the process? Although Habermas contends that coercion should and can be excluded from the communication process, the pre-communicative system has to home an "original violence" among alternative procedural views. In this case, the total elimination of coercion from the communication process will mean sedimentation resulting from the forgetting of the origins.[1] This reality will engender the further othering of the other, at least in two senses. Firstly, it will naturalize the effects of original violence, which alienated and antagonized particular groups by institutionalizing it into structures.

[1] Here I refer to Laclau's (1990) discussion of social relations.

Secondly, it will not allow redressing by requiring all to act according to these structures without resorting to coercion. In other words, the total elimination of coercion has the risk of serving the powerful and hegemonic self rather than the marginalized other. Here, Habermas may point to the more powerful self's use of coercion against the other, which is a higher risk than the one mentioned in the objection. However, rather than responding to the coercion objection, this answer will reinforce the main objection: the problem of proceduralism. For, it shows that the process needs more flexibility since there will be different ways and instruments of communicating otherness. Habermas' procedures might work for some of them while not working for others.

Although Habermas' communicative action and discourse ethics cannot be abridged in those procedures, therefore the objections of proceduralism, this rough portrait will be enough to show its limits in communicating otherness. By requiring frozen identities and structures, Habermas hinders any ontological opening that can enable communicating otherness in its otherness. As a result, the distance between the self and the other increases in a way that marginalizes the other. This reality shows the need for a more flexible and dynamic theorization of communication and otherness, which accommodate creative action and transformation. I argue that unpredictability and the process character of Arendt's action grant this dynamism and flexibility. We can understand unpredictability in two interdependent senses: unexpected beginning and unforeseen results. Firstly, action as the insertion of one into the human world is a beginning, a second birth as the beginning of the beginner (Arendt, 1998, pp. 176–177). Since beginning necessarily means the introduction of something new, "startling unexpectedness" is characteristic of it. Arendt asserts that man's ability to act indicates that "the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable" (1998, p. 177). Secondly, the process character of action makes it unpredictable regarding its consequences. Arendt states that "processes are started whose outcome is unpredictable, so that uncertainty rather than frailty becomes the decisive character of human affairs" (1998, p. 232). These processes start through the deed and speech of the actor and literally may have no end, as their consequences can multiply until the end of the world (Arendt, 1998, p. 233). Arendt maintains that this unmatched "capacity of endurance" could be a pride if the actor could bear its burdens: irreversibility and unpredictability. However, these burdens are impossible to bear. For, regardless of the actor's intention,

her deeds and speech can result in a disaster after falling into the existing web of human relationships—unpredictability—and she cannot undo this process—irreversibility. Nevertheless, despite the impossibility of bearing the burdens, these features of action—the disclosure of the self through deed and speech—render it a creative tool of communication and transformation, particularly for the marginalized other. As "unpredictability" does not recognize rules and borders, any type of deed and speech by the other has the potential to be a political action for communicating their otherness and transforming the hegemonic order in their favor. In this sense, Arendt's political action can deliver a versatile and robust theory of communicative action where the other communicates themselves in their otherness, free from any procedures that can limit their communication and construction of their self.

On the other hand, Arendt's overinterpretation of unpredictability for the actor and the exclusion of violence from political action limits its potential to communicate otherness in threatening circumstances. She argues that the unpredictability of action situates the actor as the victim and sufferer rather than the doer and the author of the action (Arendt, 1998, pp. 233–234). Although this interpretation may not appear "over," Arendt proceeds that the meaning of the action "never discloses itself to the actor." Considering its *process* character, only "the backward glance of the historian" (Arendt, 1998, pp. 192, 233) can witness its meaning entirely. Similarly, when she mentions the *moment* of political action in which the actor reveals himself, Arendt states that "the 'who,' which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself" (1998, p. 179). This appointment of the spectator as the only storyteller risks the marginalized actors' acquisition of political agency and existence. For, "who" comes into existence retrospectively through the narration of the stories in which he reveals himself. These narrations by witnessing others construct him as a "hero." Hence, although the actor is the one who begins the story through his deeds and speeches, he is neither the author nor the producer of it. Only the narrators of the story can bestow an identity to the actor by making him a hero (Arendt, 1998, pp. 184–187). This withholding of "narration" from the actors can completely eliminate marginalized groups in the long run. This elimination may happen for at least two reasons. Firstly, their actions, particularly as speech, may not be intelligible to the others who are supposed to narrate them. Therefore, regardless of their attempts at self-disclosure, they may be unable to communicate. Their speeches may fade

into oblivion without becoming a political action to be remembered and narrated. Secondly, witnesses may prefer to be blind to the actions. Particularly when they regard the actor as a threat, they can even respond with a backlash to the extent of extermination. For instance, an Islamophobic spectator or historian may prefer not to narrate the political action of the Muslim other. As a result, the marginalized Muslim cannot communicate and acquire a political identity. The second limitation of political action becomes salient, especially at this point of impossible speech: violence as communication. Arendt unconditionally excludes violence from the political process. She claims that violence and action cannot substitute each other, and when violence is involved, speech becomes "mere talk" and loses its political/action character (1998, pp. 179–180). This exclusion of violence can further marginalize them under the abovementioned conditions: unintelligible speech and blind spectators. When speech or the means of communication of the actor as non-hegemonic other are unintelligible due to existent hegemony and communication may be halted, the actor may resort to violence as the only way of communication.

While these features of political action limit its potential as a theory of communication, its unpredictability still makes it a robust and promising option for communicating otherness. We never know what the future holds and what the "process" will bring, even under the conditions of halted communication. In the following section, I will mobilize these readings to analyze the case of Syrians in Türkiye, focusing on their marginalization by the populist right.

Syrian Refugees in Türkiye

The first refugee movement from Syria to Türkiye, with only 252 Syrians, happened on 29 April 2011 (Erdoğan, 2022, p. 4). The dominant belief, both of the state and the public, was that the war would end, and Syrian *guests* would return. This belief, along with other factors, resulted in a welcoming attitude instead of an anti-refugee sentiment in the public during this initial period. The government adopted an "open door policy" and "protective" approach toward Syrians. However, in the meantime, the number of refugees, mainly Syrians, increased unanticipatedly. While Türkiye had only 58,000 refugees of all backgrounds when the first Syrians arrived in 2011, it raised to over 1.5 million in 2014, 3 million in 2016, and more than 4 million in 2020, including 3,638,000 Syrians (Erdoğan, 2020, p. 75). This drastic change in the numbers gradually

altered the perception of Syrians in a negative sense. The social and official unpreparedness for millions of newcomers, socio-economic concerns, and identity-related anxieties exploited by populist politicians facilitated anti-refugee rhetoric in society (Erdoğan, 2022, pp. 50–54). Nevertheless, with the worsening economic conditions during the COVID-19 era, which rendered Syrians one of the scapegoats, this racist stance reached a peak.

Zafer Partisi (Victory Party) appeared as an institutional embodiment of this sentiment and further galvanized it through sending-back campaigns, scapegoating, fake news, and provocations. Zafer Partisi was established in August 2021 by Ümit Özdağ, who was expelled from İyi Parti (Good Party), which Meral Akşener founded in October 2017, after being expelled from Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party, MHP). The MHP was established as an ultra-nationalist party in 1969. Its ethnonationalism, statist ideology, and occasional involvement with violence, primarily through its youth branch, led scholars to place it as a far-right party by referring to Western politics. The MHP's inner-party issues with the changing political landscape amplified the criticisms against the party leader Devlet Bahçeli, particularly after November 2015 election. This situation engendered the emergence of alternative names against Bahçeli. However, those potential leaders were thwarted, and Meral Akşenir, one of them, was dismissed from the party in October 2016. This fraction within the MHP stimulated the foundation of an alternative nationalist party, İyi Parti, by some former MHP members and prominent nationalist figures under the leadership of Meral Akşener (Gerim, 2023, pp. 273–276). İyi Parti's ideological positioning differed from the MHP on two main lines. Firstly, it embraced a more Kemalist-secularist style of nationalism, while the MHP increasingly avoided this with its gradually close alliance with the ruling AK Parti. Secondly, as the MHP-AK Parti alliance led the MHP to downplay its anti-refugee rhetoric, İyi Parti became the voice of this rhetoric. For instance, it held a workshop and released a three-step roadmap to send Syrians back. In alignment with this approach, leading figures of the party, such as Ümit Özdağ and İlay Aksoy, made statements arguing that Syrians pose the threat of reshaping the ethnic structure of Türkiye against Turks (Gerim, 2023, pp. 280–281). AK Parti government's continuing supportive discourse on Syrians played a significant role in the opposition parties' embracement of an anti-refugee discourse. Despite the mounting concerns with the increasing number of refugees, AK Parti

not only avoided the rhetoric that regards refugees as a "problem" but also lamented the deployment of such rhetoric. Instead, it continued to justify and portray the issue by referring to Islamic and cultural solidarity (the muhajir-ensar fraternity), the regional position and strength of the country, and "humanitarian foreign policy" (Erdoğan, 2020, p. 75). Therefore, opposition parties found an area to exploit: the public dissent around refugees.

Zafer Partisi was founded in this context as the first Western-style populist right or far-right party. It presented itself as a third option by criticizing both the government and the opposition in terms of the immigration issue, which it portrayed as the central problem of the country. Its principal claim was that Türkiye was under invasion, like in the War of Independence period, and Zafer Partisi would send those 8 million refugees and fugitives back to their country. Due to its xenophobic and anti-immigrant policies, particularly anti-Arab and anti-Syrian, the party was likened to European radical right and populist parties such as Front National (France), Alternative for Germany, and Party of Freedom (Netherlands) (Akçay & Deniş, 2022).

The party leader Ümit Özdağ frequently shared videos, images, and news on his social media accounts, such as a Syrian stealing a phone (*Takvim*, 2023) and Afghans beating people (Ümit Özdağ [@umitozdag], 2022). Although many of the news turned out to be fake, and sometimes people in the videos were Turkish people who had nothing to do with the action ascribed to the video (*Takvim*, 2023), Özdağ continued to fabricate and spread his fake news. On 27 June 2022, Özdağ attempted to visit Reyhanlı, a district of Hatay province, hosting many Syrians at the border of Syria. On his way to the region, he stated, "We will place the first mine on the Turkish-Syrian border in Reyhanlı, to be completed when we come to power," referring to the 2023 elections. However, before his arrival, the Hatay governorship declared that they canceled all events for one week and Özdağ and his team would not be allowed to enter Hatay. Özdağ criticized the decision by arguing that "there are 700 thousand Syrians inside (the city), there are ISIS terrorists and al-Qaeda members among them, you do not let a Turkish parliamentarian into a Turkish city" (Independent Türkçe, 2022).

Despite the official condemnation of Özdağ at all levels and pro-refugee statements and pro-refugee policies of the government, Özdağ and his campaigns were welcomed and supported by a significant portion of society. Among those campaigns, the most famous has been Zafer

Tourism referring to bus companies called "tourism." The images of buses inscribed "Zafer Tourism" began circulating with the promise of sending Syrians back. Those images are sometimes accompanied by the slogan "2023 Damascus and Kabul services are starting." For instance, he shared an IBAN on his social media by announcing that "Our ticket sales have started for Zafer Tourism's one-way Damascus expeditions. Write the name you want to send in the eft description, and we will make the reservation" (*Yeni Şafak*, 2023a). Beyond a bus figure targeting Syrians, this campaign constantly expanded to cover all types of immigrants and ways of deportation "vehicles," including the military device "catapult" to "throw" Syrians. This campaign resonated with a considerable part of society, and "Zafer Tourism" became a shorthand for the anti-refugee rhetoric on social media.

As mentioned in the introduction, when the presidential elections went to the runoff, this sending—Syrians—back campaign turned into the main campaign of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On the 14 May 2023 presidential elections, Sinan Oğan, the candidate of Ata Alliance led by Zafer Partisi, received only % 5.17 of the votes while Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Cumhur (People) Alliance led by his AK Parti garnered % 49.52, and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu of Millet Alliance received % 44.88 (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, 2023). These proportions placed Ata Alliance in a critical position for the remaining two alliances of the runoff. While Sinan Oğan expressed his endorsement for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ümit Özdağ announced that Zafer Partisi would support Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu: "If you want Türkiye remain Türkiye, if you do not want it to become an immigrant-istan (göçmenistan), support the policy and politicians that will send 13 million refugees to their homeland in the election to be held on 28 May. Vote for Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. This is the only way your country will not be an immigrant-istan" (BBC News Türkçe, 2023). Although the number of Syrians was around 3.5 million according the Ministry of Interior (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2023), "sending 13 million Syrians back" become a common slogan of the Millet Alliance even before the official support announcement of Ümit Özdağ. Furthermore, while Syrians composed the majority of the immigrants in Türkiye, Pakistanis and particularly Afghans, unlike Ukrainians, were also at the center of negative public attention and xenophobic campaigns. In this sense, immigrant-istan (göçmenistan), as a word coined by Özdağ, was of significance in this announcement. The suffix "-(i)stan," which appears in the name of many Muslim countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, could

appeal to the secular constituency of CHP by consolidating Zafer Partisi's coalition with the Millet Alliance.

After the victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (%52.18) in the runoff by garnering 2,329,865 more votes than Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (%47.82), prominent names supporting the Millet Alliance argued that Erdoğan won thanks to the votes of naturalized refugees or "Arabs" who were granted citizenship through investment (*Yeni Şafak*, 2023b). This claim was an extension of the decade-old argument that Erdoğan accepted Syrians to make them vote for himself, instrumentalizing them for his domestic interests. However, even according to the official numbers shared by CHP, the number of foreign-born-citizen voters from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Libya was 235,701 (CHP, 2023). On 11 May 2023, when he was asked about how long the country intends to host refugees ahead of the 14 May elections, Erdoğan, who is portrayed as a populist right-wing politician, repeated that although Türkiye build houses in Northern Syria and support those who wish to return there, Syrian people are still fighting for their lives against terrorist organizations due to the war in their country. By referring to the opposition's statements that "when I come, I will send them back to their country" or "I will not allow them to live in Türkiye," he maintained that "I am personally not a fan of this mindset. Firstly, this would be persecution…. Kicking them back just because they are immigrants …is not humanitarian. It is not conscientious. Above all, it is not Islamic" (NTV Haber, 2023). Therefore, the persistent pro-refugee stance of President Erdoğan, despite the increasing anti-refugee sentiment in society, provided an opportunity to be seized by all the opposition beyond the conventional populist right exemplified by Zafer Partisi.

Concluding Remarks: Syrian Refugees and Communicating Otherness

These campaigns by populist far-right Zafer Partisi not only appealed to an already existing anti-Syrian constituency but also further increased and consolidated anti-Syrian sentiment in society. The runoff election campaign of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was a sign of this acceptance and consolidation. However, beyond the hyperbolically circulating rhetoric, the lives of Syrians were also increasingly affected by this othering. The treatment and concerns of Syrians during the 6 February 2023 earthquake epitomized the impact of this othering. The "official" number of Syrians living

in 11 cities impacted by the earthquake was registered as 1.7 million. In this sense, there happened to be a significant number of earthquake victims among Syrians (Sağıroğlu, 2023). Nonetheless, those victims and other Syrians faced discriminatory treatment during the crisis, from withholding aid to life-threatening violence. For instance, several Syrians who tried to help others or save their families under the debris were attacked by "mistaken" thieves (Tuncel, 2023a). The language barrier was one of the factors that facilitated such violence, as many of them could not communicate in Turkish, such as in the case of Omar Hassoun, who was beaten while trying to save his children's lives (Kandemir, 2023). However, the mounting racism in society was the main factor behind such atrocities, as stated by both officials and NGOs. Refugee Rights Platform stated that the attacks started after Ümit Özdağ's post-earthquake Antakya visit. Before that, the local people were more in solidarity, but after the "theft" rumors, the public began to react (Tuncel, 2023b). On 10 February 2023, Özdağ shared a video on his social media claiming that a Syrian stole the phone of a fireman. After the video hit the headlines in a very short time, the person in the video, not stealing, turned out to be a Turkish earthquake volunteer, and both the person himself and officials, including the Minister of Justice and relevant governorship, made a statement against Ümit Özdağ. Yet, when he was asked to apologize, Özdağ said he had no reason to say sorry. In fact, the person in the video should apologize for wearing a blue garment given to Syrian translators (Gazete Duvar, 2023).

Although the earthquake example is enough to show the rise in the threatening conditions for Syrians parallel to the climbing anti-refugee rhetoric of populist parties such as CHP, İyi Parti, and particularly Zafer Partisi, the last couple of years also witnessed the murder of Syrians. While some of these happened due to so-called personal fights, others were direct and violent killings. For instance, missing 9-year-old Syrian girl Gina's corpse was found to be murdered and hidden in a water well in April 2023 in Kilis (Haksöz Haber, 2023). Similarly, a 12-year-old Syrian child was killed for ransom in May 2023 in Mersin (*Evrensel Gazetesi*, 2023). Although it might be argued that those kinds of homicides also happen to Turkish people or are personal issues, the increasing frequency coupled with racist attacks and discourses does not support this objection. More significantly, the reception of those killings with silence or even approval of them on social media by many demonstrates the worsening conditions to the extent of survival threats as a result of the

growing othering of Syrians. That many people tagged Zafer Partisi and Ümit Özdağ on social media for refugee-related instances shows the link between the populist parties and their anti-refugee rhetoric.

This depiction of Syrians in Türkiye makes us question the limits of the mentioned communication theories for the marginalized other. Initially, the proceduralism of Habermas' theory excludes Syrians from the communication process. Considering the structural issues, such as language barrier and different ethnicity, resulting in their exclusion even in an earthquake where they are victims in need of aid, Habermas' ideal situation will not operate under any condition. The unofficial pre-communicative system that designs Syrians as others will either automatically exclude them from communication—for instance, by Zafer Partisi—or accept them conditionally. Although the officials will attempt to ensure equal and inclusive conditions, like the statements by the mentioned municipalities and President Erdoğan, either the experience of Syrians (inner) or the increasing racism promoted by the populist right (external) will function as coercion in the communication process. Therefore, coercion will shape both the communication process and the identity construction even when it is claimed outside. The earthquake rumors about Syrians who could not call for help under the debris as they thought the people would not help them hearing them speaking Arabic illustrates an extreme example of this case (Tuncel, 2023b). In a place where speaking Arabic is risky, the ideal condition of Habermas will never be realized for a Syrian regardless of the official guarantee of the state since people will act on their experience that the state cannot compensate retrospectively.

This example also demonstrates the limits of Arendt's political action regarding blind spectators and violence. For, in cases where their Arabic or ways of living as speech are discounted on purpose by the hegemonic others, their communication will be halted. Furthermore, under particular conditions where the communication moved toward a fight, such as in the "theft" instance where Syrians cannot explain themselves in Turkish, violence might be the only way to act to survive. While it might be argued that this is not communication but self-protection, in the given examples, it still operates as a way of communicating themselves for Syrian others. On the other hand, the unpredictability and the process character of Arendt's action still carry a promise for Syrians to communicate their otherness. For instance, the media coverage of violence on Omar Hassoun being hospitalized while trying to save his children under the debris hit

the headlines and started a process of aid mobilization (Kandemir, 2023). Put in Arendtian terms, that some spectators narrated Hassoun's actions (working on the debris), which "incited" violence, triggered a process of mass solidarity, that was unpredictable for Hassoun at the beginning. In this sense, although we do not know what the future will bring—good or bad—communication as political action has always the capacity to render the process in unpredictable ways.

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Spanish Extremist Right-Wing Populist Campaign: Vox and the Pandemic as an Opportunity to Spread Hate Speech and Sinophobia

Luiz Peres-Neto

Introduction

In the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization has detected a hatred spiral of xenophobia in several countries. The link between migration and coronavirus, exploited by extremist political parties in Europe and the United States as part of its polarizing agenda, undoubtedly has contributed to this racist connection in which one Asian diaspora, in general, and Chinese migrants, in particular, were pointed as responsible for the coronavirus spread across the globe (Dochow-Sondershaus, 2022; Huertas-Bailén & Peres-Neto, 2023). In this sense, the despicable strategy of "we" (Western) versus "them" (Asia or Chinese) was used as part of the populist manual to polarize societies in the unprecedented developments of the global health warning.

Political leaders such as former US President Donald Trump explicitly referred to the "Chinese virus" as part of China's attempt to dispatch US

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leadership, a conspiracy theory deprived of any proof except fake news and social media disinformation posts. Nghiem and Morstatter (2021) explain these as anti-Asia and Sinophobic discourses. However, it was echoed by extremist right-wing counterparts such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (Nemer, 2021), among others. This hate spiral has led the UN to release a general guide to avoid linking nations and nationalities with the global pandemic (Lee, 2021). In this chapter, we propose to investigate how Vox's populist right-wing political party has used this sinophobic hate speech as a political propaganda strategy in Spain.

In general terms, hate speech and disinformation have the purpose of harming a person or a particular group and must be understood as a threat to democracy and human rights values (Keen, 2020). Alastuey Dobón (2016) argued that, after 2015, some legal changes were introduced in Spain, expanding the understanding of hate crime to prevent hate speech and its consequences to the public sphere. However, it has had no practical advantages. Hate speech remains in Spain a central issue in an even more polarized society (Paz et al., 2021). Hate speeches frequently target migrants and foreigners, and a discursive dynamic of "we" and "them" remains relevant to understanding xenophobic and polarizing political discourses.

The Spanish extreme right-wing political party Vox has engaged in disinformation and hate messages linking China during the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter addresses how Vox has expressed it on their social media page on Facebook, which can be considered hate speech and Sinophobia. To do so, we carried out a critical discourse analysis of all posts made by Vox that mention China and Covid-19. It includes cross-platform content such as tweets, Instagram posts, and YouTube videos posted on Vox's Facebook page.

We believe it is an example of how platforms failed in Europe—taking Spain as a case—to contain hate speech and disinformation. Consequently, we suggest that the circulation of harmful and fake discourse can amplify racism against migrants and damage the foundations of democracy and a culture of peace.

Hate Speech: From the American Controversy to a Minorities Group's Safeguard Boat

The literature on hate speech has its roots in legal debates that frame this concept from the limits of freedom of expression in the United States context (Brown, 2015; Gelber, 2002; Waldron, 2012). Given the singularities of the US Constitution's First Amendment, which expresses that no law can limit freedom of expression, an extensive understanding of this right was developed. The contribution of American constitutionalism went beyond the US border.

However, when taking a historical retrospective of hate speech, Samuel Walker (1994) explains how, gradually, a moat was built over the centuries, making conceptual differences that separate the American vision from that of the rest of the world. According to him, based on a strict view of the US Constitution's First Amendment, even the most violent speeches receive constitutional protection while, against the grain, in almost the entire world, more or less clear limits on freedom of expression are accepted, excluding the right to offend.

Although hate speech could be considered a problem outside of US borders, it was tackled with different constitutional interpretations in many jurisdictions. Thus, for example, it is common to analyze all the efforts of the Council of Europe to push forward initiatives to prevent and suppress hate speech. At the core of the Commissioner for Human Rights, several initiatives were implemented, such as promoting a specific Commissioner, court sections, publishing and editing manuals and documents with best practices to combat hate speech in the virtual environment, the media or to promote education based on human rights (Benedek & Kettemann, 2013; Lange, 2009).

Many voices point out, however, that social media networks and internet platforms have stretched the limits of tolerable expressions in democratic societies and, therefore, given the rampant growth in the circulation of hate speech, more political and institutional interventions are needed to help regulate freedom of expression or promote a culture of peace, recognition of otherness and diversity that make up the contemporary cultural mosaic (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017; Coller, 2021; Hameleers et al., 2022; Pettersson, 2019; Pitruzzella & Pollicino, 2020; Watanabe et al., 2018).

Even though hate speech is constituted as violent elements different from physical violence—inserting itself in the spectrum of symbolic

violence (Bourdieu, 2000) and a cause-effect relationship between the two is not verifiable, the literature consulted indicates the existence of connections between the circulation of hate speech and xenophobic or racist acts that involve physical violence (Alcacer-Guirao & Fouce, 2020; Barth, 2018; Gould, 2019; Herz & Molnár, 2012). Human action is framed in specific cultural contexts (Hall, 1999; Williams, 2011), and, therefore, we understand the importance of stopping hate speech from promoting a culture of tolerance and respect toward diversities. In this context, the media, as "cultural agents that produce and reproduce meanings" (Thompson, 2011, p. 92), also plays a determining role. The growth of social media platforms' presence in daily life interactions added a layer of complexity to controlling the spread of hate speech and its consequences online and offline for building a living together place where diversity can be achieved (Lange, 2009).

According to Brown (2015), the morality of hate speech is surrounded by the following issues: health, autonomy, security, no-subordination, the absence of oppression, and human dignity. Therefore, there are different lenses through which to analyze and approach the complexities of hate speech, from its regulation to its societal implications. Matsuda (1993), for example, discusses hate speech in the context of critical race theory, exploring its role in reinforcing systemic inequalities—majority structural oppression—when the victims are racialized (Asian or Afro-Americans), injuring human dignity. Taking this legacy, Crenshaw (2022) advocates for an intersectional approach to understanding hate speech and its implications on marginalized groups, incorporating an interconnected view on race, gender, and social class. However, Campo Herz and Molnár (2012) focused on human dignity. They argued that based on the evolution of hate speech and its social consequences, new boundaries to define the limits of free expression must be settled.

Several studies have been conducted to undermine the extension or consequences of hate speech across social media platforms. Watanabe et al. (2018) collected a massive diversity of hate speeches on X (former Twitter)—sexists, homophobic, religious, etc.—to develop a technique to prevent its spread. Focusing on the same platform, Enarsson and Lindgren (2019) analyzed hate speech against Roma people in Sweden and concluded on the importance of placing discourses on its contexts to define it as hateful speech or under political or constitutional protection. Arcila-Calderón et al. (2022) used computational big data strategies to

study the hate speech on migrants and its acceptance in Europe. Meanwhile, Losada-Díaz et al. (2021) focused on discussing political hate speech on Instagram during the 2019 General Elections in Spain.

The academic literature on hate speech is vast and encompasses studies with diverse methods and interests in particular platforms or social groups. However, the idea of hate speech as a discriminatory discourse against minority groups and the call to protect their human dignity seems to be critical to all consulted studies. In this sense, the seminal work of Waldron (2012) pivots around most of them. In his work "The Harm in Hate Speech," he defines hate speech as a form of communication that attacks or undermines the dignity of individuals or groups based on their membership in certain identifiable social groups. Therefore, Waldron emphasizes the harm caused by hate speech, particularly its role in eroding social cohesion and perpetuating inequality by diminishing and marginalizing targeted groups. As a result, he warms on the consequences of hate speech, from threatening social harmony to hurting individual dignity.

Sinophobia, Disinformation, and Racism Campaigns Along Covid-19

As discussed earlier in this chapter, hate speech as harmful discourse toward minority groups can be based on a considerable variety of prejudices and violent content. Racism and xenophobia are among those types of hate inflicted. Based on ethnic prejudice or migrant origin, during the Covid-19, several studies indicated wages of harmful discourses against Asian migrants, in general, and the Chinese diaspora, in particular. Sinophobia as a prejudice, discrimination, or fear directed toward China, its people, culture, or its policies was detected in several studies (Guo et al., 2020; Horton, 2020; Huertas-Bailén & Peres-Neto, 2023; Wang et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2022).

In France, for example, Wang et al. (2021) analyzed the racism experienced by the Chinese diaspora and how the pandemic has worked as a catalyst agent to make them even more resilient against racism. Also, they explain how it has been an opportunity window for young and well-educated Chinese diaspora to actively enroll in anti-racism activism movements. According to the authors, although it is difficult to define Asians as a unique category, prejudices in France have extended to all racialized people with Asiatic heritage. Therefore, the reaction was not only against Sinophobia—the specific xenophobia toward the Chinese

community—but on the anti-Asia prejudice driven by Covid-19 moral panic.

Although with different methods, Huertas-Bailén and Peres-Neto (2023) carried out more than 20 qualitative in-depth interviews with Chinese diaspora settled in Barcelona (Spain) and concluded that racism and Sinophobia were identified as a previously existing problem. Nevertheless, the outbreak of Covid-19 has added new layers, such as the stigmatization of mask use or the awkward situations experienced by this community in public transport or other public spaces. Although the youth diaspora tended to be more reactive to racism and Sinophobia, in general terms, due to the normalization and internalization of racism as a previous problem, the Covid-19 was considered by informants as only one more chapter on their discriminatory life experiences as a racialized community.

Kim and Kesari (2021) have related hate speech against Asian minorities diaspora in the United States during Covid-19 with misinformation. Based on the analysis of almost 60,000 tweets, they verified that after former US President Donald Trump's misinformation on Covid-19 and China, both anti-Asian hate speech and counter-hate speech had increased. Trump's discursive activity spreading misinformation regarding the origin and spread of the coronavirus or his personal views on the role of the Chinese government in it supported haters' activities on social media, waving misinformation. However, Trump's institutional position legitimized his opinions as a State's official speech. Therefore, the authors established an association between Trump's misinformation and anti-Asian and Sinophobic hate speech. Twitter's users justify and defend their hate speech using misinformation.

In the era of information disorder, Wardle (2018) argues for the need to clarify conceptual and practical definitions to research or tackle disinformation, misinformation, or malinformation. In short, disinformation involves deliberately false or misleading information spread with the intent to deceive or manipulate, causing harm. According to Wardle, when disinformation is shared, it often turns into misinformation, which refers to false or inaccurate information shared without harmful intent. In turn, malinformation involves sharing genuine information intending to cause harm or damage.

Studying disinformation as a political communication issue, Freelon and Wells (2020) devote close attention to what they have considered the two most extensively conceptual relatively: misinformation and propaganda. As such, they review the long tradition of the propaganda

model and its importance to political communication research before the academic interest in disinformation, which would be more prominent by 2016 and beyond. In this context, they consider that the faster growth of misinformation studies despite disinformation has a conceptual justification: misinformation "does not require a finding of malicious intent: messages need only be false and potentially harmful to qualify as such" (p. 149).

However, as Altay et al. (2023) explain, misinformation is not a social media problem only, and they agree with the previously mentioned authors on the importance of how we define (mis)information as central and directly related to results and practical implications of it. Therefore, to navigate through it in the context of racist political discourse on Covid-19 by political parties such as Vox, we believe critical discourse analysis can encompass a more accurate view.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): An Approach to Deconstruct Political Racism

Though with more similarities than differences with other linguistic and textual analysis perspectives, critical discourse analysis has consistently developed across different disciplines. As Wodak and Meyer (2016) explain, it is a perspective and not a method due to the possibilities to articulate metatheories and analytical frames, developing diverse analyses on a given object's structure and discursive strategies, content, and context. According to the same authors, Critical Linguistics, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics are the primary roots that nourish its emergence as a perspective.

Consequently, many possible analytical perspectives reinforce the multidisciplinary constitution of CDA. It allows the analysis of the complexities of discourse as a social practice (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). In this sense, the understanding that all discourses are social practice allows us to interpret discourse and society as part of a dialectical relationship in which language is socially constructed and constitutive of it.

Critical discourse analysis scholars such as Fairclough (2013), Van Dijk (2018), and Wodak and Meyer (2016), among others, maintain that discourses must be analyzed with the sociocultural frameworks to which they proceed. In short, we can list three general frameworks: the discursive situations (defined by the concrete situation in which the discourses

are enunciated), the institutions (family, school, state bodies, etc.) related to it, and the social (defined by the organizations or social groups). Despite some particularities, there is a general agreement that the critical discourse analysis must concentrate on the discourses' complexities in their contextual dimension.

One of these particularities can be exemplified by Teun Van Dijk's (2009, 2018) works. He sustains that, in addition to the contextual dimension, CDA presupposes the study, on the one hand, of the relationship between discursive and cognitive structures and, on the other, of the social structures. According to Van Dijk's thesis, it is not enough to understand the linguistic processes that make comprehensible or knowable discourses from their structural point of view. Otherwise, CDA must seek to analyze how these structures are related to social systems.

Van Dijk sustains that by studying the relationship between social, cognitive, and discursive structures, we can go through the social terrain of domination and power. It is worth highlighting here, however, that, for Van Dijk (2009), power and dominance must be studied based on the notion of "control." Therefore, he recognizes that any control is diffuse in society. However, he defends that it is related to the idea of freedom. No individual is entirely free to express his affections and thoughts. CDA allows the disclosure of discursive situations in which power abuse relations take place, such as racism.

Mainly, racism is considered by Van Dijk (2012) a top-down problem, at least in Europe and the United States, where elites play a crucial role. After studying how politicians in the Netherlands, Germany, France, the UK, and the United States debate on immigration, refugees, and civil rights, he concludes that their discourses contribute to the negative image of minorities. Also, close attention to the media and how corporations, education, or academic institutions propel affirmative action in those contexts allows Van Dijk to sustain his thesis on elites' circuits of domination to produce and reproduce stereotypes that legitimize or support racism practices over minorities, manufacturing ethnic consensus on white groups dominance. However, according to his studies, it does not mean that all the time elites' discourses are racist. In his own words, it is a "subtle, indirect, and strategic way of speaking or writing about ethnic minority groups" (Van Dijk, 2018, p. 283) that guarantees the efficiency and efficacy of Western white power dominance, which makes racism a deeply embedded social problem.

We collected 23 posts mentioning China from January 2020 to January 2022 from Vox's official Facebook profile. CDA was conducted to extract the macro-propositions, and their discursive implications were studied. Van Dijk (2018) carries out discourse analysis based on the identification of textual "macrostructures" or contextual "macro-propositions" that give coherence and meaning to any discourse. This allows us to identify the propositions that condense the meanings of an enunciated proposition. Also, understanding that any discourse has a set of propositions in which part of the meaning comes either from previous discourses or from references shared between issuers and receivers.

Although it may seem like a limited proposal, the use of these concepts and the conceptual aspects—highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter—provide a perspective that, in our view, is fruitful for the research carried out. From an instrumental point of view, we extracted macro-propositions from the selected posts and incorporated the framework of discursive presuppositions (what is textual said) and implications (what can be deduced from the context) for the analysis. We understand that this facilitates the study of abusive practices of power and discursive domination, such as racism, analyzing the relationship between cognitive, discursive, and social structures.

"China Must Pay": Vox's Hate Speech and Populist Political Slogan

In this research, we assume that political populism refers to a political approach where leaders claim to represent the ordinary people against an alleged elite, involving oversimplified and emotionally charged rhetoric (Maurer & Diehl, 2020). Jagers and Walgrave (2007) highlight characteristics of the communicative style of populism as a political discourse: the idealization of the people, an anti-elitist rhetoric (the people-elite antagonism), and the creation of emotional ties with citizens. Hence, Charaudeau (2009) came even to identify three common discursive moments in populist politicians' communication: proving that society is in a disastrous social situation, pointing out the enemy or person responsible for the evil, and, finally, announcing proposals for solutions based, mainly, on the exaltation of values that draw on the country's history and traditions.

Vox appeared in the Spanish political landscape by the end of 2013 in the context of the global financial crises, among other political parties

that broke the traditional two-party system. However, only in 2015 did it achieve parliamentary representation in a regional chamber of Andalusia, and only in 2019 did it enter the Spanish national House of Representatives (García Herrero, 2019). It is considered an extremist and populist right-wing political party (Fernández Suárez, 2021).

As other right-wing political parties use social media as a key element (Boulianne et al., 2020), digital communication has played a central role in Vox's populist strategy. However, the case of Vox has its nuances. Firstly, since their earliest hours, they established a solid social media presence to overcome the lack of legacy media coverage suffered at the beginning when they still needed more parliamentary representation. Secondly, it was a way to counteract the effect of his veto on legacy media's critical comments on their extremist postulates. In short, Vox found a way to reach potential voters directly on social media networks (García Herrero, 2019).

Furthermore, we understand that populist discourse fits very well with social media language and algorithms' logic, which gives visibility to short and direct messages that are oversimplified and easy to understand. They are primarily arguments reduced to an automatic cause-effect relationship, in which arguments can easily be captured based on common sense, prejudices, and general stereotypes (Charaudeau, 2021; García Herrero, 2019; Hernández Conde & Fernández García, 2019).

Results indicate the discursive intentionality of Vox to support xenophobic and Sinophobic discourses as part of their political disinformation strategy. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Vox has enforced the slogan "China must pay," suggesting that China has created the coronavirus as part of an imperialist (communist) political project. In this sense, they repeated the communicative strategy carried out by Donald Trump.

Nevertheless, the 23 analyzed posts had established a discursive circuit on the "China Must pay" populist argument that combines three structural patterns. First, the repeated use of "Chinese virus." Despite its incorrectness, the WHO—among other international bodies—explained that this was also racist. The virus of Covid-19 had no nationality. But Vox insisted on it, giving voice to a commonsense oversimplification of the virus's origin. Implicitly in this statement was the conspiracy theory that China had supposedly created the virus. As such, the external enemy was settled. Doing so, they operated with a Sinophobic armamentarium.

Secondly, and directly associated with the previous, another discourse oversimplification was operated. In the analyzed posts, a general populist

macro-proposition was used to put Vox as people's interests safeguarded in opposition to the political elite/government. Thus, the Spanish government—a coalition between the socialist party and the leftist Spanish party group Podemos—was targeted as an internal enemy. As China-friendly, the Spanish government (both communists, according to Vox) was lying to the population, hiding the truth. This was extended to the European Union and Vox's thesis against Agenda 2030 and what they called "globalism," a general statement criticizing all elements they believe go against the Spanish tradition and conservative-nationalist values.

Finally, a third discursive strategy compared the health restrictions in Spain (lockdown) with what, in Vox's view, was the situation in China: they were living a normal life, with an economic increase due to the pandemic; meanwhile, we, in Spain, are facing restrictions. This final argument reinforced the previous two and settles the main argumentation that "China must pay," a Sinophobic statement built upon disinformation presuppositions designed to polarize "we" against "them," fragilizing solidarity, empathy, and human rights. Allowing the circulation of these sorts of hate speech carved on disinformation, social media platforms are not allowing the guarantee of diversity of opinion and free speech. On the contrary, the omission of any control over these discursive flows contributes to the erosion of the democratic system.

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Exclusionary Populism in Portugal: "Islamophobia and the Construction of the 'Otherness' in the Portuguese Radical Right"

Hélder Prior and Miguel Andrade

The European Far-Right and the Islamic Threat

One of the most significant transformations of the past two decades has been the increasing importance of religious themes on the agenda of extremist and radical right-wing groups and parties in Europe. This is, to a large extent, due to the growing perception of Muslims and Islam as a threat to Europe's identity and the security of local communities. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the European far-right began to prioritize issues such as the alleged and menacing expansion of the Muslim population and the vision of a Europe destined to undergo

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significant changes in its cultural and identity framework. In fact, so-called Islamophobia has emerged as a point of convergence within the ideological spectrum of the far-right. Indeed, the increasing presence of Muslims in the West, as well as the visibility of Islam after the September 11 attacks, led some political actors to include the supposed "Islamic threat" on their political agenda.

Although Islamophobia has various roots and political motivations, ranging from intolerant extremists to more liberal political currents, it is undeniable that, especially in the last two decades, Islamophobia has become one of the primary concerns of populist far-right movements and parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017), interested in constructing the "Islamic threat" Allen, 2011). For some authors, so-called Islamophobia is a modern expression of an ancient fear (Iqbal, 2010). The concept can be interpreted as a form of religious intolerance with its origins in historical conflicts that have spanned centuries. Other authors, such as Carr and Haynes (2015), argue that the term is related to the radicalization of Muslims. According to Allen (2011), one of the authors who has contributed significantly to the study of the concept, we can trace the recent history of the term back to the United Kingdom when, in the late 1980s, the word began to be used to denote discrimination and rejection of the resident Muslim community.

An interesting way to conceptualize Islamophobic populism is to understand it as an ideology rooted in the fear of the other, particularly "manufactured" by political groups interested in creating a kind of "false consciousness" that ultimately establishes an ethnic boundary between the native people and the "others." For an author like Kaya, "Islamophobism turns out to be a practical instrument of social control used by the conservative political elite to ensure compliance and subordination in this age of neoliberalism, essential zing ethno cultural and religious boundaries" (Kaya, 2018, p. 17). In other words, it involves a set of racial ideas and practices that associate Muslims as a homogeneous group linked to terrorism, criminality, misogyny, and religious fanaticism, behaviors seen as incompatible with the values of the Western world, which is considered democratic and civilized. Issues related to cultural identity have become apparatus of domination and discrimination, replacing the prominence of "biological racism" in public discourse. As exemplified by Jean-Yves Camus (2005), the emergence of Islam as "the new enemy" in the imagination of the far-right is a notable trend in contemporary political spectrum. Indeed, while Islamophobia is not an inherent

or idiosyncratic feature of far-right ideology, it is undeniable that in recent decades, these parties have increasingly focused on Islam (Zúquete, 2011, p. 654).

When leaders like Marine Le Pen, for example, argue that "unregulated globalization" leads to mass immigration, resulting in "Islamic fundamentalism and jihadist attacks," they are reinforcing the growing perception of Muslims as a threat to native communities. "On est chez nous," or "we are in our home," is the leader of the National Front's response to the challenges posed by Muslim immigration, even going so far as to advocate for the immediate expulsion of all illegal immigrants.[1] British parties like the National Front (1967) and the British National Party (1982) have sought to realign Christian values with the political identity of these nationalist parties. They warn in their campaigns about the dangers of "Islamic colonization" in Europe and the risks of England becoming an "Islamic State" in the coming years.

In this context, it is useful to include the categories of the "internal enemy" and the "external threat" for the understanding of the concept of Islamophobia. The "internal enemy" model, a rhetoric often employed by far-right populist and radical right-wing movements, is related to the fear of the physical presence of Muslims and can be framed as a form of "xeno-racism" (Cervi, 2020; Sivanandan, 2001). The second model of anti-Muslim sentiment, as evident in the words of Marine Le Pen mentioned earlier, portrays Islam as an "external threat" to the social fabric of Western societies and presents the Muslim people as a monolithic entity associated with religious fundamentalism and terrorism.

An anti-Islamic stance is also evident in the discourse of the Italian party La Lega, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks. This party, which initially began as a regionalist party in northern Italy, accentuated its Christian rhetoric in response to changing social norms and the challenges of globalization. It frequently associates Islam with terrorism and violence. La Lega's nativist discourse has intensified with the recent migration issues, particularly affecting Mediterranean countries. Consequently, Matteo Salvini adopts the first model of anti-Muslim sentiment, the discourse of the "internal enemy," to emphasize that the

[1] https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/02/05/internacional/1486311781_647565.html.

"white Italian race is threatened by the invasion of migrants," while "Islamization" is seen as endangering Italian culture.[2]

In the 2022 Legislative Elections, the Lega party formed a coalition with the post-Fascist Party, Fratelli d'Italia, allowing the far-right to come to power for the first time since 1945. The right-wing alliance, which also includes the Forza Italia party, received over 43 percent of the votes. Fratelli d'Italia's origins can be traced back to the now-defunct Italian Social Movement, which sought to rebuild the defeated Fascist Party from its ruins after the end of World War II, transforming it into a more moderate nationalist force. The party currently led by Meloni, advocates strong Law & Order policies, particularly concerning Muslim immigration, as a means to counter the "Islamization of Italy."

The German national-populist party alternative for Germany (AfD), founded in 2013, follows a similar trajectory. The party advocates for the creation of an anti-immigration platform in the European Parliament, the reintroduction of permanent border controls within the country, and the closure of the European Union's external borders as a means to counteract the "Islamization of the West." In fact, the defense of "Christian identity" can be observed in various European far-right parties, often using the Islamic threat as a focal point. This is also the case with the Freedom Party in Austria, which frequently campaigns on anti-Muslim immigration platforms (Zúquete, 2011).

Islamophobic Populism and the Construction of "Otherness"

Historically, nationalist emphasis has been considered the central element of European far-right (Mudde, 2000; Zúquete, 2011). These parties present themselves as the true and pure national foundations of each country, appealing to the people as a proud nation. However, in many forces of the "new right" in Europe, the nationalist discourse has been associated with a broader identification with European Christian values, with the defense of Europe's identity and the values of the original and native peoples emerging as catalysts of the populist discourse of the new right. As noted by Zúquete:

[2] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-election-league-idUSKBN1F4249.

> The emphasis placed on a broader entity, whether it be Europe or the West, arises from both the collective need to defend native Europeans against the onslaught of the new world order and its globalizing ethos (which erases traditions and roots) and the fear and struggle against Islamization. (2011, p. 661)

Indeed, in the vocabulary of the far-right, the theme of the emergence of a new geopolitical entity dominated by Muslims has been recurrent. The neologism "Eurabia" (Ye'or, 2005) is included in the lexicon of some parties and refers to a new political order concocted by European and Arab political elites that would subject Christian peoples to Islamic governance. This new geopolitical theory of Europe developed after the 1970s oil crisis advocates a foreign policy aligned with Arab countries and openness to immigration from Muslim countries.

The association of illegal immigration with increased insecurity and the transformation of Europe into "Eurabia" is indeed part of the rhetoric of Vox. This Spanish conservative far-right party, founded in 2013 by dissidents from the Popular Party, advocates in its immigration program a "zero tolerance for Islamic fundamentalism," as well as the "closure of mosques and places of worship that propagate ideas contrary to the culture and identity" of Spain and the "Iberosphere."[3] In fact, the "Eurabic" theme is gaining prominence in the discourse of many European far-right parties, which combine nativist and xenophobic rhetoric with reactionary populism and out-group discourse.

The potential accession of Turkey to the European Union has strengthened the discourse of a "Muslim invasion in Europe" by several parties that identify Muslims as the "absolute other" (Casanova, 2006). Thus, the "Eurabia" thesis and the narrative of the collapse of a Europe invaded by Islam have become commonplace among nationalist far-right parties. It is no longer confined to the most radical and extremist circles but has been adopted by populist "new right" parties. In the Brexit referendum, the thesis was widely advocated by the eurosceptic UK Independence Party, while in Switzerland and Austria the theme of the Islamic specter is frequently raised in electoral campaigns by the Swiss People's Party and the Freedom Party, respectively.

Although populism cuts across the left–right axis, the topic of immigration has become part of the rhetoric of the set of populist parties within

[3] https://www.voxespana.es/programa/programa-electoral-vox.

the "new far-right" or, according to Ignazi's classification, the "post-industrial far-right" that emerged in the wave of the 1980s. Authors like Ignazi and Cas Mudde (2019) postulate the existence of three waves of development and consolidation of the European far-right after 1945, to highlight the nonlinear evolution of these parties, on the one hand, and the considerable transformation of these parties from the 1980s onward, on the other. The first wave was represented by parties created after 1945, arising in countries defeated in World War II, and was thus referred to as neofascist or neonazi parties. This includes the Italian Social Movement in Italy or the National Democratic Party in Germany. The second wave emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, observed in movements like Poujadism in France, fascism in Germany, or McCarthyism in the United States, which protested against the challenges posed by modernity. Some of these movements, such as McCarthyism, were involved in anti-communist struggles alongside more radical movements. Parties with clearly anti-immigration political agendas and xenophobic discourses characterize the third wave, from the 1970s and 1980s. This third wave emerged in European countries that began receiving immigration flows from outside of Europe, especially from Muslim-majority countries. France and the National Front party from the 1980s are notable examples.

This third wave differs from the previous far-right in bringing issues to the political agenda that were absent in earlier concerns, such as increased immigration and the economic and cultural challenges of the European Union project. This historical overview of the far-right's trajectory is helpful for understanding the differentiation between the "old far-right," nostalgic for the authoritarian movements of the interwar period, and the "post-industrial far-right," which rejects any association with fascist and Nazi movements and focuses on anti-system and ethnic dimensions (Ignazi, 1992). According to Marchi and Bruno, following Ignazi:

> The "traditional far-right" is composed of historical parties such as the Italian MSI, the German NPD, the British National Front (NF), and the British National Party (BNP). To these, we can now add the Hungarian Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and the Greek Golden Dawn (XA). The "post-industrial far-right" includes the French National Front (FN), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB), along with the addition of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV), the Danish People's Party (DF), the Finns Party (PS), the Sweden Democrats

> (SD), Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Italian Lega Nord (LN), and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). (2016, p. 41)

Cas Mudde identifies a fourth wave in the evolution of the far-right, emerging from the 2000s and characterized by the institutionalization of some far-right parties within democracies. This fourth wave is characterized by what Mudde calls the "mainstreaming of the far-right," where parties have become a component of the political systems in many countries, gaining parliamentary representation through democratic means, and even entering governments through right-wing coalitions. Mudde identifies three crises that contributed to the steady growth of the electoral base of these parties: the September 11, 2001 attacks, the great recession of 2008, and, more recently, the refugee crisis that became visible from 2015. Mudde illustrates how in several Western countries, the "radical right populism" has been progressively accepted within the democratic system, something that did not occur in the three previous waves.

In other words, the fourth wave of the far-right is even more heterogeneous than the previous waves. Mudde distinguishes between the extreme right and the radical right. While the first group rejects the fundamental principles of democracy, such as popular sovereignty, and supports overthrowing the regime through anti-democratic and even violent means, as was the case with fascism and Nazism, the second group accepts the rules of democracy, such as elections or referendums, but opposes the fundamental principles of liberal democracy, adopting an "illiberal" stance regarding issues like freedom of the press, minority rights, or the separation of powers (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2019). This distinction, which is currently a consensus among researchers, is accompanied by German constitutional jurisprudence that differentiates between right-wing extremism and right-wing radicalism. It underscores that while the former seeks to subvert the regime through revolutionary means, the latter seeks to change the regime through democratic means, determining the legality of right radicalism and the illegality of right-wing extremism (Marchi, 2020).

Regarding the characteristics of the radical right, Mudde points to nativism, authoritarianism, and populism as fundamental aspects. These characteristics help explain the opposition to immigration policies and the strong law and order policies that radical right parties advocate. These parties also combine these dimensions with populism, which involves

anti-establishment sentiments and the dichotomous division of society between the people, often described as a virtuous entity, and the elites, interpreted as corrupt (Laclau, 2005; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In fact, radical right populist parties interpret politics as a confrontation between the "pure" or virtuous people and the elites, favor natives over foreigners (nativism and out-group rhetoric), and contest the liberal and institutional principles of democracy in favor of direct democracy mechanisms and security-oriented and authoritarian law and order policies.

As mass immigration increasingly affects some European countries, these parties oppose the multicultural and globalizing model, promoting right-wing identity politics and the division between the in-group, the native peoples of Europe, and prejudice against the out-group, particularly in relation to Muslim immigration. Populism is characterized by a moralistic view of politics (Müller, 2017), contrasting the people, described as pure and virtuous, with the elites or other groups that populists consider enemies or outsiders. Thus, ethnic, religious minorities, immigrants, or other minority groups are perceived as a threat to the values and identity of the "good people." The messages of populist leaders, therefore, include appeals to the people, evoking nativist and nationalist aspects while inciting revolt against certain out-groups.

> Populism is the opposite of political pluralism. It speaks on behalf of an imagined majority and rejects all viewpoints it considers part of the minority. Especially in its right-wing version, its enemies often include religious and ethnic minorities, and it consistently targets independent media. (Finchelstein, 2020, p. 5)

CHEGA Party and the New Anti-establishment Right

In Portugal, this far-right populism was absent from parliamentary representation until the 2019 Legislative Elections. From 1974 until 2019, which marked the rise of two new right parties, Iniciativa Liberal and CHEGA, the center-right space was dominated by three parties: Partido Social Democrata (PSD), Centro Democrático Social (CDS), and Partido Popular Monárquico (PPM). However, the PSD and CDS, although representing the right in Portugal with a liberal economic stance and

conservative values, preferred to identify more with the center-right and less with radical positions. After the wear and tear of the XIX Constitutional Government, led by the PSD-CDS coalition from 2011 to 2015, related to the implementation of several austerity measures resulting from the Troika's guidelines (International Monetary Fund, European Commission, and European Central Bank), there was a crisis among traditional right-wing actors. This created conditions for the emergence of new parties within this political spectrum. In 2019, Iniciativa Liberal and CHEGA managed to secure parliamentary representation.

The rise of CHEGA in Portugal has been a notable political phenomenon since it's founding in April 2019. Founded by André Ventura, a former PSD member, the party quickly gained significant support, winning parliamentary representation in the 2019 Legislative Elections and expanding its influence since then, establishing itself as the third political force in the 2022 elections. André Ventura, the founder of CHEGA, is a controversial figure in Portuguese politics. Before entering politics, he was a university professor and a sports commentator on CMTV, a sensationalist television channel that gave him broad media visibility, demonstrating the hypothesis that sensationalist media are often involved in the emergence of populist leaders. Ventura positions himself as a defender of traditional Portuguese values, also using an anti-establishment rhetoric that attracts many voters dissatisfied with the traditional political system.

The CHEGA party falls into the category of the radical right and is often associated with a populist and nationalist platform. The party takes a critical stance on immigration, advocating for stricter policies and tighter border controls, especially concerning Muslim immigration. It advocates for stricter security and criminal justice policies, with harsher penalties for delinquency and corruption, aligning with law enforcement. CHEGA emphasizes the importance of national identity and traditional Portuguese values, criticizing multiculturalism as a threat to the country's culture. The rise of this party can be attributed to several factors. First, the growing dissatisfaction with traditional political parties and the perception that these parties have failed to address voters' concerns in areas such as security, immigration, and cultural identity. Additionally, André Ventura's outspoken rhetoric about the political system and his ability to communicate directly with the people, especially through social media, also play a significant role in the party's increasing popularity (Prior, 2024).

It is essential to note that the success of CHEGA has also generated controversy and divisions within Portuguese society. The party is frequently accused of promoting discriminatory speeches and polarizing society between "good Portuguese" and out-groups, especially immigrants and the Romani community, accused of living on state subsidies and outside the rule of law.

Methodology and Discussion

The "Exclusionary populism" (Betz, 2003) is characterized by distorting the complaints of citizens, problematizing the division between "us and them," and capitalizing on identity lines, labeling as "others" those who do not share the identity and culture of the native people (Cervi, 2020). In fact, Muslims have become the ideal out-group of far-right populist rhetoric, making Islamophobic views so central in today's far-right populist discourse that some scholars have begun to use the term "Islamophobic populism" (Hafez, 2017). Indeed, it is undeniable that, especially after September 11, Islamophobia has become the primary populist paradigm of the far-right (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This article contributes to the growing literature on Islamophobic populism by analyzing the anti-immigration discourse of André Ventura, leader of the CHEGA party.

By analyzing substantive points from publications ($N = 888$) belonging to André Ventura's official page on the social network X, formerly Twitter, during the period from July 3, 2022, to August 23, 2023, we sought to identify the content of his communication through a mixdata analysis, dealing with qualitative and quantitative variables and highlighting discursive elements aimed at constructing the "Islamic threat." To extract the data, the Visual Studio Code program was used, which is a free licensed code editor developed by Microsoft. Visual Studio Code works with JSON (JavaScript Object Notation), a text format that represents structured data. It is based on the "JavaScript" programming language. After using the program, the data was extracted in Microsoft Excel format. Subsequently, the MAXqda program was used to analyze the content of the publications, resulting in a selection of posts specifically related to the topic under consideration. Using MAXqda's automatic search function, a search for code segments related to expressions such as "refugees," "immigrants," "Islam," "terrorism," and "Islamic immigration" was conducted. As multiple code segments were obtained and

several posts were selected, the AI Assist was used to suggest analysis codes, which were subsequently used in a percentage-based and selective approach to the publications on the official page of the leader of CHEGA.

After a preliminary review of the extracted posts, and in line with the intended research, codes were established with the aim of identifying content and text segments that would meet the desired analysis (Bardin, 1991). Some of the codes and subcodes used in the analysis were as follows: "Political Right"; "Political Left"; "President"; "Ministers"; "António Costa"; "Terrorism"; "Immigrants"; "Islam"; "political parties"; these words allowed us to extract posts by André Ventura related to mainstream political parties, key figures in the political system, the Prime Minister, António Costa, and the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, as well as messages about immigration and Islam.

During the search, some words indicated others, which were selected and included in the presented list. One of the resources used was the free AI Assist extension/application of the MAXqda program. The AI Assist extension utilizes artificial intelligence to automate the analysis of qualitative data. This application allows for summarizing information and suggests codes and subcodes for the selected information. This program extension was used to obtain more concise information and identify patterns in the analyzed tweets. After collecting and selecting the information, following the created codes and subcodes, efforts were made to visualize them with the aim of verifying a "Single Code Model and its coded segments." This process resulted in Fig. 1.

Islamic immigration is portrayed as incompatible with European civilization, framed as an external threat with the clear intention of invading Europe with the goal of "Islamizing" it, imposing religion, culture, and customs. Immigrants are consistently associated with radicalism and fundamentalism, strategies aimed at criminalization and association with terrorism. The attention given to the threatening presence of Muslims, even when referring to other topics such as corruption or parliamentary policy discussions, contributes to the construction of the "internal enemy," which Alietti and Padovan (2013) see as constitutive of cultural racism. Islamic traditions are portrayed as "radical," dangerous, and "fundamentalist," thereby making Muslims inherently incompatible with integration into European society and its "civilized" values. This is evident when Ventura refers to "constant violations of the freedom and dignity of women within Islamic immigration." In this case, Ventura uses Islam

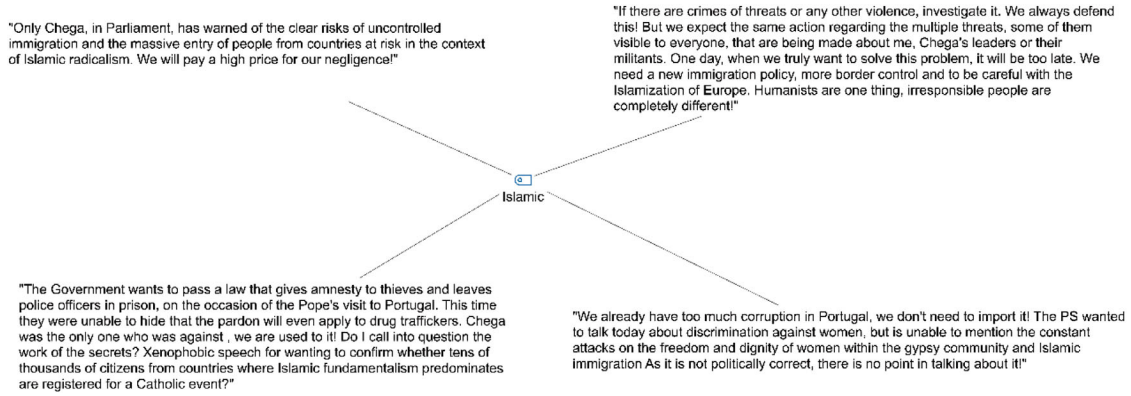


Fig. 1 Single Code Model and coded segments. Code "Islamic" and some examples of the coded text segments that correspond to the created code

to delegitimize feminist discourse, representing it as contradictory and hypocritical. Feminists and the left are interested in women's rights but abandon Muslim women who are, by definition, abused and discriminated against.

One of Ventura's arguments is that the traditional political class betrays the people, primarily due to their positions on immigration and multiculturalism. The main arguments for calling the political elite illegitimate are therefore related to nativism and nationalism. The central claim is that the political elite has promoted the rights of foreigners and immigrants at the expense of their own nation's interests (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Ventura contends that public policies should be designed for natives and the "true people," understood as "the majority," and not for the "others," whether they are "minorities" or immigrants. The "common Portuguese," sometimes referred to as "good Portuguese," correspond to those who "work" and "pay their taxes," in contrast to political elites and those who live on state subsidies, which the leader of CHEGA labels as "dependency on subsidies" (Fig. 2).

This is also evident when the leader of CHEGA claims that the government wants to criminalize the actions of the police but allows "tens of thousands of citizens from countries where 'Islamic fundamentalism' predominates to participate in a Catholic event," entering Portugal without any control, in the context of World Youth Day and the visit of Pope Francis to Portugal. André Ventura published false content that reinforces his narrative, emphasizing that despite his party's warning, the government "did absolutely nothing" to counter the invasion. Several studies demonstrate an affinity between the new right-wing populist movements and disinformation. The ability to appeal to the people without intermediaries and promote direct communication allows politicians to instill propaganda disguised as news (Hameleers, 2020; Waisbord, 2018), creating post-truth regimes in the digital environment (Gerbaudo, 2018; Prior, 2021, 2022) (Fig. 3).

Identity is central in the discourse of the far-right, both the "old far-right" and the radical right, in the face of the creation of Islamic enclaves in Europe. In this sense, Muslims and Islamic refugees pose a challenge to Europe's Christian identity, and Islam is portrayed as a theo-political entity incompatible with European values. In two tweets shared on Ventura's official page, Muslims are seen as a problem because they constitute groups on the fringes of Portuguese and European culture and identity, emphasizing the idea of a "Muslim Europe." Indeed, the



Fig. 2 The leader of CHEGA expresses concern over what he refers to as "cultural and religious invasion" and criticizes the alleged benefits assigned to minorities and out-groups

emphasis on the "Christian identity" of the "original communities" in Europe, threatened by the advance of Islam and its association with terrorism, can be seen to some extent in various far-right parties across Europe (Zúquete, 2011, p. 657) (Fig. 4).

After a qualitative analysis, our work also aimed to assess, from a quantitative perspective, the frequency of certain elements and discourse patterns. In this regard, we sought to determine, in all collected publications (of the 888 tweets), the frequency of specific keywords, such as: "Islamic"; "Islamization"; "Immigration"; "Radicalism"; "Terrorists." This analytical procedure resulted in Graph 1.

The present graph allows for a comparison of the frequency of the selected keywords in the analyzed posts. It was observed that, based on the selected words, there is a significant reference to "Immigration," followed by the expression "Terrorists." The terms "Islamic," "Islamization," and "Islamic" are closely grouped in frequency. To some extent,



Fig. 3 André Ventura published a supposed news article associating illegal immigration with World Youth Day. The content, resembling the Radio Renascença's graphic design, is false. Radio Renascença denied having published this information that reinforces the narrative of the leader of CHEGA

despite some fluctuations, there are relationships between the selected words in the same sections of the document.

To complement this analysis, a word cloud was created using the Wordart tool (https://wordart.com/). To construct the word cloud text segments were selected under the code "Islamic," as represented in the previous graph. The size of the words and expressions corresponds to their frequency in the studied content. The following word cloud illustrates the prominence of the theme of Islamic immigration in Portugal. Phrases like "threat" and "radicalism" are also highlighted in the narrative of the leader of CHEGA (Fig. 5).

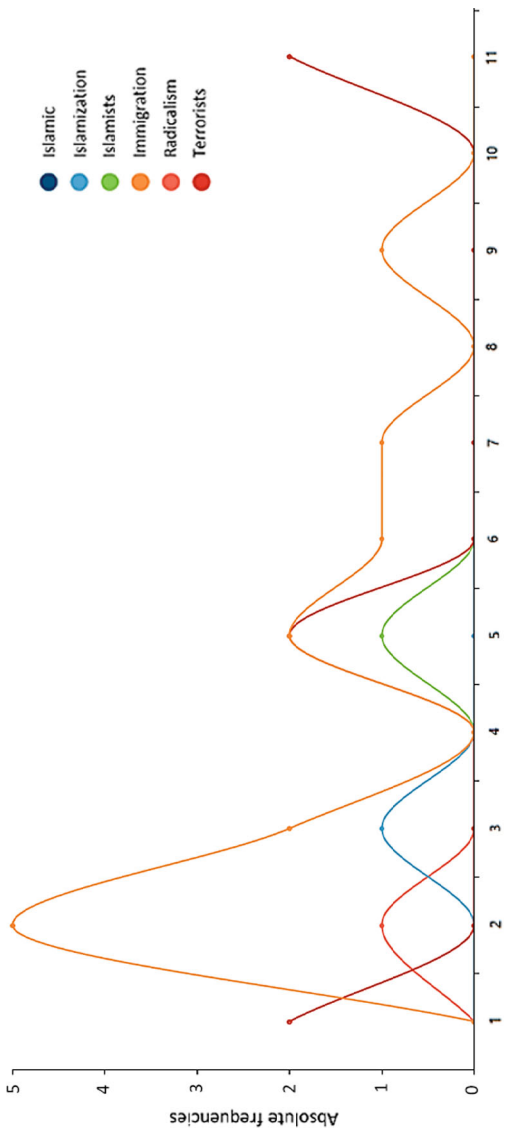


Fig. 4 André Ventura's posts related to the "Islamization" of Portugal and Europe. In the second post, there is an association between the Islamization of Europe and the proliferation of terrorism

MAXqda also allowed, based on the analysis conducted, to identify the co-occurrence and proximity between the selected codes.

In Graph 2, it can be observed that the CHEGA party made references to "Immigrants" (approximately 103 times) and "Islamic" (approximately 86 times), and there are instances of proximity and co-occurrence between the remaining codes depicted in the figure. In the graph, we can see the prominence of two clear out-groups in Ventura's discourse: Islamic immigration and the Gypsy community. The relationship between these two groups, interpreted as a threat to the "good Portuguese," is established through negative discourse, associating both groups with behaviors outside the rule of law that threaten social order.

When analyzing André Ventura's social media posts, we can identify certain dimensions in his discourse. During the reading and observation of his posts, some substantive points of the communicated content were identified. To comprehensively understand Ventura's discourse over the course of a year, the discursive elements were subsequently grouped into five main categories, resulting from a floating reading of the posts and the use of codes proposed by the artificial intelligence of the MAXqda program. The following graph provides insight into the categorization of communication content and the prominence of specific themes typical of far-right rhetoric (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Stavrakakis et al.,



Graph 1 Absolute frequencies of the selected keywords in the document containing the 888 tweets by André Ventura

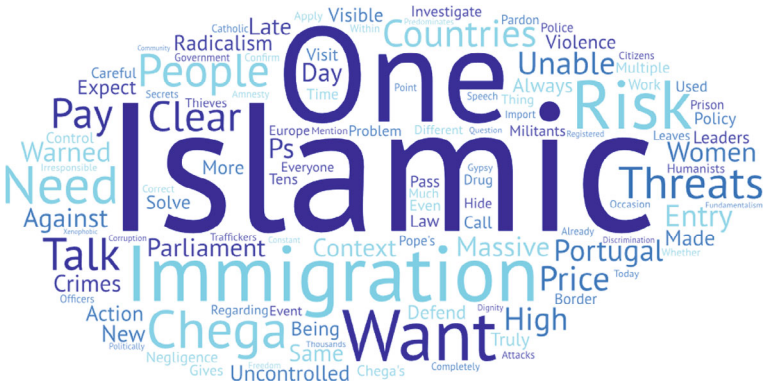


Fig. 5 Word cloud generated using the Wordart tool, based on text segments related to the Islamic population

Graph 2 Code co-occurrence model (code proximity). A graph representing the code co-occurrence model and the proximity between codes

2017), such as anti-corruption discourse, criticism of minority groups, and references to law and order policies (Graph 3).

During the process of analyzing text segments, it was possible to identify the presence of characteristics typical of right-wing populist rhetoric. The dimension "Exclusionary Rhetoric - Immigration" encompasses posts that associate Islamic immigration with European population replacement, terrorism, and the incompatibility of European values with Islamic culture and heritage.

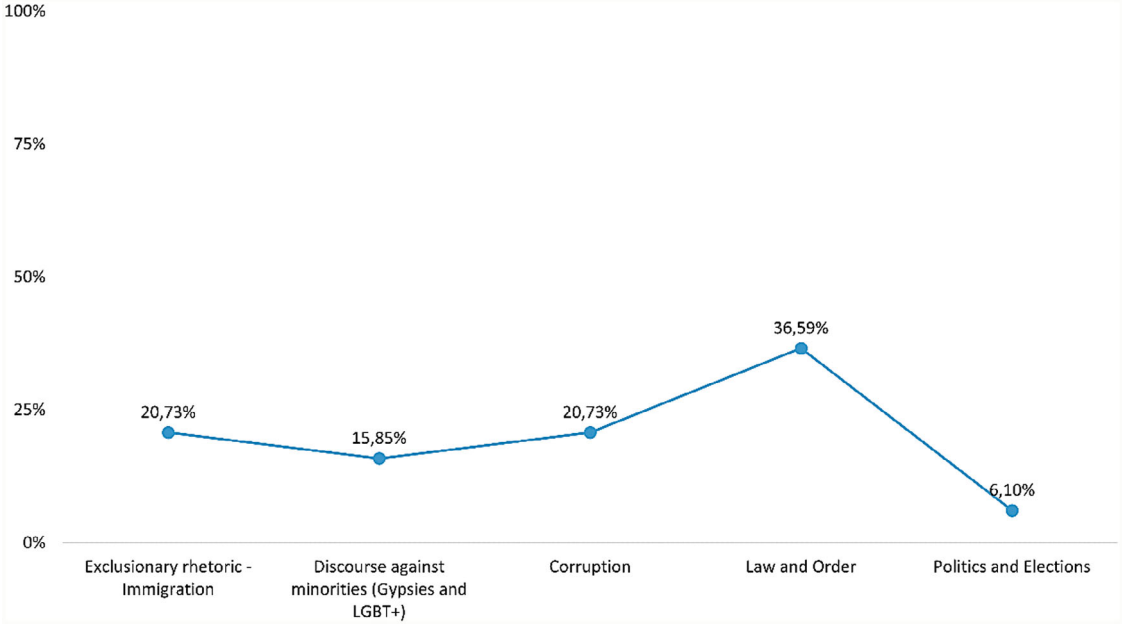
> If the Mediterranean has become a cemetery, and we witness tragedies every month, it is not the fault of those who want to protect their countries and their culture. It's the fault of those who continually encourage the illegal and uncontrolled influx of migrants and refugees, often for political reasons!

The dimension "Discourse Against Minorities (Gypsies and LGBT+)" encompasses derogatory posts about minority groups such as the Gypsy community and sexual minorities. When addressing the LGBT theme, André Ventura accuses the left and these minority groups of promoting a kind of "sexualization of children in schools," discussing a crisis in education and traditional family values. In the case of the Gypsy community, André Ventura portrays a group that lives "outside the rule of law" and relies on state social subsidies. This involves the construction of a process of social stigmatization of these minority groups, excluded from the category of a "pure" or unpolluted "people."

> Performance by transvestites and drag queens in school.

> Today is the National Day of the Gypsy, and instead of the usual empty and politically correct phrases, political leaders, starting with the President of the Republic, should call for an end to dependency on subsidies, the culture of violence, and the ongoing subordination of women.

Populism discursively articulates an antagonistic view of politics (Laclau, 2005), mobilizing the "people" against the established powers, emphasizing the authority of vox populi against the described political elites, invariably portrayed as corrupt or betraying the people's trust. Indeed, the theme of corruption emerges in Ventura's discourse as a way to accentuate the anti-establishment dimension of CHEGA and appeal to



Graph 3 Categorization of André Ventura's discourse in posts related to the themes of "immigration," "corruption," "legislative changes," and "discourses on minorities"

voters who are dissatisfied with the dominant political system. For André Ventura, only CHEGA is interested in combating corruption in Portugal.

> The other parties chose to remain silent, but not us: how can the Prime Minister ignore having ministers in his government who are formally suspected of corruption? How can you then ask the Portuguese people to trust the government?
>
> This is what I forced Minister João Cravinho and Minister Helena Carreiras to listen to in Parliament. Only CHEGA effectively fights corruption in Portugal!

In addition to the discourse that criticizes traditional institutions and political elites, which is typical of populist rhetoric, it's important to emphasize the focus on issues related to the sense of insecurity affecting the population of Portugal. This includes a negative rhetoric of chaos and fear about matters concerning the people's safety. In this regard, the "Law and Order" dimension consists of posts about crimes committed against police, increasing prison sentences for particularly heinous crimes, such as pedophilia.

> Increase in penalties for pedophiles and the statute of limitations for crimes against children.

Regarding the "Politics and Elections" dimension, it represents André Ventura's posts about elections and future political alliances within the right-wing spectrum, as well as participation in meetings with international political leaders who are close to the political family of CHEGA.

> At the Embassy of Hungary in Lisbon, with the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, Gergely Gulyás, we looked at the future of the European right and the need to win the European elections and end the dominance of Brussels bureaucrats.
>
> This Sunday, we will elect delegates to the V National Convention of CHEGA in all districts and regions of the country. These men and women, chosen tomorrow, will decide who will be the President of the Party and all national bodies. Vote! Don't leave the future in the hands of others.

Conclusion

Exclusionary populism is widely known for highlighting the division between "us versus them," exploiting identity differences and classification as "others" those who do not share the identity and culture of the "native people." In this regard, especially after the September 11 attacks, Muslims have become the preferred archetype of the "other" in right-wing populism. Indeed, many European countries are witnessing the rise of far-right parties with a post-nationalist dynamic rooted in a Christian identity that interprets Islam as a threat to the native people and Western culture. Anti-Muslim political discourse often revolves around the idea that Islam aims to impose its backward and misogynistic culture, contrasting with the civilized West, and that Muslims are directly linked to the increase in crime and terrorism.

As observed in our analysis of André Ventura's discourse, Muslims and Islam are portrayed as the most significant external threat to culture, endangering the erasure of Portuguese and European identity, culture, and traditional way of life. On the other hand, the CHEGA leader focuses on each illegal immigrant as a burden to society, emphasizing the economic and security concerns imposed by the presence of Muslims. When referring specifically to Muslims, Ventura relies on stereotypical representations of coexistence with Islamic culture, portraying Islam as the most urgent threat to European civilization.

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Artists as "Others": Resentment, Public Policies, and the Brazilian Far-Right

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Introduction

In March 2011, Brazilian newspapers spread the news that singer Maria Bethânia, one of the most regarded artists in the country, was going to develop a cultural project to introduce the language of poetry to new

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audiences. The project "The World Needs Poetry"[1] aimed to present a blog with 365 unpublished daily-released videos, with the artist interpreting texts written by established and emerging authors. In the words of the initiative's proponents, that would be "a democratic and idealistic way of bringing poetry into people's lives through the most powerful communication tool in the world today"[2] (Costa & Rocha, 2011, p. 3).

Such a communication tool, however, ended up stimulating a controversy surrounding the proposal's funding. The project had been authorized to raise its operational budget from private investors through the so-called Rouanet Law, the main federal legislation promoting the arts in Brazil. This law's rules allow corporations interested in encouraging cultural projects to deduct the amounts donated from their income tax. "The World Needs Poetry" was authorized to raise approximately US$800,000[3] from sponsors, a total budget to afford production costs, and to pay the team of professionals involved.

A biased version of the news triggered protests on social media. It was supposed that the famous singer had individually earned almost a million dollars from public coffers to merely create a blog, a free media platform accessible to any internet user. Critics denounced that the State approached artists condescendingly by giving them undue advantages through tax waiver laws. On Twitter, the name "Maria Bethânia" was raised to the trending topics and became one of the three most commented in the world (Costa & Rocha, 2011, p. 4). The influential journalist Reinaldo Azevedo classified the project as a "mamata", a pejorative term in Portuguese that means "robbery" or "easy life".[4] Folha de São Paulo, a reference newspaper in Brazil, stated that "everyone needs poetry, but not everyone needs Rouanet"[5] (Pimenta, 2022, p. 53). Faced with negative repercussions, the singer announced that she had given up on the cultural project.

This case illustrates the controversies that have lately put artists and the funding of culture by the Brazilian State in the spotlight. In 2006, a tour by the Canadian group Cirque du Soleil led to heated debates about

[1] Original text: "O Mundo Precisa de Poesia".

[2] Original text: "uma forma democrática e idealista de levar poesia para a vida das pessoas por meio da mais potente ferramenta de comunicação do mundo atual".

[3] On March 15, 2011, the Ministry of Culture authorized raising R$1,356,858.00, which we converted into the dollar exchange rate on that date.

[4] See: https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/reinaldo/e-a-turma-que-quer-derrubar-ana-de-hollanda-que-divulgou-o-troco. Access on August 24, 2023.

[5] Original text: "de poesia todo mundo precisa, já de Rouanet, nem todo mundo".

using tax waivers to access public resources and then charging high ticket prices. In 2011 and 2015, the most international musical event held in the country, Rock in Rio, was also targeted by much criticism. In 2023, actress Claudia Raia, known for her work in musical theater, was criticized for proposing to stage two shows under a budget of US$993,000.[6] All these cultural projects' feasibility relied on the Rouanet Law operational dynamics, which establish a delicate accord between public and private interests.

The Brazilian Federal Government created the legislation in the early 1990s to boost the national cultural market. Its name derives from the Secretary of Culture at that time, philosopher Sergio Paulo Rouanet. The financing model places the federal government as a guarantor of a relationship between artists, producers, and investors, allowing market predispositions to direct the destination of public resources. Access to funds demands that cultural agents submit their proposals to the government, that forward them to the review of a committee composed of civil servants and hired professionals, both of them experts in the area. After the technical analysis of the project—viability, budget compatibility with market values, among other criteria—the federal government may allow proponents to raise funds from companies interested in cooperation. Such cultural agents become responsible for the project's accountability toward the public agencies, which must certify the correct funds' destination.[7]

In recent decades, the role of this legislation for the Brazilian cultural environment has transformed it into a link for different chains of social relations and political moods, making the term "Rouanet" resonate not only among specialists from the field of culture. Scholar groups tend to criticize the neoliberal logic of the legislation, which transfers the decision on public investment to private companies' marketing interests. Among lay segments and right-wing parliamentarians, the term "Rouanet" reverberates as a synonym for something potentially corrupt. This idea was stimulated in 2016 by a police operation, which identified misuse of purpose and fraud in applying resources for some projects. The fact's mass resonance led to the creation of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, which eventually could not prove that the legislation's

[6] On January 18, 2023, the Ministry of Culture authorized raising R$5,057,203.63, which we converted to the dollar exchange rate on that date.

[7] As an illustration, we mention that, in 2022, 2,157 projects were authorized for fundraising. This is the lowest rate of authorizations granted in the decade, as an effect of Bolsonaro administration's political measures.

operational mechanisms were somehow vicious (Domingues & Paula, 2021).

In this chapter, we intend to identify some meanings assembled by the Brazilian far-right regarding the State's participation in financing cultural activities. Political tensions around the Rouanet Law preceded the agenda for the cultural sector implemented by the Jair Bolsonaro administration between 2019 and 2022, which raised the image of artists as Others of the average Brazilian citizen. This villainization of the figure of the artist drew on the rhetoric about a supposed privileged class, an elite protected from the experience of crisis spread throughout the country. The government body responsible for managing the cultural sector in the Bolsonaro administration furthered such ideas and declared a political war against artists and cultural agents.

In the following section, we present theoretical-analytical frames and discuss the similarity between the Brazilian phenomenon and forms of governance that ascend along with extreme right movements in other countries. Then, we highlight the discursive strategies employed by the Bolsonaro administration to antagonize artists and describe findings from fieldwork carried out between 2020 and 2021 on the performance of the leaders of the National Secretariat of Culture. In the final section, we point out some of the meanings of this recent political cycle in the broader history of public policies and interactions among artists, mediating agents, and the State in Brazil.

Far-Right and Public Feelings

The recent rise of far-right trends in Brazil resulted from diverse factors, such as the crisis that hit the national economy in the last decade and the erosion of the political agreements that guaranteed the governability of the Workers' Party until 2016. Nevertheless, some facts suggested the formation of this political mood even some years earlier, such as the election of Marco Feliciano to preside over the Human Rights Commission in 2013 and Eduardo Cunha to preside over the Chamber of Deputies in 2015.[8] During such a period, a civil movement called Escola sem

[8] Elected to that Commission in 2013, Feliciano became famous for amplifying discourses related to "conversion therapy" for LGBT people and asserting the existence of a "curse" inherent to the African population. The presidency of Eduardo Cunha, which

Partido (School Without Party) gained national strength,[9] boosted by bills designed to restrict professorship freedom and reifying conspiratorial discourses. The campaign "10 Measures against Corruption",[10] associated with public figures and actions of "Operation Car Wash",[11] fostered the distrust toward politicians and public management among more or less radicalized right-wing groups.

Former President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 resulted from this political confluence and expressed a particular aversion to State management, then under the Workers' Party guidance for 14 years. Michel Temer's government, inducted after the impeachment, drastically reduced public investments in areas such as education, health, and culture.[12] Indeed, that moment represented the victory of the neoliberal project of State administration, showing a political and social reorganization. Interpretations on this turn have multiplied in recent years, contemplating the effect of Bolsonaro's election and the fragility of the institutional conditions of Brazilian democracy.[13]

Jair Bolsonaro, a former military member, had defended corporate and conservative agendas as a federal deputy since the 1990s. He became the most favored politician in that crisis scenario, by using communication tactics that stepped up his figure as a political representative. During the 2018 election run, his political group advanced over arenas

began in 2015, was marked by the processing of guidelines against the rights of the LGBT population and women (Lacerda, 2019).

[9] The movement was created in 2003 by lawyer Miguel Nagib, based on the idea that the education offered in schools in the country was "ideologized" and operated a left-wing "indoctrination" of students.

[10] The campaign, started in 2015 by the Federal Public Ministry to repress corruption and impunity in the country, had as one of its main promoters the then-prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol, a key figure in Operation Lava-Jato.

[11] Original name: "10 Medidas contra a Corrupção". The operation began in 2014 and corresponded to a series of investigations carried out by the Brazilian Federal Police, which destabilized the political system with successive search and seizure warrants, temporary arrest, and coercive conduct, which even affected the then-former President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva.

[12] Constitutional Amendment No. 95 (2016), known as the "Expenditure Ceiling Amendment", is illustrative of this moment. It limited public expenditure in relation to inflation variation, and ended up being known as "The Amendment of the End of the World".

[13] See Avritzer (2016, 2019), Lynch and Cassimiro (2022), and Nobre (2022).

hardly explored by Brazilian political parties in the middle of the last decade, especially forums on social media and instant messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram (Fonseca, 2020). On those platforms, political communication targeted already aligned audiences and raised biased understandings of public problems. Bolsonaro's combative rhetoric during the election run also guided his administration, which took a step forward in the overlap between the political and digital spaces.

Such strategies seem close to what studies on far-right trends indicate, such as Cesarino's (2019), which describes the so-called Bolsonarism as *digital populism*. Back to Ernesto Laclau's ideas, she admits that, as a political form, populism draws upon two axes: the *difference* between the people and the elite, and the *equivalence* between those represented and their leader. What is new in the experience of digital communication is the illusion of the inexistence of mediation between the masses and the charismatic leader. Such dynamics focus on the increasing of the anti-system stand, as illustrated by Bolsonaro: a President who remained without party affiliation for most of his term and used web lives as an instrument of political communication, announcing measures that would respond to his followers' requests. This new informational ecology configures the dispute for the discursive repertoires that support public action and thus reorganizes the forms of political affection (Mendonça et al., 2021).

Scholarship on the rise of the far-right in different countries has drawn attention to a kind of political subjectivity firmly based on the effects of neoliberal reason on economic organization.[14] In Brown's (2019) interpretative scheme, unplanned effects of neoliberalism on the economy[15] come together with the opposition to progressive agendas. It shapes a conservative and anti-democratic subjectivity based on a struggle for market freedom against the social justice agenda that might put traditional social hierarchies under political pressure. In her view, the subject who bears the privileges of whiteness and masculinity feels threatened by the not-so-recent precariousness of the Welfare State and by the policies

[14] Some analyses of neoliberalism highlight its effects on exacerbating the commodification of life and social disintegration. See, for example: Harvey (2014 [2005]), Dardot and Laval (2016 [2009]), and Casara (2021).

[15] The reference for Brown's (2019) analysis is the previously privileged social groups, especially the male-white portions of the U.S. population, when they get impoverished in their purchasing power amidst neoliberalism's crisis.

built by the pact around social justice. Such policies advocate that hitherto stigmatized and historically undervalued social groups become the beneficiary subjects of struggles against racism, patriarchy, and colonialism. Although still far from democratizing rights to full citizenship, especially in countries like Brazil, some changes are visible in accessing previously more restricted arenas, such as universities, media, and political representation. In Brown's (2019) analysis of the U.S. experience, such shifts lead privileged parts of the population to attitudes that may be read as forms of nihilism, as proposed by Freud, and of resentment, by Marcuse. According to her, this trend has been accelerated by the contraction of all spheres of life to market parameters.

By coming together with lowering ethical and political awareness, nihilism would result from current economic frustration and denial of a particular social pact that, at least in theory, proposes the universalization of rights as its goal. Resentment is a central clue for analyzing attitudes that associate freedom with maintaining hierarchies and the absence of expectations of change amid violent public behaviors. Such postures reflect apparently incoherent or unstable affections but are understandable when read as resulting from the exacerbation of nihilism, in resentment toward what is interpreted as dominant, leading to denial as political action and revenge.[16]

Several studies[17] have investigated the international expansion of the extreme right in the last decade, a phenomenon defined by a complex situation that requires attention to international vectors and local political and economic pressures. Mulhall (2022), for example, points out similarities among movements that took place in countries as different as Brazil, the United States, India, England, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, and Slovakia, and in the vertiginous growth of extremist parties in Sweden, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Spain, and Finland. Beyond the institutional politics arenas, the author also suggests the development of the extreme right among new transnational activist movements and in

[16] Back to Nietzsche's postulates, Brown (2019, p. 217) defines it as: "it is about ressentiment trapped in its retained grudge, incapable of 'becoming creative'. It only has revenge, with no way out, without futurity" (our translation to English).

[17] Given the limitations of space, it is not possible to further such analyses here. However, it is important to point out that they highlight diverse groups within the current far-right phenomenon, especially concerning the relationships these groups develop with democratic politics, showing different levels of approximation with the German and Italian political experiences of populism and fascism in the late 1930s.

terrorist practices. In Latin America, the 2010s marked a phenomenon of political reorientation to the right that affected, in addition to Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Peru, and Chile (Lacerda, 2019).

Our research focuses on a specific target of the extreme right's agenda: the policies for managing culture as a branch of the national economy. In the United States, for example, the leading public fund supporting cultural activities, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), has been an object of conservative citizens' rage since the 1980s for sponsoring initiatives that address sexual diversity and contest the religious power (Baulerlein & Grantham, 2009). Donald Trump responded to such sentiments by radicalizing the federal policy for the NEA and proposed eliminating the agency's budget, which did not occur solely due to the Federal Congress' intervention. In Italy, the government agenda of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, elected in 2022, is committed to rescuing conservative moral and aesthetic values, aiming to foster a "new Italian Renaissance". In the United Kingdom, former Vice Prime Minister, Oliver Dowden, held the position of Secretary of Culture during Boris Johnson's term and led clashes with national cultural organizations' policies to return expropriated goods to former colonies, denying their effort to repair the history of slavery in the British Empire (British Art Studies, 2021). In Hungary, the government of Viktor Orbán has distinguished itself by "1) attempts to rewrite the cultural canon, 2) the occupation of existing elite positions in the cultural field, and 3) the founding new cultural institutions and positions, thereby creating or strengthening parallel/alternative structures alongside the existing ones in the cultural field" (Kristóf, 2017, p. 142).

With such a general picture as a background, this chapter investigates the meanings of the public management of culture produced by leaders of the Bolsonaro government. This analytical gesture is justified since some preferences of this ruling elite were particularly conflictive with the methods of left-wing groups in charge of previous federal cultural policies. To a large extent, our text draws on the idea that understanding the public meanings produced in policy cycles requires studying the agents producing State messages. This interest has guided several of our publications in the past few years, which sought to identify emerging semantic framings for right and extreme right movements in Brazil (Domingues et al., 2018; Domingues & Paula, 2019, 2020, 2021; Cid et al., 2022a, 2022b).

We have borrowed the notion of *counterpublicity* from Michael Warner (2002) to describe a form of conflict regarding the "natural" and "correct" ways of life reflected in dominant discourses or understood as such by groups that fight them. Warner draws attention to the existence of disputes in the public sphere that target not only ideas but the discursive genres themselves and the cultural hierarchies adjacent to them, responsible for giving prestige to certain speeches (such as those of authorities, specialists, scientists, renowned artists, etc.) and to discredit other places of enunciation, such as the "ordinary citizen's" speech. Camila Rocha (2018) shows how Warner's idea suits contemporary phenomena derived from the rise of the extreme right movements, driven by online interactivity's expressive resources, such as negationist, revisionist, or "politically incorrect" counterpublics. These clues have helped us to identify, for example, counterpublic discourses in evangelical news media (Paula, 2020); in the dispute over the terms of confronting racism through State policies (Paula & Ayala, 2023); in the controversies surrounding initiatives identified with the Queer movement (Paula & Domingues, 2020); in the dissemination of legislative projects against the thesis of "cultural Marxism" (Paula & Iglesias, 2021), among other symptoms of our cultural climate.

In the following section, we seek to point out how agents in chief executive positions in the federal government (2020–2022) justified political action within a given interactional and cognitive circuit. The combative discursive model adopted by these leaders reproduces what Rocha and Medeiros (2021) called the *dominant counterpublicity* of the Bolsonaro administration, a paradox that characterized this political cycle. On the one hand, the government had the conditions to consolidate political hegemony given by the Federal Executive apparatus; on the other hand, it undertook "constant shock with other discursive arenas, within and outside the State, to keep his supporters constantly mobilized" (Rocha & Medeiros, 2021, p. 14). Such warring rhetoric was furthered by the Special Secretariat for Culture's leaders, who addressed a counterpublic composed by their Others: Brazilian artists and cultural agents, or at least the significant portion of such professionals whose survival depended on the State support.

The Special Secretariat for Culture and Its Others

At the beginning of Jair Bolsonaro's term, the Ministry of Culture lost its status and became a Special Secretariat. This "downgrading" gesture followed the rhetoric of the electoral run when Bolsonaro promised a drastic reduction in the number of ministries in his term. During his mandate, the government body responsible for managing cultural affairs had seven heads[18] and was prolific in controversy (Domingues & Paula, 2019). We highlight here the administration period of Mario Frias in the Secretariat, the longest during the Bolsonaro administration.

Over a year, we collected official speeches, interviews, press reports, and content from Twitter. The findings suggested reciprocity with another agent who became essential in formulating our research *corpus*: André Porciuncula, whom Frias appointed the National Secretary for Fostering and Incentive to Culture, the department responsible for managing the Rouanet Law. The duo had distinct personal backgrounds: while Frias worked as an actor in soap operas and hosted TV shows of reasonable visibility, Porciuncula came from the military police of the state of Bahia. Both were in their first experience as public managers. They also had quite different profiles compared to the politicians and intellectuals historically in charge of culture in the federal government.[19]

The Frias-Porciuncula administration faced criticism from the media, the academic community, cultural agents, and civil servants. Many critics indicated that the management actions encouraged blockages and dismantling of cultural policies that had been successful until then. We agree with such positions, but our research allowed access to some complementary dimensions. Accompanying the political elite that emerged with Bolsonaro showed their convergence with interactional circuits opposing the hegemonic conceptions of cultural policies. The Secretariat's lethargic

[18] Henrique Pires (January to August 2019), Ricardo Braga (September to November 2019), Roberto Alvim (November 2019 and January 2020), Regina Duarte (March to May 2020), Mário Frias (June 2020 to March 2022), Hélio Ferraz de Oliveira (April 2022 to December 2022) and André Porciuncula (December 2022).

[19] The government body responsible for culture was headed by figures of public recognition such as Celso Furtado, Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, Francisco Weffort, Juca Ferreira, Ana de Hollanda, Marta Suplicy, and Gilberto Gil. They were artists or intellectuals with extensive academic production, although not always in the area of culture (except for Marta Suplicy, a political leader with a decades-long career in the Worker's Party).

behavior regarding such policies then revealed a high ability to construe the political circumstances in Brazil.

We monitored the *corpus* discussed in this text between June 2020—Frias' appointment[20]—and July 2021, taking Mario Frias and André Porciuncula as the main political agents of our research.[21] We tabulated all social media posts by the secretaries in that period and created analysis filters, such as keywords and background content of each one, looking for an index of the actors' discursive patterns. We collected around 5,000 *tweets*; discarding posts unrelated to cultural policies reduced this volume to around 700 *tweets*. The similarity that we found among the manifestations of the two secretaries suggests how the public management of culture, particularly its funding forms, activates sensibilities that shape a counterpublic. Observing the circuit created by Frias and Porciuncula on the internet, we noticed how supporters of the Bolsonaro administration resent the very logic of the Rouanet Law: sentences like "Bolsonaro ended the Rouanet Law's mafia" or "the easy life ended" were quite regular in interactions observed in social media. On the other hand, when they published a critical judgment on the government, artists of some visibility were soon ironized by Bolsonaro's supporters, with questions such as "Have you already learned to live without money from the public coffers?" or even mentions about a "Rouanet abstinence".

The fieldwork revealed two patterns as discursive trendings. The first one refers to the Rouanet Law's management carried out by previous administrations, contrasted to the fair handling of public endowments claimed by the Bolsonaro term's Secretaries. Such a trend produced Others as a "union artistic elite", a supposed historical beneficiary of the government body Frias and Porciuncula then commanded. The Secretaries constructed this discursive pattern by suggesting the existence of a collusion between artists and the Workers' Party, which would have resulted in advantages of access to Rouanet Law's resources. Aiming at his left-wing critics, the National Secretary of Culture stated in June 2021: "You never made public policy, you threw money away in the

[20] André Porciuncula was appointed Secretary of Promotion and Incentive to Culture in August 2020.

[21] At the time we write this text, Mario Fria's Twitter account has more than 1 million followers, while Porciuncula's has more than 560,000.

air, and always for the same elitist club. Not anymore! We are going to democratize public means to support culture".[22]

This narrative drew upon the argument of a structural flaw in project management and accountability by the Workers' Party mandates, which would have been lenient with the undue allocation of public funds. The anti-corruption agenda, in vogue in the country, thus had repercussions on formulating the image of a new kind of culture manager. The Secretaries affirmed that if the previous policies favored an elite, their management agenda relied on a new value, the *audit*: "Carrying out a rigorous and quick auditing process of cultural projects is a fundamental step for us to moralize the Rouanet's mechanisms. Otherwise, it is impossible to define a public cultural policy".[23]

The public manager's discourse as an auditor successively repeated throughout the corpus: "More than 75% of investments did not even have its object audited. The previous public policy was to pour money and hope for the cultural action to happen, even without supervision".[24] The narrative axis explored the historical difficulty of the federal government's culture department about overseeing the benefited projects.[25] It also threatened the cultural sector with sanctions on the pace of project approvals. In December 2020, for example, O Globo newspaper published the article "Cultural projects lose R$ 500 million already raised

[22] Original text: "Vocês nunca fizeram política pública, vocês jogavam dinheiro para o alto, e sempre para o mesmo clubinho elitista. Não mais! Vamos popularizar os mecanismos de fomento à cultura". Available at: https://twitter.com/mfriasoficial/status/1340854606725642649 6. Accessed on 17 August 2023.

[23] Original text: "realizar um processo rigoroso e célere de auditoria dos projetos culturais é um passo fundamental para moralizarmos os mecanismos de fomento da Rouanet. Sem isso, é impossível definir uma política pública cultural". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1374718492306501637. Accessed on 17 August 2023.

[24] Original text: "mais de 75% do que foi investido sequer teve seu objeto auditado. A política pública anterior era derramar dinheiro e torcer para a ação cultural acontecer, mesmo sem fiscalização". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1404404631934062592. Accessed on 17 August 2023.

[25] In 2011, the Federal Court of Auditors indicated the technical inability of the Ministry of Culture to carry out audits of benefited projects due to a lack of human resources, which led to the hiring of temporary specialists in 2013. In 2016, a report by the Ministry itself indicated the existence of more than 12 thousand projects without analysis, approved between 1991 and 2011.

in 2020 due to lack of publication in the Official Gazette",[26] indicating the Secretariat's inaction regarding the formal approval of projects that already raised interest among private investors. In response, André Porciuncula activated his counterpublic on social media, stating that "you cannot lose what was never granted. It is public money, tax breaks. The militant media will try at all costs to turn me into a mere stamper, they won't succeed. We will only approve the exact amount of projects that we can audit. Respect for the people!".[27] The *corpus* thus points out an attempt to reinforce, among the right-wing counterpublic, the image of a management practice that would have been *inaugurated* by the two actors then in chief positions, attributing to their Others an anti-republican behavior.

A second pattern also emerged when analyzing the two public managers' discursive performances. In their rhetoric, the existence of a "union artistic elite" would have generated a distortion concerning what they defended as the final destination of public cultural policies. By seeking to overcome the "elitist deviations" discursively designed by the two managers, the Bolsonaro government composed a specific moral mosaic.

In a G20 meeting that gathered ministers and secretaries of culture in July 2021 in Rome, Mario Frias was responsible for the speech of the Brazilian entourage. In his statement, he declared that "culture is a spiritual insight of the first magnitude. It is the theophanic event in which the cult (culture) sprouts in a society"[28] (Frias, 2021). He also did not refrain from waving to critics of the very existence of public funding for the arts and culture by stating that "a people's culture does not depend on large public funds, but on a deep spiritual connection between

[26] Original text: "Projetos culturais perdem R$ 500 milhões já captados em 2020 por falta de publicação no Diário Oficial". Available at: https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/projetos-culturalis-perdem-500-milhoes-ja-captados-em-2020-por-falta-de-publicacao-no-diario-oficial-24817925. Accessed on 20 August 2023.

[27] Original text: "não se pode perder o que nunca foi concedido. Isso é dinheiro público, renúncia fiscal. A mídia militante tentará a todo custo me transformar num mero carimbador, não vão conseguir. Só aprovaremos a exata quantidade de projetos que for possível auditar. Respeito com o povo!". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1344610769632161793/photo/1. Accessed on 17 August 2023.

[28] Original text: "a cultura é um insight espiritual de primeira grandeza, é o evento teofânico em que o culto (cultura) brota em uma sociedade".

the cult (culture) and its timeless traditions"[29] (Frias, 2021). However, the implicit criticism of the Rouanet Law counterbalanced with another element in his speech: the frequent use of the expression "common man". Through this abstract signifier, the secretaries suggested an agenda to return cultural policies to those who would be their "authentic" recipients. The expression "common man", which Frias and Porciuncula widely used in speeches and posts, revealed an idealized citizen as the purpose of policy-making, in dialogue with the publics tuned to the Bolsonaro government and the far-right ecology in Brazil.

The "common man" caught our attention for its recurrence and ability to bring together a set of notions in the political communication strategy. In the clues left by the Secretaries, we identified that its use derived from the English author Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), regarded among Brazilian conservative social circles as the "common man's writer".[30] A significant increase in the publishing of his books happened in Brazil over the last decade, especially by publishing houses devoted to Catholic readers. In Chesterton's writings, the common man is presented in opposition to the "uncommon man", the latter meaning the literate, intellectual citizen, the political leader in charge of society. Contrariwise, the common man is disinterested in the bourgeois ideals of cultural distinction and incapable of realizing his life in modernity. The argumentative line bets on the existence of values, interests, and aesthetic experiences that would be inaccessible to the avant-garde social groups.

The term "common man" frequently made a self-reference to the Secretaries or even President Bolsonaro.[31] Such a discursive use evoked the idea of an ontological parity, with the Secretaries willing to "defend" those whose interest they would know in their own intimacy. We found references to the common man in the Secretaries' discourse associating this figure with a "simple life" in the country's small towns. The idealized image of this common man echoes some traits of a so-called cultural or "spiritual" war, as it appears in Porciuncula's words: "Culture, in this government (…), is a place to preserve the historical values and traditions

[29] Original text: "cultura de um povo não depende de gordas verbas públicas, mas sim de uma profunda conexão espiritual entre o culto (cultura) e as suas tradições atemporais".

[30] See, Chesterton Brazil Society. Available at: https://www.sociedadechestertonbrasil.org/seja-membro/. Accessed on 28 September 2021.

[31] Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1390739790803439621?s=20. Accessed on 11 July 2023.

of the common man, once so ignored and despised"[32]; "the pedantic artistic elite have discovered to their horror that their circular opinions are not taken seriously by the common man".[33]

The Secretaries' stand on cultural policies drew upon readings about traditionalism, which was also strategically employed by governance practices in different countries. The common man enunciated by Frias and Porciuncula aligns with extreme right-wing endeavors worldwide, which also associate modern secular society with atrophying the horizon of groups that believe themselves to be bearers of a kind of timeless spiritual wisdom (Teitelbaum, 2020). Reacting to the criticism that the government was fighting against the cultural sector, Porciuncula stated: "there is no attack on culture, other than the one you promote, which is an attack on art, an attack on civilization. We are others, common men, just returning our culture to its age-old tradition".[34]

This discourse on the historical roots of culture seems to interact with a historical trend described by Cesarino (2020, p. 422) as the "contemporary obsession with authenticity and spontaneity in politics", responsible for the popular appeal of figures such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro. When the mediations that make up social life—such as political, legal, scientific institutions—go under suspicion in the so-called post-truth regime, populist currents respond to diffuse yearnings around the genuine, the traditional, and the authentic.[35] To make them effective, issuers and recipients of these enunciative suggestions must recognize themselves as ahistorical subjects and bearers of the "culture" to which public policies must be attentive. Added to the abstract notion of universal

[32] Original text: "a Cultura, nesse governo (…), é um local para ajudar a preservar os valores históricos e as tradições do homem comum, outrora tão ignorado e desprezado". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1364001209481314307. Accessed on 28 July 2023.

[33] Original text: "a elite artística pedante descobriu, horrorizada, que suas opiniões circulares não são levadas a sério pelo homem comum". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1397141156207775744. Accessed on 28 July 2023.

[34] Original text: "There is no attack on culture, other than the one you promote, which is an attack on art, an attack on civilization. We other common men are just returning our culture to its ancient tradition". Available at: https://twitter.com/andreporci/status/1389935845357010944?s=20. Accessed on 22 August 2023.

[35] We point out to a particular pattern of searching for "authentic" cultures, apparently scarce in increasingly financialized and digitized societies. See Boym (2001), Brown (2019), and Cesarino (2020).

(spiritual) culture, Bolsonaro's, Frias', and Porciuncula's "common man" suspended the idea of citizenship from social contradictions and inequalities to be repaired by the State. The persuasive force of such an idea relied on someone other than intellectuals and artists who historically guided the public management of culture. It became a task of those who claimed to be ontologically leveled with their counterpublic.

Final Considerations

In opposing the critics who accused him of not mastering the specificities of the area under his charge in the federal government, André Porciuncula articulated one of the most suggestive findings of our fieldwork: "They say that I am not a 'man of culture'. But we are all men of culture".[36] The comment's acumen hijacked from the left-wing discourse the militancy in universalizing the right to cultural citizenship. In historical terms, Brazilian artists, intellectuals, and progressive political elites sought to include marginalized groups and expressions in the State recognition framings. For these actors, it was a matter of giving a *public character* to vulnerable cultures, exemplified by the heritage policies designed to preserve indigenous and Afro-Brazilian traditions.

The semantic expansion of the category "culture" by the Workers' Party public policies (2003–2016) was essential to consolidate such an approach. At the time, policies for the area relied on an anthropological perspective of the term, according to which "culture" would not represent only a specialized dimension of the social life shaped by the arts. Rather, the State policies should target the lived experience's substrate of the most diverse groups, addressing their values, identities, and aesthetic dispositions. Thus "culture" has become an indispensable category for reparation projects and policies for recognizing subaltern groups, in line with a global trend (Cunha, 2009; Wright, 1998). By its turn, this political project produced a specific type of leadership: the public manager of culture as an interpreter of the social, able to identify the meanings of popular manifestations and bring to the coordination of the State those

[36] Original text: "Dizem que não sou 'homem de cultura.' Mas todos nós somos homens de cultura". Available at: https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/o-governo-federal-nao-tem-obrigacao-de-bancar-marmanjo--diz-mario-frias-em-live-sobre-arte-crista-25006859. Accessed on 22 August 2023.

convenient to a particular idea of Brazil. This diacritical way of understanding social justice is presented in several analyses that have become references in studies on culture in Brazil, such as those by Miceli (1984) and Schwarz (2009).[37]

When he stated that "we are all men of culture", the Bolsonaro government's Secretary played with the discursive ambivalences of this previous political paradigm. He claimed for himself the role of a beneficiary of the anthropological view of culture and, at the same time, pointed out the elitism of his opponents, who, by describing him as not being a "man of culture", would have deprived him of a "right". Such a populist discursive project thus seems to have sought to remove from the hands of progressive elites, historically hegemonic in this field of State policies, the power to define the meaning of the right to culture. This attitude shows a reactive force to the injustice that a subject understands to have lived, in the form of what Friedrich Nietzsche understood as *resentment*, a political object in dispute and an accusatory category constantly remembered (Lisboa, 2022). The invention of artists as Others by the Brazilian extreme right thus refers to previous feelings diffused in some social niches, as a reaction to an alleged injustice regarding how the public meanings of "culture" are constituted.

This counterpublic movement allows us to understand how the meanings of "culture" are disputed in their claim to translate local identities within a coherent national imagination. By making the State funding model for cultural activities a political-electoral scarecrow, Brazilian extreme right's agents entered an arena of debates previously restricted to somewhat specialized groups. The—unfounded—accusations of collusion between artists and leftist parties increased on social media, supporting the emergence of leaders such as Frias and Porciuncula. Speaking not only *about* the common men, but *as* common men, such actors animated a counterpublic that guaranteed them expressive participation in the last elections held in the country. Frias was elected Federal Deputy for the state of São Paulo, while Porciuncula became a substitute for his party for a seat in the national parliament representing the state of Bahia. The reorganization of this political field when the left returns to power, after

[37] Anthropologists like Edward Sapir (2012), Marshall Sahlins (2004) and Roy Wagner (2010) drew attention to the delicate production of "culture" as a category amidst the effort to find and name the authenticity of a group's way of life.

Lula's election in 2022, lasts as a flank of the extreme right's performance to be observed in Brazil.

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Witches, Hyenas, and Monsters: The Othering and Demonization of Feminists in Spanish PRR Party VOX

Laura Cervi, Santiago Tejedor, and Angela Puca

Introduction

Populist radical right parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) have ceased to be marginal actors to compete with traditional political parties, entering different governments both in Europe and worldwide (Novais, 2023).

This party family is well known for twisting citizens' grievances by reducing it into the oppositional dichotomy "us vs them", and consequently identifying whoever falls outside the category of "us" as a threat to society (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 324).

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In recent decades, immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, have been mostly chosen singled out as the "them" to be scapegoated (Cervi et al., 2020). However, members of or any "ethnic, religious, sexual, minorities" (Reinemann et al., 2017, p. 21), whose identity or behavior can be placed outside the "people" category have also been opportunistically framed as "others".

In current times, it is difficult to ignore the gender dynamics in far-right and populist politics (Nirel, 2017; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015) and the important role that **anti-genderism** and **anti-feminism** play in their ideological framework (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018) and their discourse (Wodak, 2015).

Nonetheless, and despite many claims to deepen the research, gender is still marginalized in the study on populism (Akkerman, 2015; de Lange & Mügge, 2015). In particular, as stressed by Ruth Wodak (2015), gendered discourses in the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties have been neglected and remain under-researched.

The aim of this work, therefore, is to contribute to the understanding of gendered discourses in the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties, focusing on VOX, the Spanish emergent PRR party which, besides aligning with other Western European radical right-wing parties for its anti-immigration and nativist stances (Betz, 2003), also presents a novelty: a strong anti-feminist message (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022) and the open negation of the existence of gender-based violence (Puente et al., 2021).

We attempt to make an empirical contribution to the current debate about PPR parties disclosing how feminists are constructed in VOX's discourse, assuming that capitalizing on and appealing to people's ontological insecurities, populist actors narratively construct feminists as a folk devil (Cohen, 2011) to instill scare, or moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010), toward the potential disruption that the struggle for women's right might cause in society.

Theoretical Framework

VOX

VOX was born in 2013 as a radical schism of the conservative Popular Party. The party ran for the first time in the 2014 European elections, without getting representation; after the 2017 terrorist attack in

Barcelona, coinciding with the independence struggle in the region, VOX tripled the number of its affiliates in **Spain** (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019).

In December 2018, in the regional elections of Andalusia, the party obtained 12 seats, becoming a fundamental piece to form a right-wing government led by the Popular Party.

Since then VOX has entered different regional governments and, although losing some votes, has been the third most-voted party in the 2023 election (Ramis-Moyano et al., 2023).

VOX presents all three main features, which, according to Mudde's (2004) influential definition, characterize the PRR party family: populism, nativism, and authoritarianism.

Populism is a type of political discourse that imagines societies divided in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, people and elites, and assigns treacherous behavior to the latter that is opposed to a positively conceived people (Mudde, 2004). VOX expression of the classical populist Manichean perspective of the fight between "us" and "them", is entrenched with hard nativism, characterized by an intense hostility to anything deemed alien and therefore threatening national cohesion—"separatism" on the inside and immigration, especially Muslim immigration, on the outside—for the ultimate purpose of achieving a mono-national and mono-cultural state (Cervi & Tejedor, 2021).

The party also presents authoritarian features, such as a preference for an ordered society that punishes severely any infringements of the norms—especially those committed by the "enemies" of the nation" (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019)—together with a strong anti-pluralism (Kriesi, 2014).

The label "radical," finally, perfectly fits the party that presents an outspoken position at the far end of the political spectrum on issues related to immigration and ethnic diversity, but also for a fierce anti-genderism that appears so crucial in VOX's ideology that different authors (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022; Puente et al., 2021) consider it a pillar of the party's ideological foundation.

PRR and Gender

General scholarship tends to conceive European PRR parties as men's parties since they are usually led, represented, and supported by men (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Most of the existing literature scrutinizing the relationship between PRR parties and gender mainly deals with demand-side questions. Specifically, most research focuses on explaining the gender gap in the electorate (Ilkkaracan, 2019; Oshri et al., 2023) suggesting that men attach greater salience to issues that are traditionally associated with the radical right and that they may also be less repelled than women by these parties' reputation and political stigmatization (Harteveld et al., 2015).

Although a growing body of scholarship is tackling the supply side—i.e. the ideology of the populist radical right concerning gender—as Kuhar and Paternotte point out (2017), most of the time, these studies mix phenomena as diverse as populism, far-right parties, religious fundamentalism, nationalism, racism, neoliberalism or austerity politics. In the same vein, Mudde observes that this literature suffers from a flawed research design, and authors hardly ever start their research with an open and unprejudiced view (2004, p. 91).

Thus, there is no wide agreement on the role of gender issues in PRR party ideology.

On the one hand, a wide stream of scholars, regards gender relations as a feature of the populist radical right (Mudde, 2004), being dependent on variant cultural and political contexts. In particular, PRR parties' position appears dependent upon how gender relates to the division between "the people" and "the elite": if women are perceived as part of "the people", populist actors will probably try to mobilize them by including gender in ideology and policy. At the same time, if feminism is understood as part of an educated and privileged elite, populists are unlikely to work toward change in gender relations (Dingler et al., 2017).

In addition, Abi-Hassan (2017) argues that the treatment of gender issues in populism is particularly dependent on the personal goals and ideas of particular populist leaders.

On the other side, many authors place anti-genderism at the center of PRR parties' ideological framework (see among others Akkerman, 2015; Erzeel & Rashkova, 2017; Norocel, 2013), stressing how it helps to maintain social order, oppose elites and their progressive project, which has supposedly gone too far in challenging traditional gender roles and families (Köttig et al., 2017).Spierings & Zaslove, 2015).

Empirical evidence, however, discloses conflicting, and often contradictory (Mayer et al., 2014) views on gender relations among these parties.

There is no doubt that nativism is tightly connected with the sustainability of the native population (Christley, 2022), in which children appear vital to the survival of the nation (Betz, 2003).

As a result, many PRR parties see women as "the nation's biological breeders" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 22), those who embody the sacred role of guaranteeing the survival of the native community in the face of a threat to their identity and their future—posed by immigrants (Christley, 2022)—relegating them to their "sublime role of housewife and mother" (Mudde, 2004).

Family—the "natural" family, based on the "natural differences" between men and women is considered the core institution of society, so "women's politics" becomes "family politics" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018).

Anti-feminism, together with the fight against LGTBQ+ and reproductive rights, appears, therefore, logically tied to nativism through a form of gender nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 1997) that Grzebalska and Pető (2018) define familialism, "a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as a foundation of the nation and subjugates individual reproductive and self-determination rights to the normative demand of the reproduction of the nation" (p. 167).

Pető, (2015) along these lines, warns that 'these anti-gender movements only use these gender policy arguments as cover-up for fostering a deeper and profound change in the European political and value system' (p. 127).

Notwithstanding, other PRR parties seem to have chosen a more modern and flexible approach to these issues (Akkerman, 2015), adopting the language of women's rights and gender equality (Meret & Siim, 2013).

In most of these cases, radical right-wing parties advocate for women's rights in an instrumental way, insofar as women's rights enable them to justify their anti-Islamic and anti-immigration positions (Akkerman, 2015).

In other words, the nativist fight against the (supposed) Islamification has brought populist radical right parties to defend the equality of men and women as a key value of their ideology (Mudde, 2004, p. 96): gender equality is framed as a distinctively Western and European value (Meret & Siim, 2013), opposed to Muslim values, deemed as primitive and oppressive for women, providing a justification to reject Muslim immigrants (Dingler et al., 2017).

To account for these quasi-feminist attitudes (Mudde, 2004), Farris (2017) proposes the term femonationalism referring to a combination of the terms of feminism and femocratic-nationalism. According to Farris, the new centrality given to gender issues by right-wing nationalism should be interpreted as a form of opportunistic modernization of gender approaches strengthening these parties' nationalist and exclusionary messages.

Ontological Security and the Construction of the Deviant "Other"

The study of populism has recently taken an "emotional turn", as several scholars refer to emotionality as a key element of populist communication (Aslan, 2021; Browning, 2019; Moffitt, 2015).

Indeed, recognizing that PRR parties' discourse can be reduced to a promise of relief and redemption from anxieties and fears arising from contemporary events (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p. 11), populists' oversimplified narrative structure, which reduces the world to a two-way reality, aims at triggering individuals' emotions, acting upon their sense of ontological security.

Ontological Security Theory is based on the premise that the human capacity for agency rests on responses to existential anxieties (Giddens, 1991), which humans try to manage through the deployment of routinized behavior and practices (Steele & Homolar, 2019).

These practices, mostly articulated in narrative forms, define and locate the self in the social world and in relation to others, providing a sort of 'security of being' (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 746), a stable selfhood, that can be both projected and protected, across time and space (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall, 2018).

In other words, these narratives forge and define what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2010) call a symbolic-moral universe, a conception of reality that integrates symbols, meanings, values, motives, and reasons into a coherent system that legitimizes a certain moral order.

As human beings make sense of themselves by defining selves in relation to different people (Vough et al., 2020), that is to say by rhetorically constructing cultural binaries (Steele & Homolar, 2019), the symbolic-moral universe delineates the moral limits and hence the criteria for what is deviant.

In Ben-Yehuda's terminology, deviancy is a social construct, in which one person or group defines another person or group, or their actions,

as deviant and dangerous to society. Deviancy, therefore, appears to be central to the explanation of social stability or change (Ben-Yehuda, 1980).

The populist discourse shows subjects their place in the world by depicting an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness—a beatific dimension that displays the actions, agents, and conditions that will lead to the fullness (Glynos, 2008)—and a disaster scenario, a horrific dimension which calls out deviants as the obstacle, "responsible" for the disaster (Eberle, 2019).

Populist actors, hence, become "moral entrepreneurs" (Cohen, 2011) portraying deviants as a threat to society, whose very existence represents a dangerous and unacceptable disruption of the symbolic-moral universe, which will lead to a disaster for society.

To say it Cohen's (2011) words, deviants are framed as folk's devils to instill a sense of moral panic in society.

The Witch as the Archetypical Feminine Folk Devil

Folk devils, according to Cohen (2011), can be defined as individuals or groups of people portrayed as outsiders and deviant, and who are blamed for crimes or other sorts of social problems to sparkle a widespread feeling of fear, a moral panic, against this perceived "evil group" that threatens the values, interests, or well-being of a community or society.

As Gilbert Herdt (2009) states, moral panic not only reveals the ideologies, hierarchies, and social fissures of society but also exposes systemic forms of structural violence, especially in the "reproduction of sex and gender differences" (18).

Influential scholarly research (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; Levack, 2006; Purkiss, 1996) reveals that historically, the concept of female deviance has been prominently manifested through the archetype of the witch. This representation has often led to women accused of witchcraft being perceived as folk devils, subjected to societal blame and fear.

The special link between women and the supernatural can be traced back to the pagan divinities of antiquity (Maddox Hueffer, 2019, p. 24). However, as civilization began to be founded upon monotheistic beliefs, such as Christianity, old pagan rites became unofficial and, as a result, "these generative, destructive mother goddesses who symbolized both

birth and death, light and dark" disappeared in favor of increasingly polarized archetypes of womanhood as either "virgin, obedient wife or deviant whore", as prescribed in the Bible (Sollee, 2017, p. 21).

Since then, the witch, in some cases defined as 'someone who causes harm to others by mystical means' (Hutton, 2017, p. 9), has become the embodiment of everything that goes against the values conveyed by Christian theology and the dominant value system of the related society.

Women who were too old to bear children or decided not to, women who did not marry nor took on the role the community saw fit for them, that is to say, any women challenging the narrative underpinning of the society, were accused of witchcraft to ultimately tame their sexuality, bodies and reproductive function (Gage, 2020).

Along the same line, Silvia Federici's work (2017) discloses how the consolidation of the capitalist system depended on the subjugation of women, suggesting that the early modern witch hunts are related to a gender-based division of work where women are relegated to the production of children.

Following Ben-Yehuda (1980), the fact that, in reality, witches did not have the dangerous capacities that were imputed on them did not make witch-hunts less effective as long as the imaginary danger legitimized the maintenance of a strong power structure.

As a matter of fact, the imagery surrounding the figure of the witch and its gathering within one label all the elements of the ultimate adversary to the norms upheld by a functioning community (Hutton, 2017), has become a stable of European popular culture becoming a trope in media and pop culture (Roper, 2006).

Hence, taking into consideration both the wider literature on populist discourse (for an overview see Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).) and how it triggers ontological insecurities (Browning, 2019; Steele & Homolar, 2019) and the specific literature on how witches have been constructed throughout history (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; Levack, 2006; Purkiss, 1996), we analyze how VOX, drawing on the long-lasting archetype portraying deviant women as witches, frames feminist as folk devils and as a dangerous threat to society.

Methods

An ontological security approach reflects a social constructionist approach to subjectivity, highlighting the constitutive role of discourse and narratives (Andrews et al., 2015) and drawing attention specifically to the emotional aspects.

In accordance with Mair and Mudde (1998), who suggest that the study of ideology requires a comprehensive in-depth approach focusing on "what parties are, rather than on what they do" (p. 224), we have investigated a large corpus of data including party's manifestos, Parliamentary interventions (both in Madrid and in regional parliaments), speeches and interviews with party leaders and members from 2018 to 2023.

Within this corpus, we have selected the specific discourse strand—defined as topical threads within discourses (Dragomir, 2022)—related to gender and feminism.

The strand has been analyzed following DHA, which views discourse as a set of "context-dependent semiotic practices" which are "socially constituted and socially constitutive"(Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 89) and is particularly helpful to disclose the ways in which power-dependent semiotic means are used to construct positive self and negative presentations of others (Cervi & Carrillo-Andrade, 2019).

Following Reisigl and Wodak (2001), our analysis was developed in two steps: the "entry-level analysis" isolates the thematic dimension of texts (the frames), and the "in-depth analysis" which deconstructs the coherence and cohesion of texts in detail allowing for interpretation.

Results

The "Natural Family": The Foundational Frame

In October 2018 VOX presented 100 urgent measures for Spain. Already in this first manifesto, the party made it very clear that the family—understood as the "natural family", the one composed of a man and a woman—existed before the creation of any political institution, being the original and, thus, the core institution of society.

The "natural" family deploys a crucial social function, the demographic survival of the nation, and as such must be protected.

"*La familia cumple una relevante función social: garantiza la supervivencia demográfica*"
(The family fulfills a relevant social function: it guarantees demographic survival.)
Point number 56
VOX's manifesto "*100 medidas para la España viva*"

"*Promulgación de una ley orgánica de protección de la familia natural que la reconozca como institución anterior al Estado.*"
(Promulgation of an organic law for the protection of the natural family that recognizes it as an institution prior to the State.)
Proposal number 72
VOX's manifesto "*100 medidas para la España viva*"

As Nira Yuval-Davis observes, nations and nationalisms are gendered: women are used as symbols, as they are in charge of the material and symbolic reproduction of the nation, but as such they are colonized and controlled by strict regulations (1997).

VOX's particular understanding of the natural family is entrenched with nativism and the survival of the native people (Betz, 2003): as a consequence individual reproductive and self-determination rights are subjugated to the normative demand of the reproduction of the nation (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018).

The ideological foundation in the gender approach of the organization, besides displaying nativist nationalism, preserves some central elements of the Francoist ideology, especially in the role of Catholicism, considered as a founding value of Western, and especially Spanish society (Ramis-Moyano et al., 2023).

"*España es una sociedad católica y no protestante, ni islámica, ni judía, por ejemplo)*"
(Spain is a Catholic society, not a Protestant, Islamic or Jewish society, for example)

> Santiago Abascal, VOX President.
> Madrid, Vistalegre meeting, March, 8th, 2020

That being the case, the party proposes to abolish public funding for any "surgical intervention" that does not involve citizens' health, such as gender reassignment or abortion, de facto excluding both practices from the domain of individual rights.

> "*Suprimir en la sanidad pública las intervenciones quirúrgicas ajenas a la salud (cambio de género, aborto…)*"
> (Suppress in the public health system surgical interventions unrelated to health gender reassignment, abortion…).
> Point number 56; VOX's Electoral Program, 2022.

The Othering Frame: The Construction of Deviant Women as Witches

Since the "natural" family is the core of society, anyone who acts outside "nature" is necessarily deviant.

Feminists, regarded as those who refuse to uphold what both society and "nature" require them to do are depicted as the ideal deviant "other".

"**Othering**" can be essentially understood as a social method of identifying individuals thought to be different from one's self (Dervin, 2012) through differentiating discourses that lead to moral and political judgments of superiority and inferiority between in-groups and out-groups (Jensen, 2011).

Feminists are, accordingly, framed as different, apart from any "average", "normal" women, or directly excluded from the category of women.

In the first case, they are different because they behave in a non-acceptable way.

> "*Son mujeres pero no las representan…la gran mayoría de las mujeres no son como Ustedes…no van gritando groserías….*"

(They are women but they don't represent them…the vast majority of women are not like then…they don't go around shouting profanities…)
"*Las que no representan a las mujeres son algunas locas de odio, que insultan a otras mujeres*"
(The ones who don't represent women are some hate freaks, who insult other women)
Santiago Abascal, VOX President.
Madrid, Vistalegre meeting, March, 8th, 2020

In the second, their actions are set so outside their natural role, calling "horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not—be crossed" (Cohen, 2011, p. 13), that they cease to be women.

"*No son mujeres ustedes tienen que llegar a ser mujeres*"
(You are not women, you have to become women)
Rocío de Meer, Vox MP
Spanish Parliament, February 2nd 2020

This othering dynamic echoes the previously mentioned classical 'Madonna-Whore' dichotomy, which takes root in Christian thought and splits women into two categories, one which is acceptable and the other to be ostracized. A woman, in other words, has only one acceptable role to play and any deviation from that norm will push the individual to the margins of society, deemed as a "whore" (Tishkoff, 2006).

Scholars have disclosed that during witch hunts such a dichotomy is transposed from ethical conception to belief in evil spirits with whom women would escape at night, such as the *strigae, lamiae*, and the *bonae res* (Broedel, 2013, pp. 101–105).

Indeed, not only the activity of exclusion is necessary to guarantee that "he subject takes up his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic" (Creed, 1999, p. 253), but, as Sara Ahmed (2004, p. 1) points out, those who are not considered "us", in not being us, are a danger for what is "ours" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 1).

Feminists, therefore, become monstrous creatures, in other words, folk's devil.

Deformity played a role in witchcraft texts and accusations, as it distinguished individuals as evil based on their physical appearance (Breuer, 2009, p. 131) which further demonized characters and signified their otherness.

In the same way, feminists are called out for their physical appearance. At first, feminists are depicted as ugly.

> "*feministas feas que dicen a las mujeres lo que tienen que hacer*"
> (Ugly feminists who tell women what they have to do)
> Jorge Buxadé, VOX's Candidate to the European Parliament.
> Madrd, Vox's campaign meeting 22 May 2019

The widely used stereotype of "the ugly feminist" was invented to impede the feminist movement—suffragettes were dismissed as "masculine", second-wave feminists were "ugly man-haters"—implying that only undesirable women—unattractive, alone, unloved—care about their rights, and especially their bodily autonomy (Federici, 2017).

Another common trope is feminists as "purple hair hysteric (women)".

> "*Esas histéricas del pelo morado*"
> (These purple-haired hyteric)
> Jorge Buxadé, VOX's Candidate to the European Parliament.
> Madrd, Press conference, 22 Mach 2020

Portraying feminists as "purple haired", besides representing a clear strategy of othering through differentiation, entails a clear mocking of feminist symbols, as the color purple, symbolizing the feminist fight, is widely employed in feminist esthetics.

This process perfectly matches what Cohen (2011) defines as the symbolization of the folk devil, whose appearance and overall identity are over-simplified to be easily recognizable.

The trope of female hysteria, constructed as a form of hysteria inherently related to femaleness and to non-normative female behavior, on the other hand, dates back to ancient times (Gilman et al., 2022), and has always been somehow connected to the female tendency to cause troubles. Inthe Middle Ages female hysteria was thought to depend on devil

possession, as demoniacal forces were considered to be attracted to those who were prone to melancholy, particularly to single women and the elderly. Still up to the end of the XVII century marriage, and regular sexual encounters with her husband, were the most highly recommended long-term remedy for a woman with hysteria (Katz et al., 2008).

Deviant women also undergo a process of animalization, being compared, in their monstrosity, to dangerous hyenas (animals that are stereotypically represented as laughing hysterically while eating corpses).

> "*Nuevo ataque de las hienas feministas*"
> (New attack by the feminist hyenas)
> Macarena Olona, former VOX MP.
> Spanish Parliament, May, 12th, 2022

Animalization is a form of dehumanization in which, as explained by Silvia Federici (2017) femaleness is seen as a "mark of bestiality and irrationality" to conform "the exclusion of women…and the consequent naturalization of their exploitation" (p. 200).

This process of demonization resonates with what Sabatier and colleagues (1987) identify as the "devil shift", the tendency for people to exaggerate the power and maliciousness of political opponents, corresponding to an intentional strategy to build a villain figure.

The results of modern field research disclose how the breaking of taboos or social, moral, or religious values, causes women to "become" witches. It all starts with a rumor and gossip about some ugly, unmarried, divorced, promiscuous, old or too pretty women in the village. But they are still not branded as witches until a certain negative incident or misfortunate event occurs: then those women next-door, who were previously marked as undesirable, are accused for the disaster and the accusers are hence resolved of all responsibility (Šešo, 2012, p. 195).

In the same way, VOX's othering and demonizing feminists create the breeding ground for openly framing them as witches when they trespass the borders of their role by asking for rights, especially the right to decide over their bodies.

During the debate of a motion to penalize the harassment of women who attend abortion clinics, VOX's MP José María Sánchez García called a socialist colleague "witch" up to three times. After refusing to correct

the insult he was expelled from the chamber. The following day, another MP assured that "witchcraft in Spain has not been a crime for 200 years".

As a result, feminist gatherings are accordingly defined as *aquelarres*, witches' coven.

> "*Un aquelarre llevó a miles de mujeres a encontrarse con la muerte*"
> (A witch coven led thousands of women to meet death.)
> Aránzazu Cabello, VOX's regional MP for Madrid (referring to a feminist protest occurred before de beginning of Covid-19 pandemic)
> Parliament of Madrid, Plenary session, February 23th, 2021.

Moral Panic: The Performance of the Crisis

As Benjamin Moffitt (2015) reminds us, populism discourse, in order to activate people's ontological insecurities, always entails the performance of a crisis.

So, once the construction of the folk devil is completed, and the boundaries between "us" and "them are clearly set, moral panic can be activated by triggering a sense of emergency".

As Cohen (2011) suggests, the facts of the controversy surrounding the folk devil are distorted, or fabricated altogether, as "the concept of moral panic rests on disproportion" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010) fueling the moral crusade.

Feminism is, thus, framed as a threat to the foundation of society, family, and maternity, therefore a "cancer" for society.

> "*Este feminismo viene a acabar con la familia y la maternidad*"
> (This feminism is coming to end family and motherhood)
> Rocío Monasterio, VOX's ViceSectretary for Social Issues
> VOX's video, April, 2nd, 2019

> "*El feminismo es cáncer*"
> (Feminism is cancer)
> Alicia Rubio, VOX Regional MP in Madrid.
> Madrid Regional Parliament, November 14th 2019.

Feminists become totalitarian *feminazi*, who want to impose their dictatorial will on the rest of society, criminalizing men (50% of the population) and destroying both the moral order and social stability by inciting a "war between sexes".

> "*El feminazismo que ustedes practican es un movimiento contra el hombre. Ustedes no buscan la igualdad, incitan a la violencia contra los varones, contra la mitad de la población*".
> (The feminazism that you practice is a movement against men. You do not seek equality, you incite violence against men, against half of the population.)
> Ángeles Criado, VOX's Regional MP.
> Regional Parliament of Valencia, March 9th, 2022

The term *feminazi* originated in the 90s, becoming a popular insult in Spain used to generally undermine all feminist movements by portraying them as a group of radical, extremist and crazy women that hate men (Puente et al., 2021).

In this respect, the *feminazi* is an "illustration of the work of abjection" (Creed, 1999, p. 253), a queer monster that represents an imminent danger for the "people".

Often these attacks become personal and specific political actors are targeted through "character assassination", understood as a form of attack that is not focused on political and professional actions but rather on the target's personality and behavior and can include insults and defamation (Cervi et al., 2023).

In particular, Irene Montero Spanish former Minister of Equality and driver of Europe's most advanced law against gender violence (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022) is scapegoated as a sort of "source of every evil", personally attacked and openly defined as "a threat to Spanish kids".

"*El tremendo daño que esta ministra está haciendo a los niños y a las niñas españolas*"
(The terrible damage that this Minister is doing to Spanish children)
Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros, VOX's former Secretary General.
Madrid, Press conference, March, Semptember 22nd, 2022

In addition, and in direct connection with their nativism, not only feminists are portrayed as a danger, but they are also accused of behaving as or sympathizing/conspiring with the other "Other": Muslim immigrants.

"*Hoy hay un cierto feminismo supremacista que impone el discurso de la ideología de género y pretende amordazarnos con su burka ideológico*"
(Today there is a certain supremacist feminism that imposes the discourse of gender ideology and pretends to gag us with its ideological burqa)
"*…La dictadura del feminismo supremacista que dice defender a las mujeres, pero que nunca critica a las manadas magrebíes o al islam que somete a las mujeres*"
(…The dictatorship of supremacist feminism that claims to defend women, but never criticizes the Maghrebi herds or Islam that subjugates women)
Rocío Monasterio, VOX's ViceSectretary for Social Issues
VOX's video, April, 2nd, 2019

The Solution Framework

Hero-villain narratives are "ethically constitutive" stories that can inspire normative worth (Homolar, 2022); therefore, the "moral entrepreneur" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010) becomes the hero, which generally attracts empathy, affinity, and positive feelings (Homolar, 2022).

This dynamic allows VOX's politicians to present their organization as the only guardian of societal stability, that is to say, the only possible solution against the threatening "Other".

> "*El éxito de Vox callará la boca a muchos y será el mayor éxito frente a los ofendiditos y las histéricas del pelo morado*".
> (The success of Vox will shut the mouths of many and will be the greatest success in the face of the easily offended and the hysterics of the purple hair)
> Manuel Mariscal. VOX's ViceSecretary of communication.
> Toledo, VOX's meeting, April, 11th, 2019

In the same vein, dehumanization allows the justification of extreme measures (Haslam, 2006): excluding the "other" from humanity enables temporarily acting outside humanity itself, because we are fighting those who are acting inhumanely.

Accordingly, VOX not only negates the existence of gender violence but also promises to end all the initiatives fighting for women's rights.

In particular, all the associations and governmental department dedicated to fighting against gender violence are defined as *chiringuitos feministas*. This slang expression, literally meaning "beach bar", alludes to the idea that these associations, instead of fighting for citizens' rights, are just a cover-up the unnecessary (and possibly illicit) feminist activities.

> "*La presencia de Vox en distintos gobiernos será muy peligrosa para todos los que viven de la ubre del Estado a base de victimizarse y luego pedir subvenciones*"
> (The presence of Vox in different governments will be very dangerous for all those who live off the udder of the State by victimizing themselves and then asking for subsidies.)
> Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros, VOX's former Secretary General.
> Madrid, Press conference, March, 16th, 2022

Conclusion and Discussion

Recognizing that the connection between PRR parties and the control of women has been noted but not thoroughly studied, our study contributes to this stream of research by showing how in the case of VOX feminists are narratively transformed into folk's devil, responsible for an imminent disaster for the community.

Focusing on a specific case we cannot make general statements. However, our case study limiting the confounding factors that crop up in cross-national research can generate insights that can be explored in other contexts.

In particular, we have shown how applying an ontological security approach, provides the opportunity to deconstruct of populist narratives and re-connect them with existential anxieties, proving that such an approach can represent both a solid theoretical background and a helpful empirical tool to disclose how populists manufacture those profitable discursive opportunities (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

Therefore, although the emotional side is already well studied by populism scholars (Aslan, 2021; Browning, 2019; Moffitt, 2015), we agree with Kinnvall's (2018) call to integrate the ontological security into the study of populist discourse, to grasp populists' ability to activate emotions and emotional reactions.

Concretely, a classification system to distinguish people (Vough et al., 2020), triggering specific existential anxieties provide a sense of security that makes individuals feel protected not only against the "destabilizing effects" (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 744) of modern society but against anything that might change the *status-quo*.

Accordingly, more comparative research should be devoted to analyzing how anti-feminism is related to nativism (Farris, 2017), but also on how it can entail the perfect discursive opportunity (Koopmans & Statham, 2010) to advocate full bio-political control over women's bodies (Federici, 2017).

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Populism as a Communication Phenomenon in Portugal: The Dimensions of the Other

Isabel Ferin Cunha

Introduction

This article aims to take stock of the dimensions that have led to the expansion of populist ideas in Portugal, in particular the identification of an Other, expressed in many forms of otherness, as a cornerstone of this type of discourse throughout history. The creation of the Chega party [Enough] by André Ventura, in April 2019, and the subsequent elections by which he was elected to Parliament, provide the framework for the observation conducted in this exploratory essay. From that year onward,

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the public space, the mainstream media and social networks began to be more intensely engaged in discourses marked by populist components, in which the identification of an Other, characterized by various elements, is very pronounced. To illustrate the argument put forth in this article, statistical data and examples stemming from empirical research focused primarily on election campaigns will be drawn upon throughout.

After the Second World War, with the defeat of the Nazi and Fascist regimes, authoritarian variants of populism began to emerge in several regions, such as Latin America, the Iberian Peninsula and communist regimes. In democratic countries, notably in Europe, populist and far-right movements sought to survive on the fringes, adapting to their rules and waiting for an opportunity to come to power (Finchelstein, 2017).

Due to its wide scope and usage, the term populism is now verging on a non-concept, as it encompasses a wide array of meanings and actors from a variety of political spectra and affiliations (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013). The concept is also associated with a thin-centred ideology that can be attached to a more structured one, of which the far-right populisms, based on the Nazi ideology, and the far-left populisms, based on the Marxist ideology, are an example (Mudde, 2016). This article focuses on right-wing populism and its spread across Europe, at the end of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century.

A further point of clarification is necessary, to explain, without exhausting the debate, the difference between radical-right and far-right populism. While radical-right populism, grounded in pluralism, takes advantage of the democratic processes, eliminating all obstacles in democratic institutions and legislation in order to come to power, the far-right advocates the elimination of pluralism and democratic institutions (Albertazzi & Van Kessel, 2021). Against this background, it is argued here that, ideologically, the Chega party and its leader currently fall within the populist radical right.

Contrary to what has been noted by certain authors, who view populism as a constructive form of popular participation of democracy (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2020), the majority of the current European populist movements falls within the radical right. At the heart of these social eruptions lie the consequences of globalization and neoliberal capitalism, in Europe. The individual and collective resentment and frustration they generate, instigated by social networks and used as raw material by the mainstream media, are gradually undermining the democratic institutions. In this context, charismatic leaders tend to leverage the

features of the digital and media ecosystem, mobilizing to their advantage opportunistic strategies in which an Other, the Outsider, becomes a convincing point of attraction.

Out of the vast bibliography referenced on the subject of populism and its various theoretical, methodological and political conceptions (Mazzoleni, 2023), Moffitt (2016) warrants particular attention, when he distinguishes between three fundamental notions of populism: populism as a strategy; populism as an ideology; and populism as a political discourse or style. As a strategy, populism is predominantly centred on a charismatic leader who garners the direct support of the ordinary, non-organized "people", through high-impact performative actions that range from resource distribution to the weakening of democratic institutions and control of the media. In this regard, if controlling the media is not feasible, silencing them, i.e., putting an end to freedom of expression and of the press, becomes essential. As an ideology, according to Moffitt, populism encompasses two opposing and competing groups: the "pure people", a vague entity; and a "corrupt elite", identified with specific social groups. It associates the "pure people" with moral values that support the nation, while attributing to the "corrupt elite" the causes of national decline, pointing to a moralist ideological view (De La Torre & Mazzoleni, 2019). With regard to a populist discourse or style, it can be observed that both charismatic leaders and other actors in the political spectrum, including journalists, are drawn to a certain vocabulary, predominantly rude and crude, or to visual texts, that favours appealing performances. To achieve this goal, "truth" becomes relative and susceptible of being manipulated, in line with the intended results. The aim is to rile up the people, the ordinary citizens, against the elites and democratic institutions and control their "will" and opinions. To that end, misinformation, fake news, bad information and hate speech become political communication tools. The expansion of this style is accompanied by a polarization of positions, within and among parties, in the discourse of political actors from democratic and media institutions and in the everyday life of ordinary citizens. In addition, the political and media agents, appearing and acting predominantly on television news channels and newscasts, in an impulse to imitate and compete with social networks (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018), adopt very similar strategies to those described above, favouring a popular register, slang and the simplification of information.

The need to distinguish between radical-right and far-right populism began to emerge in the European political landscape with the subprime crisis, in 2008, and became more pronounced with the migratory crisis in Europe, caused by the war in Syria in 2015 (Melzer & Serafin, 2013). Generally speaking, the movements inscribed within the far right are defined by a historical genealogy grounded in theoretical and philosophical perspectives that span across the 19th and twentieth century, in Europe. As for the populist parties of the radical right, they do not openly defend totalitarian ideologies, such as Fascism and Nazism; rather, they position themselves as opposed to the traditional parties, which they deem corrupt. At the same time, they call for a new way of doing politics in liberal democracies—illiberalism—that upholds the rights and values of the nation and the people.

In radical-right populism studies, otherness hinges on the notion of the "pure people", citizens who ethnically originate from a nation-state, as opposed to the Other, who is commonly identified with the "corrupt elites". Today, however, the notion of an Other has come to include all those who do not fall within the set of ideas espoused by those parties. Thus, the Other encompasses, without distinction, people who are LGBTQIA+; immigrants; refugees; ethnic and religious groups; women with different views on family and gender roles; and the elites engaged with capitalism and globalization.

Based on the assumption that there is a popular/populist style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013) in Portuguese politics, present in the Salazar dictatorship (1928–1974) and in the democracy established by the revolution of April 1974, three main dimensions of populist set of ideas are analysed here: a historical/cultural dimension; a media dimension; and a political dimension.

The historical/cultural dimension is rooted in the period of the Salazar dictatorship, whose nationalist and colonial set of ideas tends to be reflected in the identification of an Other, on the basis of race or of cultural and religious values, as opposed to the Portuguese people, defined on the basis of a homogeneous and collective entity and a set of entrenched belief. This dimension further extends to conservative Catholic movements (Giorgi, 2020), with strict religious values, predominantly aimed at young people and members of the traditional elites, which identify the Other/Others with those outside their circle of faith and religious practices.

The second dimension lies in the mainstream media (Mazzoleni, 2008), with a special focus on television channels and on television entertainment programmes and newscasts, with social media, and particularly the expansion of social networks, appearing alongside them in the new millennium. The gradual mediatization of society (Strömbäck, 2008), with news media focusing on the market and audiences, has fostered spectacularization, the exacerbation of subjectivities and the simplification of topics related to citizenship, thus contributing to the weakening of the democratic institutions. At the same time, the growth of social networks, the dominance of Big Tech and the expansion of AI—unregulated in the Western world—resulted in the intensification of ideological bubbles. These tend to promote misinformation, encourage hate speech and contribute to the polarization of societies, where the Other is anyone who does not fit into an ethnic/political or social profile or is not on the same "wavelength" in terms of his/her convictions.

The permeability between mainstream media and social networks has transformed the former into sounding boards for unmediated content, giving visibility to components with greater potential for grabbing attention and drawing in audiences and publicity, eliciting emotions and reactions. All these elements have become exacerbated in Portugal since the pandemic, with the increase in social network users and the crisis affecting the large television groups, which, through their activity, play an active role as an engaged political actor (Serrano, 2022).

The third dimension is shaped around the global and national political contexts between 2008 and 2023, in Europe and Portugal. The background for this period is formed by the consequences of the subprime crisis (2008–2014), still not overcome in Europe, and particularly in Portugal, where the intervention of the Troika, formed by the European Commission, the IMF and the ECB (May 2011), has left a mark on the Portuguese society and economy (Valentim et al., 2018). Further to this, between 2020 and 2022 there was the Covid-19 pandemic, and the measures adopted at the international and national levels to fight the disease and its social and economic effects added to the challenges faced by the democratic institutions and reversed the course of globalization. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, in February 2022, brought new challenges to democracies and increased populist displays, all around Europe, while worsening social problems, leading to political and ideological polarization and reinforcing the notion of an Other, either internal or external, as an enemy.

This article seeks to show that, though populism is generally studied as a deviant form of politics, it retains elements of continuity in Portuguese politics, with regard to the style of communication, even among actors from democratic groups. The goal is to demonstrate the permanence and renewal of a certain populist style that is present in political communication in Portugal, grounded in the mainstream media and leveraged by social networks, particularly from 2019 onward, in the radical-right party Chega.

The Historical and Cultural Dimension of Populism in Portugal

In this dimension, the aim is to identify historical and cultural elements that underlie the use of a certain populist style in political communication, particularly by the radical-right party Chega and its leader, André Ventura (AV). To that end, a brief outline is given of the values that were at the root of Salazar's Estado Novo [New State] of 1928 to 1974 and their contribution to the definition of an Us (the Portuguese people) standing in alterity to an Other (often fairly undefined). In so doing, are highlighted the continuities and differences that, in different contexts, throughout the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, have gradually reshaped that set of ideas.

Of note is the role played by the institutions of the Estado Novo in inculcating a value system—a set of "indisputable truths" such as the nation; the empire; the family; the Christian values—that circulated in schools, within the family, at work and in leisure.

Over the course of approximately forty years, the Salazarist school, through its educational content, played a fundamental role in forming a new view of Portuguese history and culture. Based on the teachings of the school and of the Catholic Church, which was in alignment with it, the ideology of the Estado Novo extended to everyday forms of sociability and shaped the behaviours, attitudes and mentalities of, at least, four generations. This goal was pursued with the contribution of organizations, associations and corporations geared towards men, women, young people, blue-collar workers, liberal professionals and activities such as industry and trade. In a regime whose characteristics have remained fairly unchanged for over four decades, it comes as no surprise that, despite a

revolution such as the one of 25 April 1974,[1] which put an end to the dictatorship, many of those elements persist in the mentality of the people but also in the structure of institutions such as Justice, the Armed Forces, Education and the Catholic Church.

It should be noted that the ideas of the Estado Novo—unified by the "política de espírito" [policy of the spirit] (Quadros, 1963)—were always marked by the tension between a Catholic and integralist background, with Nazi and Fascist influences, and another wing, favourable to developmentalist policies, based on science and technology. This conflict between priorities was always conditioned by the Salazarist thought, which rooted the "Portuguese essence" in the land, the countryside, frugality, honest poverty and Catholic values.

The notion of empire,[2] defended by the Salazarist colonialist thought, not only involved and incorporated the values of the Estado Novo, explained above, but also added a process of othering grounded both in "race" and in culture and religion. The Other was the inhabitant of those colonized territories, the indigenous person to be civilized, but also the Portuguese person born in those lands and called "second-class white/Portuguese".[3] In the Portuguese Empire, as in other empires, a hierarchy was developed, based on the fact of belonging to a certain nationality, race or culture (Boxer, 1963). The Other was viewed, by the legal and social apparatus of the colonizer,[4] on a scale based on a paradigm of distance/proximity in relation to Western modernity. The greater the distance of

[1] The Revolution of 25 April 1974 put an end to the authoritarian regime of Estado Novo, paving the way towards a resolution of the problem of the colonial war and towards democratization.
https://app.parlamento.pt/comunicar/V1/202104/72/artigos/art2.html.

[2] The so-called Portuguese empire was composed of territories in Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe), in India (Goa, Daman and Diu), in China (Macau) and in Oceania (East Timor).

[3] See Maria Paula G. Meneses, "O 'indígena' africano e o colono 'europeu': a construção da diferença por processos legais" [The African 'indigenous person' and the 'European' colonial settler: building difference through legal processes], e-cadernos, 7, 2010, pp. 68–93. https://journals.openedition.org/eces/403; Acto Colonial [Colonial Act], 1930. https://www.parlamento.pt/Parlamento/Documents/acto_colonial.pdf.

[4] Estatuto dos Indígenas Portugueses das Províncias da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique [Statute of the Portuguese Indigenous People of the Provinces of Guinea, Angola and Mozambique] (1954) https://www.fd.unl.pt/Anexos/Investigacao/7523.pdf.

their ways and customs, their technology and science, the lower their position would be on the social hierarchy, and this was applied to slavery, to Roma ethnicity, as well as to the Portuguese people, seen as inferior to the British or the French. Even though in the last decade of the Estado Novo, after the beginning of the wars of national liberation (1962), there was, in the territories under colonial domination, a paradigm shift associated with the ideas of Lusotropicalism,[5] which defended harmony among the "races", the notion of social hierarchy remained a part of the Portuguese colonial process.[6] It would be present even after the Revolution of the Carnations on 25 April 1974, upon the return of the Retornados[7] to metropolitan Portugal and in the subsequent process of adoption of the Nationality Law of 1975,[8] which established the rules on the granting, acquisition, loss and reacquisition of Portuguese nationality. It was at this historical moment of independence of the countries that formed the Portuguese colonial empire—and the return/repatriation/escape of around half a million inhabitants of those territories—that the new radical and far-right populist movements (Marchi, 2012) as well as new forms of otherness began to emerge in Portuguese society,[9] recycled within the set of ideas of the colonial Estado Novo.

As the empire came to an end and the transition to the European Union took place, two different views of the Other collided, in the context of a search for and discussion about a new Portuguese identity. The so-called Retornados took centre stage in this national discussion, as, on the one hand, they brought into play the national colonial myths of adaptability, tolerance and welcome and, on the other, they faced the stigmas of decolonization, the new obligations stemming from the

[5] Lusotropicalism, a quasi-theory, developed by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (O Mundo que o português criou [The world created by the Portuguese], 1940), who studied the societies created by the Portuguese colonization in the tropics.

[6] See: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176716302644.

[7] The name Retornados was given to the Portuguese people who arrived in Portugal, after the agreements of independence of the former colonies in Africa, following the revolution of April 1974 (Delaunay, 2022).

[8] See: https://www.igf.gov.pt/leggeraldocs/DL_308_A_75.htm.

[9] See: Cunha, I. F. (1997). Nós e os Outros na Imprensa Portuguesa [Us and the Others in the Portuguese Press]. *Lusotopie* 3, 435–467.
http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/cunha-isabel-ferin-nos-outros-opiniao.pdf.

European treaties[10] and the official Portuguese policies to promote the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) (1996).[11] In the nineties, Portugal, a country of emigrants, became a country of immigrants as well, and the Other gained visibility in the new media landscape, led by the daily and weekly newspapers and the television channels,[12] with a focus on the market. Otherness was built in media discourses that tended to establish a hierarchy between migrants, based on ethnic and cultural stereotypes and their integration into the job market.

With the exception of the death of a Portuguese young man, of Cape Verdean origin, on 12 June 1995,[13] which constituted a racist hate crime, the far right remained fairly absent. Additionally, during those decades, the Portuguese Catholic Church, whose hierarchy struggled to incorporate the teachings of the Second Vatican Council[14] and move away from the ideology of the Estado Novo, supported the expansion of a group of Catholic organizations, restricted to specific social groups and aimed at creating nationalist and conservative elites, such as the Opus Dei, Comunhão e Liberdade and Schoenstatt movements. The conservative Catholic ideas appealed to a social substrate of the traditional elites, many of whom were the heirs, descendants and members of families that held a leading position in industry, agriculture, trade and banking during the Estado Novo. The combined growth of these movements, of a markedly fundamentalist conservative Catholic nature, provided a social base permeable to the populism of Chega and the values its advocates (Beuter et al., 2023).

[10] See: Maastricht Treaty, which was signed in 1992 and entered into force in 1993; Schengen Agreements (1995).

[11] See: https://www.cplp.org/id-2752.aspx.

[12] The Portuguese media landscape underwent a profound change at the end of the eighties and in the early nineties, as private projects in publishing and television, geared towards the market, began to emerge (see Correia, F. (2006). *Jornalismo, Grupos Económicos e Democracia* [Journalism, Economic Groups and Democracy]. Lisboa: Caminho).

[13] Cunha, I. (1999). *Imigração e Racismo: dez anos nos media* [Immigration and Racism: Ten years in the media]. https://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/cunha-isabel-ferin-sos-racismo.pdf.

[14] See: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index_po.htm.

The Media Dimension of Populism in Portugal

In this dimension, the focus is on populism as a communication phenomenon (Guazina, 2021) in which the media become of central importance. Populism as a communication phenomenon involves content and style. As content, what stands out is a political communication focused on messages or frames that use the populist ideology, such as the evocation of an us, anti-elitism and the identification of a threatening Other. The populist style of communication emphasizes performance and staging in conveying the message and strengthens the political actor by reinforcing the content. Taking over populism as a communication phenomenon contribute to the existence of nuances and degrees of populism, which can be manipulated by the various actors, based on context, position and political spectrum, and identified by the audiences in light of their personal trajectories, emotions or situation at a given moment. Broadly speaking, it is possible to account for three types of populism: complete, selective and empty or vague. Complete populism includes references and appeals to the people, anti-elitism and exclusion of an Other. Selective populism generally presents itself in two forms, one where it addresses the people and excludes certain out-groups and another where it appeals to the people and declares itself anti-elitist. Empty populism includes only references to the people (De Vreese et al., 2018).

Throughout Portuguese history, these forms of populism have alternated, both under the Estado Novo and under democracy, although the adoption of complete populism can be found in the ideas of Salazarism, in the far-right parties and, most recently, in the radical right. However, selective populism, in the form of appealing to the people and adopting an anti-elite stance, seems to be often present in democracy, mainly during times of political and economic crisis, notably by way of content manipulation, to which emotional performances are added. In this context, the actors can be political agents or political commentators as well as journalists or media organizations/institutions.

A brief summary of the history of the media in Portugal shows that, during Salazar's Estado Novo, the press and the radio were open to private and corporate initiative, notably from the Catholic Church, although they were subject to censorship on a daily basis from the State's police and surveillance bodies. In television, the situation was the same, with a single public television channel existing at the time,

from its creation in 1955 until 1974. The restriction of information by the censorship bodies hid from the Portuguese people a substantial part of society, since what could be reported on was confined to the purposes of the Salazarist government. In the radio and in the press, both public and private, as well as in cultural activities, such as theatre (Cabrera, 2013), censorship served as a tool for homogenizing thought and ensuring compliance with the directives. The political propaganda of the regime was conducted through specific channels and services, such as the National Secretariat of Information, Popular Culture and Tourism (Secretariado Nacional de Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo—SNI). The aim of this strategy was to reach all Portuguese people—in the mainland and overseas, ignoring the differences in political views and the consequences of colonialism—and create a homogeneous discourse that exalted the dictator; the nation; its values; its timeless mission; and the Portuguese people. The Other was identified as the one who posed a threat to the nation, sometimes belonging to the political opposition, other times belonging to groups that resisted integration, such as those who were of Roma ethnicity or Jehovah's witnesses—or, in the case of the overseas territories, who had not yet reached the stage of civilization required for integration into Portuguese society, within the hierarchy of proximity to Christian and Western values.

With the revolution of 25 April 1974, the picture changed dramatically and a large part of the sector, where private economic groups were in operation, was nationalized. The only television channel in existence, Rádio Televisão Portuguesa (RTP), remained in the sphere of the State and, in the first years of the revolution, was very much exploited by the clashing governments and political factions. It should be noted that the revolution gave rise to a host of internal and external political actions and battles from the radicalized left-wing movements aimed at controlling the information and restricting the freedom of the press (Rezola, 2019), whose characteristics were very similar to those of the censorship exercised by the Estado Novo. After the revolutionary period (PREC), and once the normal functioning of democracy was resumed, the media sector was modernized and liberalized, in anticipation of the accession to the European Union, in 1986. In the years that followed the revolution of 25 April, as a result of the clashes between social and political sectors, the Other took on different forms, which persist to this day in many aspects of everyday life. For the right, the Other

can be, within a political framework, the "comuna", "xuxa", "reviralho" or "esquerdista",[15] for example. For the left, the Other can be, within the same framework, the "facho", "reaça", "pide", "porco capitalista" or "retornado",[16] for example. In addition, the indiscriminate and pejorative use of references to ethnic origin such as "ciganos", "pretos", "escarumbas", "monhés", "chamuças", "chinocas", "brazucas" and "encardidos"[17] makes an appearance.

In the early nineties, two private television channels were created—SIC, 1992 and TVI, 1993—in addition to the two existing public channels RTP1 and RTP2. The nineties, which were marked by major changes in information and communication technology, corresponded to a profound shift in the way content was presented and, in the languages, used by the media. Even though free-to-air television channels kept their traditional programming focused on soap operas—mostly Brazilian at first—newscasts and football, the competition among the three channels for advertising and prime-time audiences produced a change in the languages and in the handling of entertainment and information content. Furthermore, journalistic projects such as the weekly newspaper *O Independente*[18] (1988–2006) introduced in the public space a new form of journalism, where spectacle, image and language became appealing. Its openly right-wing Christian management, close to the Social Democratic Centre party (Centro Democrático Social—CDS), was headed by the journalist and politician Paulo Portas, who would later become the leader of that party. As a relevant political actor (McNair, 2014; Page, 1996), *O Independente* adopted and used populist, and discriminatory, elements, notably the contrasting notions of Us/Others, where the Us, the people, showed an arrogant facet of a privileged class. This distinction could point

[15] Translator's note (TN): Derogatory terms focused on the fact of being on the left of the political spectrum or, historically, an opponent of the regimes that followed the military coup of 28 May 1926, which put an end to the First Portuguese Republic and established the Ditadura Nacional [National Dictatorship] and subsequently the Estado Novo.

[16] TN: Derogatory terms focused on the fact of being on the right of the political spectrum, a reactionary, a capitalist or, historically, among those who returned from the former Portuguese colonies following the revolution of 25 April 1974.

[17] TN: Derogatory terms focused on the fact of being of Roma ethnicity, of African descent, from Asian countries, from Brazil or a person of colour.

[18] See Barradas, M. F. (2012). https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/7390?mode=full.

either to the differences between old and new political and economic elites or to the differences between an old middle class, of liberal professionals and intellectuals, and a new middle class on the rise, associated with the influx of European structural funds and focused on the consumption of disposable items and fast food. The role of this weekly newspaper as a "politician grinding machine",[19] initially focused on the government of Cavaco Silva (1985–1995), was, in the media landscape, the point of origin of the discrediting of democratic institutions, political parties and politicians, and it introduced the topic of political corruption in Portugal, today also taken on by the populist radical-right parties.

The identification of an Other, a migrant, who belongs to a minority group dates back to the nineties. It was in the media, especially the press and the radio, that two symbolic worlds came to clash with regard to the definition of otherness, in battles between groups that sought to preserve, expand or redefine the Us versus the Other. Events such as the Expo98 brought many migrants to Portugal. In a competitive environment with an increasing tendency towards the spectacularization of content, the media gave prominence to migrants, from Africa, Brazil—particularly the women, portrayed as "bar girls/prostitutes"—or Eastern European countries, and also to Portuguese of Roma ethnicity, associating them with racial stereotypes and crimes[20] (e.g., Baganha et al., 2006).

This style of news coverage that identified the Other as threatening coincided with the broadcasting of reality shows, such as Big Brother (TVI, 2000), and entertainment shows featuring politicians, such as "Cadeira do poder" (SIC, 1997), or dealing with current political topics, as in the case of the comedy sketches by "Gato Fedorento" (2003–2009), which not only introduced a new form of spectacle on television (Traquina, 1997) but also adopted infotainment as a form of reporting on political themes, a situation that was compounded by the establishment of 24-hour news channels. The millennium brought with it new forms of doing politics, particularly among young party supporters, from the left to the right, who rushed to the blogs to present ideas, challenge political proposals and make a name for themselves in the digital space (Canavilhas, 2009). The emergence, in the public space, of this academically and

[19] See Valente, L., & Costa, F. S. (2015). *O Independente: A Máquina de triturar políticos* [O Independente: A Politician Grinding Machine]. Lisboa: Edito Matéria Prima.

[20] See: Observatório das Migrações [Observatory for Migration]. https://www.om.acm.gov.pt/publicacoes-om/coleccao-estudos.

politically qualified generation without any memory of the dictatorship, and its support to cartelized parties, generated frustrations that led to the creation of new parties.

The relationship between the media and populism is shaped by three variables: populism by the media; populism through the media and populist journalism (De Vresse et al., 2018; Prior, 2021). It is possible to speak of populism by the media when they take part in creating an environment conducive to populism, by echoing political elements and trends and critical attitudes against the elites and out-groups. Populism through the media is linked to processes of mediatization that, in optimizing the procedures and routines employed by the media, notably the news media, tend to favour points of view that promote conflict, drama, negativity and spectacle, in a cycle of seeking for audiences and infotainment. Populist journalism is a form of journalism where the professional takes on the characteristics of a political commentator—intervening ideologically or blocking the speaker in interviews—taking a stance with regard to the information being conveyed. By acting in this way, he/she tends to engage with, incorporate and reshape the populist points of view expressed by the so-called vox pop, mainly on social networks.

National politics has been integrated into the digital medium since the first decade of the millennium. All the parties with a seat in Parliament, as well as their leaders, have a website and social network presence, with the exception of the current President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, and the Secretary-General of the Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português—PCP). The Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, increased the use of social networks, particularly Facebook, promoting new applications in areas such as health, education, banking, work and leisure.[21] However, in the same period, television continued to be the main source of information for 57.7% of the Portuguese people, by contrast with the preference of 17.4% for the Internet (Cardoso et al., 2022).[22]

While it is not possible to accuse the media of directly promoting populism (Mazzoleni, 2008), it can be noted, however, that they favour the expansion of a style of communication that is conducive to it, as a result of their focus on the market, commercial rationale and effective

[21] See: https://obercom.pt/homepage/investigacao/.

[22] See: https://obercom.pt/digital-news-report-2021-portugal/.

regulation and capture by private interests, to the detriment of public interest (Freedman, 2019). This focus was particularly noticeable after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, in the so-called sovereign debt crisis in Europe, which affected most intensely the countries of southern Europe, such as Portugal. The news coverage of the crisis made by the large media platforms adhered to the defence of the capital and of restrictive policies, deemed absolutely inevitable, as expressed in the internationally established expression TINA (There Is No Alternative); this accentuated the discrediting of democracy and the inability of its institutions to protect ordinary citizens. In Portugal, for the first time, this perception reached sectors otherwise faithful to the democratic centre, including a large part of the middle class, the qualified public officials and its pensioners. In that sense, the mainstream media contributed to a feeling abandonment in ordinary citizens, especially those left behind by globalization, and to their moving towards populist parties (Mohiuddin et al., 2016).

It is worth noting that a large number of political commentators coming from journalism, party politics and academia circulate between mainstream media and social networks, in a cross-media process, which is a singularity of the Portuguese context. The circulation of commentator between those media has contributed to a uniform style of news coverage, predominantly emotional, instantaneous, contentious and exclusionary, and has also accelerated looping and cross-media information processes (Torres da Silva et al., 2017).

In the news channels, there is a majority of right-wing commentators (Figueiras, 2018), which seems unprecedented in a parliamentary framework with a left-wing majority in almost all legislatures (Cardoso et al., 2019). Their discourses, simplified for news programmes, stripped of context, critical and contentious in addressing political topics, contribute to the discrediting of democracy, the institutions and the party system, despite their claims of being anti-populist (Marchi, 2022).

The Political Dimension of Populism

In this dimension, the aim is to follow the common thread running across Portuguese politics, from the Estado Novo to the present day, from a perspective that oscillates between authoritarianism, paternalism and populism, always by reference to an Us versus an Other. This is an exploratory approach, covering facts and events that have been the object of empirical study by various authors.

It should be recalled that, upon the fall of the colonial empire, three conservative ultranationalist far-right movements emerged: the Christian Democratic Party (Partido Democrático Cristão—PDC); the Independent Movement for National Reconstruction (Movimento Independente para a Reconstrução Nacional—MIRN); and the National Front (Frente Nacional—FN). The activity of those movements, though relevant in the first few years of the revolution of 25 April 1974, faded after the 1982 amendment to the Constitution, which eased the "Marxist" bias, present in the text of 1976, and prepared Portugal for accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), in 1986. For approximately thirty years, the far right disappeared from the Portuguese political landscape and its potential supporters either gathered around parties without a seat in Parliament, such as the National Renewal Party (Partido Nacional Renovador—PNR), currently Rise Up (Ergue-te), or hid in the traditional right-wing parties. This led some authors to declare the failure of the ideology of the Estado Novo in supporting this type of ideas (Pinto, 1995) and to discuss the "exceptional nature" of the Portuguese situation vis-à-vis the emergence of populist radical-right movements in Europe (Caeiro, 2019). The apparent hibernation of the far-right moments should not lead to forgetting the constant signs of life from groups such as the PNR and the Portugal Hammerskins, which, after the extinction of the colonial empire, looked for inspiration in their European and American counterparts, adopting nationalist, supremacist, xenophobic and misogynistic agendas.

It bears noting that in Portugal voting is not mandatory and currently the percentage of voters lies between 45 and 55% of those enrolled in the electoral register.[23] Portugal has a semi-presidential and parliamentary political system, in which the Executive is headed by the Prime Minister. Presidential elections are held every five years and parliamentary elections every four years.

Since the end of the dictatorship, on 25 April 1974, the country has been ruled by two parties, the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista—PS) and the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata—PSD), which have alternated in power, forming occasional alliances with other parties, notably the Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party (Centro

[23] See: Pordata 2020. https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Taxa+de+absten%C3%A7%C3%A3o+nas+elei%C3%A7%C3%B5es+para+a+Assembleia+da+Rep%C3%BAblica+total++residentes+em+Portugal+e+residentes+no+estrangeiro-2208.

Democrático Social-Partido Popular—CDS-PP) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which were joined by the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda—BE), represented in Parliament since 1999. The first decade of democracy was marked by the creation and dissolution of ten constitutional governments, which shows the volatility of its politics and economic contexts, such as the intervention of the IMF in 1983. From 1987 onward, the two centre parties, the PSD and the PS, alternated in power; between 1995 and 2019, the PS ruled for 18 years, while the PSD did so for 7 years.

Populism, as style, appears repeatedly in centre, left-wing and right-wing leaders and is expressed by creating a direct bond with the voters (Salgado & Zuquete, 2017). The make-up of the Portuguese semi-presidential and parliamentary system, with a President who acts as a moderator and plays a role in ensuring compliance with the Constitution and an Executive headed by the Prime Minister, can lead, depending on the political circles and personality of the President and Prime Minister in office, to populist performances on the part of those office holders, often verging on an authoritarian paternalism inherited from the Salazar dictatorship. This was the case, for example, of the relationship between President Mário Soares[24] (1986–1996) and Prime Minister Cavaco Silva (1985–1995), with the former holding eleven open presidencies,[25] with the goal of hearing and giving voice to the people. What stands out in these appearances, with content and performances between selective and empty populism, is how he approached ordinary people, listening to them and sharing their worries and concerns, and subtly calling the political elites into question. The same strategy was used at other points in time by the Presidents of the Republic, especially Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. It is bears noting that in his first term in office (2016 a 2021) he maintained a populist discourse and a performance focused on affection, on proximity in the form of selfies, while in his second term in office, adopting a selective populism, he incorporated the voice of the people and began to denounce a certain party and economic elite (Lopes & Botelho, 2019).

[24] Serrano, E. (2002). *As presidências abertas de Mário Soares: as estratégias e o aparelho de comunicação do Presidente da República* [The open presidencies of Mário Soares: the strategies and the communication apparatus of the President of the Republic]. Coimbra: Livraria Almedina.

[25] TN: Events in which the President toured the country, hearing the people and drawing attention to major issues.

As for President Cavaco Silva (2006–2016), he chose to keep the population at a controlled distance, with his appearances revealing a paternalistic and authoritarian style, in an attempt to create "a new Portuguese man", during his term in office.

In the 2009 parliamentary election, which led to the re-election of Prime Minister José Sócrates, the candidate for the PS, social networks were definitively introduced as a campaign tool. In that election, the company responsible for managing the Sócrates campaign, Blue State Digital, following similar lines to those of the strategy of President Obama in 2008, used in the communication style the concept of "proximity", involving not only digital platforms but also the website socrates2009.pt. This communication strategy extended to the appearances on mainstream media, notably on the infotainment show "Gato Fedorento esmiúça os sufrágios", in which comedian Ricardo Araújo Pereira interviewed the candidate.[26] The communication style used in the candidacy, which involved interactions with voters on MyMov (Canavilhas, 2009), was geared towards qualified working young adults—perceived as "Us"—and highlighted the modern, visionary and enterprising profile of the candidate, while defining a certain elite, presented as the "Other", as backward, old-fashioned and conformist.

Following the bailout of 6 September 2011 that arose from the subprime financial crisis in Europe, and its repercussions in Portugal, an early parliamentary election was held, resulting in a victory (with 38.6% of the votes) for the PSD; this party then formed a government with the CDS-PP, which had received 11.7% of the votes. Through the PSD, in coalition with the conservative Catholic elite of the CDS, the right wing came to power, stigmatizing social and labour achievements, beyond the terms of the bailout. The authoritarian and paternalistic content and styles of discourse, sometimes mitigated by Christian assistentialism, gained great visibility. The mainstream media repeated official reports of rating companies and institutions that controlled the bailout. The financial crisis elicited from the government headed by Prime Minister Passos Coelho a communication based on the concept of austerity—"Portugal has lived beyond its means"; "going beyond the terms imposed by the Troika"; "slimming down the State"; "the Portuguese people can take it"—and on stigmatizing a considerable part of the Portuguese people, by accusing

[26] Programme aired on SIC, during prime time, on 15/09/2009.

them, either directly or indirectly, of having caused the disaster. The search for national "scapegoats" that could justify the austerity policies and authoritarian behaviours fostered by the intervention of the international institutions—IMF, ECB and European Commission—promoted increasing polarization on social networks.[27] From this political point in time onward, it became possible to observe an expansion of nationalist populism and an increase in hate speech and misinformation, through social networks.[28] Resentment, from a significant part of the population towards democratic institutions, politicians and parties, increased. Simultaneously, the political generation that established itself on social networks and blogs entered the public space, without any memory of the dictatorship and the repression, and new parties began to appear, bringing new political and governance proposals and goals. In 2015, the People, Animals, Nature party (Pessoas, Animais e Natureza—PAN) entered Parliament; in the 2019 election, Chega, the Liberal Initiative (Iniciativa Liberal—IL) and Livre [Free] did so too. Of these new parties, which represent a renewal of the Portuguese political and party system, only Chega is an organization with a programme that falls within the European radical right, although with some specificities that stem from the historical and cultural heritage. At the same time, the election campaigns, such as those of the 2019 parliamentary election and the 2021 presidential election, created new forms of communicating politics, where hybridism of the formats, contamination of languages—oral, visual, auditory and aesthetic—and technology intersect (Lopes, 2021). In turn, the emergence on the political landscape of a radical right, such as Chega, elicited ambiguous attitudes in the mainstream media, sometimes in the form of attraction, other times in the form of rejection. The party is headed by AV—former municipal councillor for the PSD, former football commentator—who introduced himself in the 2019 parliamentary election as an anti-establishment, nationalist and Catholic politician, the only one who told the "truth" to the "good Portuguese citizens". His election made use of the features of social networks, creating a profile for the party (Baptista et al., 2021) and extending to Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp groups; it used memes and edited videos and photos, focused

[27] See: https://www.publico.pt/2012/09/09/tecnologia/noticia/passos-coelho-pos-as-redes-sociais-a-ferver-1562316.

[28] See: https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-portugal-portuguese-translation-/16808de7db.

mainly on the themes of security, migration and economy, and adopted a negative, critical and derogatory tone regarding the government and the democratic institutions (Jaramillo, 2021). After being elected, AV used the Parliament as a stage to test his own performative style, full of emotion and vehement words, tone of voice and gestures. Adopting a salvific perspective, with a messianic tone and style (Dias, 2022), AV committed to fighting on behalf of the "good Portuguese citizens". His radical-right programme, gradually normalized by the mainstream media after his entry into Parliament, is defined primarily by alterity in relation to the Other(s), thereby bringing back and reshaping the Salazarist, conservative Catholic and colonialist ideas.

This strategy resulted in the generation of sound bites and image bites that gained great visibility in the media and on social networks, providing the party and its leader with a basis for growth, as confirmed in the 2021 presidential election and, later on, in the 2022 parliamentary election.

Is Populism the Future?

Is there a future for a one-man party, whose statutes and convention have been challenged since its very creation and whose councillors elected to the various municipal councils of the country often resign? How can one explain the normalizing of anti-democratic programme proposals from a radical-right party by the centre and right-wing democratic parties, as in the regional government of the Azores in the 2020 election? How should one view the meteoric rise in votes of this radical-right party, deprived of ideologically solid national structures and leaders, that jumped, between 2019 and 2021, from around 1.3% of the votes in the legislative election to 12% in the presidential election, coming in third in the national voting? Further yet, how should one interpret the votes obtained by that party in the 2022 parliamentary election, where it managed to elect 12 Members of Parliament with 7.1% of the national votes?

First, it is assumed that the rise of this radical-right party in Portugal does not differ much from that of many of its counterparts in Europe, as shown by the support that has been publicly given to it and the visits it has received from the leaders of those political parties, notably from Spain, Italy and France.

In Portugal, as in other European countries, the political, economic and social consequences of the various crises, since 2011, have accentuated the distrust of a large portion of the population towards democracy and its institutions.

All over Europe, with Portugal being no exception, political parties and democratic governments have adopted erratic communication policies in which they avoid "telling citizens the truth", for fear of meeting a political end akin to a "death of the messenger". The Governments from the far right, and from the radical right, have stated as much, through a menacing and loud populist communication, presenting solutions that are not only anti-democratic, but also xenophobic. In light of these perceived problems and due to a distrust of the communication of the governments, voters gravitate towards extreme solutions.

In Portugal, even though the results of the most recent election still reflect the democratic hope of the 2015–2019 left-wing Geringonça[29] government (Fernandes et al., 2018), which sought to reinstate some of the economic benefits and democratic rights withdrawn while the Troika was in place, such electoral trend is unlikely to persist in the medium run. Moreover, the age and ethnic make-up of the Portuguese voting population is undergoing a significant change, as the generations that lived through the April 1974 revolution, composed mostly of voters on the centre, is replaced at the ballot box by a new generation with higher levels of education and digital savviness. This generation, characterized by greater polarization and adherence to identitarian values, tends to drift away from the democratic centre, failing to identify with its proposals and methodologies for action, and to gather around more extreme new parties. Many of these movements act on the climate issue by evoking tools of radical right-wing or left-wing populism. Another group of voters, the migrants, who obtained Portuguese nationality, will also tend to support more conservative parties, since, generally speaking, they do not have a democratic culture and preserve their religious background.

[29] See: https://medium.com/geringon%C3%A7a/o-que-%C3%A9-a-geringon%C3%A7a-portuguesa-73abc8907436. "Geringonça" is the name given to a coalition that came into power in Portugal in November 2015, composed of Prime Minister António Costa, from the Socialist Party (PS), and three parties from the far-left in the European context—the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the Left Bloc (BE) and The Greens (Os Verdes).

The entry into Parliament of Chega and its political conduct normalized a truculent way of doing politics that has influenced the political parties and the mainstream media, notably during the election periods. The mainstream media, especially television channels in their newscasts and through their most influential news anchors, were not able to stay away from this antagonistic and rude language, nor to deconstruct the exclusionary programme proposals of that radical-right party (Novais, 2022). The populist style has contaminated the entire political spectrum in the last few election campaigns, from candidates to journalists, with unprecedented episodes of conflict, intimidation, persuasion and spreading of untruth, often based on polls, statistics and data manipulation.

The behaviour of AV, the party leader, and of his party, with regard to the pandemic, his anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown stance and positive attitude towards such behaviour, drew in voters from elsewhere in the political spectrum and added new form of otherness to his speeches. His image as a providential politician and a messianic hero, ready to save Portugal from a corrupt elite that denies the original values of the nation and protects an anti-natural 47-year-old Constitution, has gained traction since then.

The ongoing reorganization of the Chega party, its ability to penetrate the public space and garner the support of the youth, has intensified. Its reliance on social networks and on the use of special AI software to generate and disseminate news on social networks will constitute a challenge in the upcoming 2024 European political elections.[30]

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[30] See Soares, T. (2023). Chega: Captações abertas para "novos talentos" a pensar nas Europeias [Chega: Recruiting "new talent" with an eye on the European elections]. Semanário *Expresso*, 1 de setembro de 2023, 2653, 1º caderno, p. 12.

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Israel of God in Brazil: An Imagined Messianic Nation

Franco Iacomini

Foreword and Context

It's Friday in São Paulo, round 3 PM. Church service is about to start. The pastor entered at the sanctuary, all dressed in white. Backward to the public, he kneels in front of a sheer veil. Beyond the veil there's a replica of the Arc of Covenant. Nicknamed "Salomon's Temple", this is the most important worship place of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the fourth biggest protestant denomination in Brazil, according to the 2010 Census. It's a huge structure, also a center of pilgrimage of the church and a tourist spot in the most populated Brazilian city. The temple (that was built aiming to roughly rebuild the wonder of the Jerusalem Temple as described in the Old Testament) has a seating capacity of

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around 10,000 people. This venue could be seen as an isolated expression of an evangelical group seen as deviant within the heterogeneous panorama of Brazilian Protestantism. But no—there are in the country several examples of a consistent movement, especially on Pentecostalism, of different groups that try to forge a religious approach with Judaism.

Not every initiative are as showy as the building of the Universal Church in Braz neighborhood. Some of them are more subtle, as the series of devotion books and videos by the Baptist pastor Ed René Kivitz, called "Talmidin" (Kivitz, 2011, 2012, 2016). In it, Kivitz suggests his readers to think of themselves as students of a Jewish master from the first century. His lessons relate the teachings of Christ as exposed on the gospels with the expected behavior of the students of the Jewish law from that time. In the 364 videos on his channel on YouTube, soundtrack is a prayer in Hebrew language, sung by Brazilian evangelical singer Leonardo Gonçalves, available on his album called Anivu Malkenu (Gonçalves, 2010).

In some churches, Jewish elements have been incorporated into the ornamentation and even liturgy. Stars of David (as a decorative element or in the State of Israel flag), the *menorah*, the *shofar*, words and Bible verses in Hebrew painted on the churches walls are some of these elements. Annual programs include commemorations as the *Sukhot* and the *Pessach*. Some pastors and congregation members use *kippah* and the *talit*. Many refer to Jesus in his Hebrew name, *Yeshua* (Topel, 2011).

Outside Brazil, this is a well-known phenomenon already analyzed through the optics of the dispensationalist theology. In the country, however, it has assumed some new shapes, provided by the polarized political scenario built in recent years. This face of the syncretic evangelical-Jewish phenomenon has been manifested through the presence of flags of the State of Israel in political events and demonstrations on the streets, especially on those who support former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro. The focus of this paper is to understand reasons and mechanisms that led part of the Brazilian evangelical population to identify the Jewish symbols with the political advocacy of the populist far-right. Needful to point out that not all links of the Brazilian Protestantism with Judaism are associated to conservative movements of the right-wing spectrum. Pastor Kivitz, specifically, has been alerting that the association of State and Church are a danger to the faith and democracy. Kivitz himself did not endorse Bolsonaro in 2018 and 2022 elections (César, 2019).

To understand the aforementioned phenomenon it is necessary to mention one central event on the narrative that led the association of Jair Bolsonaro to the evangelical churches, his baptism in the Jordan river, in May 12th 2016. This date is symbolic in its context–it is the same day when Michel Temer became the interim president of Brazil, as part of the process that would lead, some months later, to the impeachment of the former president Dilma Rousseff (Extra, 2016). Bolsonaro was on a trip to Israel leaded by Everaldo Dias Pereira, pastor of the Assembly of God in Rio de Janeiro and president of Christian Social Party (PSC), to which Bolsonaro was affiliated at that time (Oualalou, 2019). This kind of trip is organized frequently by Brazilian evangelical churches. A video recorded on the spot was spread on social media and WhatsApp chat groups, with many replications:

> To the average evangelical voter, Bolsonaro had "converted", generating more affinity. But when questioned by his catholic bishop, Bolsonaro denied he would have traded his catholic faith, saying it was only a symbolic and political gesture, although theologically controversial. This way, the candidate remained catholic and assumed an identity evangelical-pentecostal, in a cunning electoral hybrid. (Oliveira, 2019, p. 9)

The act carried out by pastor Pereira is a commonplace in those trips, almost as part of the tour (Oualalou, 2019). In the context of the "bolsonarist" ascension, however, it has two understandings, of political fact and media event. Bolsonaro's wife, Michelle, is an active member of the Atitude Baptist Church, in Rio de Janeiro, and some evangelical leaderships had already declared their support to a possible candidacy to Planalto Palace at that time. Who plunged into the Jordan was Jair, a representative with mediocre actuation, best known for misogynistic statements and for defending the torture against opposition during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985) and the police violence practiced nowadays. Who emerged from the waters was, metaphorically, the Messiah (which is the translation of his middle name). Those events strengthened support from part of Brazilian Pentecostals to Bolsonaro and happened to associate his image, in different ways, to the State of Israel. Also helped the candidate his mentions to the scientific and technological excellence of the Israeli (Abdala, 2018; Franco, 2019; Veja, 2019), as well as his statements in support of the transference of the Brazilian

embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Charleaux, 2019; Jornal do Brazil, 2018).

The phenomenon will be studied under three main references. The first is the dispensationalist evangelical theology, build on the fringes of the protestant orthodoxy starting from the middle of the nineteenth century. In the dispensationalist eschatology, the biblical prophecies related to the second coming of Christ must be understood in a literal way. They put Israel in a spotlight and foresee Jerusalem as the capital of a messianic kingdom, scenario of central events to the end of the human History (Ariel, 2013; Lindsey & Carlson, 1981; Stam, 1985).

The second point is the Brazilian messianism, whose origin can be traced to the seventeenth century Portugal, or even before, on the 12th, when arises the legend that Christ appeared to Dom Afonso Henriques, the future king of Portugal, ensuring his victory on the Ourique battle, against part of the moor army (Michelan, 2011). In rural Brazil from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, messianism set up around mystic leaders such as Antônio Conselheiro, leader of the Canudos rebellion (Cunha, 1995), and the monk José Maria, the head of the Contestado rebellion, in Southern Brazil (Queiroz, 1994). With the consolidation of the Republic and the distance from the Portuguese origins, the Sebastianism has been left, but the desire for a savior of the nation has been kept, assuming a political character—even though, sometimes, it flirted with the insanity (Negrão, 2001).

After the theological and historical references, the third view is about political science, starting from the idea of imagined communities, crafted by Benedict Anderson. Anderson concentrates on the idea of nationalism overlapping (or succeeding) two previous cultural systems: the religious community and the dynastic realm. Brazilian messianism puts itself as a residual structure of feeling (Williams, 2015), founded on systems that preceded Brazilian formation and pointed toward an alternative social order. In this context, the arise of urban ways of messianism (Negrão, 2001) points out to developments that are now gaining visibility in Brazilian national order.

Dispensationalism: Together with Israel

From those three references, the most explored is, definitely, Dispensationalism. As described by Yaakov Ariel (2013), the most conservatives protestant streams are those who devoted greater interest and dedication to Jewish themes. Those groups include premillennialist Christians[1] with revived messianic hopes, who wait for the return of Christ, and have showed "ideological and political influences far beyond their numbers, often shaping much of the evangelical agenda toward Jews" (Ariel, 2013, p. 5).

The use of symbols and even practices of Judaism by evangelical groups have been associated with Dispensationalism, a movement whose origin can be identified on England on the seventeenth century (Ariel, 2013). In the dispensationalist view, the progressive revelation of God's will allows to observe noticeable steps, in which God introduces new responsibilities to mankind. Those steps, also called economies, stewardships or dispensations, are part of the expression of the divine will. According to classic dispensationalism, the Israeli people has an important eschatological function on the period called the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on the world:

> During the period of the millennial kingdom, Israel will enjoy a place of privilege and special blessing. In contrast with the present church age, where Jew and Gentile are on the same plane and have the same privileges, the people of Israel in the Millennium will inherit the Promised Land and will be the special objects of God's favor. It will be the time of Israel's regathering, reestablishment as a nation, and renewal of the Davidic kingdom. At long last Israel will possess the land permanently and in its entirety. (Chafer & Walvoord, 1974, p. 356)

The group known as "progressive dispensationalists" proposes something beyond. For them,

> *the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel will still be fulfilled in the millennium by ethnic Jewish people* who will believe in Christ and live in the land of Israel as a "model nation" for all nations to see and learn from. Therefore they would not say that the church is the "new Israel" or that all the Old Testament prophecies about Israel will be fulfilled in the church, for these prophecies will yet be fulfilled in ethnic Israel. (Grudem, 2000, p. 750)

It is important to notice that, through this perspective, Israel becomes a reference not only for a future spiritual reign, but also the model nation to other countries on the physical contemporary world. The creation of the modern State of Israel materializes this thought under the shape of a real political entity that was understood by some evangelical groups as an advance onto the realization of God's plan and a revival for their escathological hopes. In United States, the Cold War adds a component to this drama, providing an identification of the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire" that would invade Israel in the Armageddon Battle:

> Evangelicals were strongly affected by the cold war, its dangers, and the global struggle spearheaded by the United States against the Soviet Union and its allies. Their anticommunist stand and pro-Israeli sympathies meshed together. In supporting Israel they were thus both responsible Americans and good Christians. (Ariel, 2013, p. 179)

Correlations between the biblical prophecies and the current facts have become very popular in the 1970s, associating the consolidation of the State of Israel and the success of the offensive of 1967 to the end of History. In those associations, the international left movements, identified with the Soviet Union, were seen as enemies of Israel:

> The new State of Israel will be plagued by a certain pattern of events which has been clearly forecasted.
> Shortly after the restoration of the Jews in the land of Israel, an incredible enemy will arise to its "uttermost North". This enemy will be composed of one great nation which will gather around it a number of allies. It is the "Northern Confederacy" that is destined to plunge the world into its final great war which Christ will return to end. (Lindsey & Carlson, 1981, p. 48)

These premises strengthened the construction of an understanding, among a relevant part of Brazilian evangelicals, of a distinction of the "us against them" kind. "We" are the Israel of God, identified with America and its way of life. "They", the left, stand against Israel. Therefore, they personify evil.

To understand the meaning that statements such as these have taken in the context of Brazilian Protestantism, one must understand its origin. The first Protestants to land in Brazil, according to historical registers, were enemies of the Portuguese metropolis: the French people that

settled in the states of Maranhão and Rio de Janeiro, and the Dutchmen that occupied Brazilian North East. In both cases, they were militarily expelled. The relations between faith and the State were clear: Portugal had received from Rome its national sovereignty and the divine right of its monarchs; thus, Portuguese monarchy declared itself loyal to the Pope (Cavalcanti, 2002). Iberian Catholicism that is on the genesis of Brazilian religiosity was, still, marked by a "sick feeling, by superstitions and magical ritualism" (Cavalcanti, 2002, p. 184), with no limits between sacred and secular. Driven by a poorly educated and underpaid clergy, it compromised to the influence of other beliefs that resulted in typically Brazilian ways of syncretism.

Protestantism arrived in Brazil, at first, through communities of immigrants, diplomats and foreign businessmen, that Brazilian monarchic (emperors Pedro I and Pedro II) only tolerated. The consolidation of its presence in Brazil only came, in fact, with the arrival of missionaries from denominations such as the Baptists and Presbyterians, starting in the middle of the nineteenth century. Among the missionaries, predominance was of English-speakers, especially Americans. Growth was slow, especially starting from the 1950s, when churches born in Brazil started to develop, under the influence of American missionaries who founded denominations such as the Foursquare Church, and gave others an invaluable support through theological education or financial resources. In those secular influences from Europe and North America,

> Latin America continues to be God's territory, with the particularity that where the powerful Catholic Church became too obviously uninterested in the plight of its huddled masses in order to indulge in the favors of the rich and powerful, new cults arose, usually under the form of Pentecostalism often imported from the United States – perhaps the most successful American influence in a subcontinent obviously fatigued from Yankee imperialism. Indeed, Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religion worldwide, expanding from 155 million to 588.5 million global adherents between 2000 and 2005. (Castells, 2010, pp. XX–XXI)

In 2010 (latest available data), 22,1% of all Brazilian population declared themselves as Evangelical, and 13,3% declared be part of any kind of a Pentecostal church (IBGE, 2012). Being the American influence determinant since the first years of Brazilian Pentecostalism, it is natural that it has merged with the ways of behaving and thinking of all Brazilian

Evangelicals. The 1970s, when begun the strongest expansion of Brazilian Protestantism, are marked by what Paul Freston (1995) called the third wave of Brazilian Pentecostalism. With a crescent popularity and stimulated by the powerful use of radio and television, Pentecostalism spread a theological view that identifies all leftist political forces as evil. On the other side, the conservative worldviews were associated to the triumph of Christ, in which the State of Israel should have a relevant role.

Messianism, the Brazilian Way

In dispensationalism and in other Evangelical groups classified as messianic, the emphasis falls into an imminent return of Jesus Christ. In popular messianisms of Portuguese and Brazilian traditions, there's a deviation: the messianic dominance is granted by the population to a king or another political representative—it is "the blind faith of the masses on a political leader, judged as able to end present abuses and inaugurate a new era of general welfare" (Besselaar, 1987, p. 10). These movements can be associated to non-secular societies, open to the influence of the supernatural world.

This was the situation in Brazil on the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, when different movements that can be identified with Portuguese messianism and Sebastianism movements hatched.[2] The Sebastianist movement had itself great influence over Brazil in a moment when national convictions were in their earliest formation. Two of the main acting intellectuals in Brazil in sixteenth century, the Jesuit priests José de Anchieta e Antônio Vieira, were aligned with messianic movements. About Anchieta, who was one of the founders of the city of São Paulo and had been among the first to study indigenous languages, José Van Den Besselaar (1987, p. 38) writes:

> Priest José de Anchieta, of Castilian origin, but engaged in the national cause as apostle of Brazil, on the fatal day of August the 4th of 1578 would have said to the captain Miguel de Azevedo that D. Sebastião had lost the battle, but didn't die and, after many years, would take his reign again.

Antônio Vieira, whose manuscripts are known as the first works of Brazilian Literature, was taken to the Inquisitorial courts under the accusation of delivering "heretical, reckless, evil-sounding and scandalous

propositions" (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, 2015) in support to the joanine messianism, raised on the seventeenth century over the bases of sebastianism. In letters and sermons, Vieira argued that the king D. João IV would resurrect to take the throne and build a long-lasting empire.

Founded over these illustrious foundations, Brazilian messianism flourished in popular movements such as Canudos and Contestado, both seen as an exotic outcrop by the "enlightened" elite of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It seemed connected only to the population of the backlands, where part of the social order of the colonial and monarchic times was preserved. Conservative movements were "orientated by the memory of the past and not by an imaginary that would turn back to the future" (Queiroz, 1994, p. 37). However, the societies they wanted to build

> Were deeply conservative, as in the model of the new urban agglomerations as in the type of leader that would guide them, copied from the preaching monks from the European past and also in the image of the warrior hero that was getting popular. The desire to return to the past is visible, a past in which the real and the mystic merge – because the Empire really existed in Brazil, but its memory takes the shape of the one who is preserved in popular literature. (Queiroz, 1994, p. 37)

This was the general profile of the messianic movements that arise in the country until the middle of the twentieth century. Lísias Nogueira Negrão (2001) observes that, in five movements of the last century, only two had the traditional pattern of rural societies. The other three were urban phenomena that took place on Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s, São Paulo in the 1960s and in Campina Grande, Paraíba, in the following decade. Based on these occurrences, Negrão concludes that "it seems that there is a compatibility between these movements and modern society" (Negrão, 2001, p. 125). In common, these movements conciliated leaders with financial resources and a high level of education and a contingent of disciples with not much study. The case of Aladino Félix, a former military pilot that received training in the United States, is emblematic:

> Many of the terrorist acts occurred in the final of the 60s, that motivated (or provided the pretext for) the edition of the AI-5[3] were executed by military groups led by him. In the imaginary plan that informed the group and its action, we find a freaky mix of Esoterism, Judaism (Aladino Félix was a descendent of Jews in his fatherly side) and Ufology (he was also

> Ufologist and wrote books describing his space and earthly adventures with extraterrestrials). (Negrão, 2001, p. 126).

Information about Félix was always scarce, but a certain amount of documents about him came to the public last year, thanks to an investigation by Agência Pública, a non-profit investigative journalism agency. Pública's research, based in documents archived on Brazilian Military Supreme Court, points that members of the local police force, followers of Félix, were responsible for 14 bomb attacks in the country, with the tacit support of the dictatorial government. Attacks would have been made to allow the government to take harder measures to defeat its biggest enemy, the leftist organizations. After Félix indictment, however, government started to treat him as a maniac: "The police later describes him as a mystic that said he have been contacted by aliens and that introduced himself as the anointed one that would unify the 12 tribes of Israel, after all, a Messiah" (Quadros, 2018). Considered as crazy and incapable to answer for his acts, he was condemned to eight months to prison and later released.

What draws attention to the case of Aladino Félix is the urban environment in which his version of messianism has developed and his capacity of convincing well educated individuals not only to follow him, but to act aggressively and violently. Based in those and other occurrences, Lísias Nogueira Negrão (2009, p. 44) observes that "we should be prepared to the rise of new movements in urban centers, guided not by specific religious views, but by plural eclectic perspectives". Negrão says, however, that the first decade of the twenty-first century seems to present a scenario capable of inhibiting the messianic and millenarian manifestations for two reasons that he considers so antagonistic as complementary: the Pentecostalism that associates the magical and the religious; and the individualism that led people to escape the ecclesial control. "The fragmentation and self-concentration that rule in these postmodern times inhibit the prophetic and messianic collectivist appeals" (Negrão, 2009, p. 44).

The optimistic perspective of Negrão doesn't resist a closer look to the Pentecostal praxis. Centered on charismatic leaders and formed by people who believe in a special blessing from God, Pentecostal organizations have showed themselves permeable to messianic influences in the political field. It is important to remember the definition of messianism as

> movements of social and political vindication under the guidance of a religious leader, sent by God; his appearance is also closely connected to beliefs concerning the coming or return of a religious emissary that will bring social improvements and install the earthly paradise. (Queiroz, 1971, p. 112)

Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz highlights, therefore, that messianism is a political movement. In the rural past of Brazil, political power has been in the hands of the "coronéis",[4] who also assumed spiritual leadership, given the lack of catholic priests in the backlands. In contemporary Pentecostal denominations, power moves from *coronéis* to the "apostle" who doesn't hold only the spiritual guidance, but also has the final word in all spheres, including economy and politics. When aligned to projects of political power, leaders of Pentecostal churches contribute to the repetition of a pattern that refers to a scenario of a century ago.

An Imagined Brazil

Its's interesting to observe that, in the midst of the rallies that preceded the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and, later, the demonstrations pro-Jair Bolsonaro, there are frequent references to idealized situations. Some appeals to military interventions, echoing amends to those "good old times" when nobody talked about corruption (maybe because military governments didn't allowed it); compliments to the Brazilian Monarchy and to D. Pedro II, mentioned as an example of an enlightened king. These references come accompanied by analogue symbols: military uniforms and marches reminds the military regime; imperial flags showed up in demonstrations remind D. Pedro's Brazil. To these symbols sum up flags of the State of Israel, also taken to the streets in similar situations. I defend the all three images are part of the same phenomenon, an attempt to imagine a better country, borrowing representations that are somehow perverted. For this, I will take elements of the imagined communities, as proposed by Benedict Anderson (2008).

One of the main teachings of Anderson is that nationalisms are built over emotional relations—the internal solidarity of social group and the liaisons of this group with a specific place on Earth. In the interpretation of historian Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, he is "guided by the idea that it is necessary to make something old out of new, as well to find naturalness in a past that is recent and, in most of times, is nothing but a selection,

frequently a conscious one" (Schwarcz, 2013, p. 10). It's a game in which events of the past are highlighted or omitted from the national memory in a movement that is not exclusive of a dominant elite, but develops itself in individual routines. In Brazilian case, Schwarcz discusses it on terms of social and racial identity of Brazilian people. In the nineteenth century, most imagined themselves as European with some Indian traces, although 80% were black or mixed.

The challenge here is to introducing a religious identity—plus, a minority religious identity, brought to the country 150 years ago by foreign missionaries—to the debate of Brazilian nationalism in the twenty-first century. That is a question that may appear a contradiction to Anderson's work. According to him, nationalism was preceded by two great cultural systems, religious community and dynastic realm. It was not a simple succession by substitution, but a transformation in the way of apprehending the world. Publications such as books and newspapers were essential elements to this change. They will develop into a print-capitalism "which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new way" (Anderson, 2006, p. 36).

The creation of a Brazilian national consciousness was a long process that found an important phase starting in the 1930s, with the coming of radio and cinema as influential media throughout Latin America (Martín-Barbero, 1997). By mediating between the tradition of popular languages (representations of the Rural Brazil, the same one that sheltered Messianic Millenarist movements loke Canudos and the Contestado), radio, movies and the television point out to a different country. This mediated system will take, some decades later, to establishing faith-drenched communities who subsist today as a residual feeling structure within Brazilian culture—a sort of hybrid cultural system engendered by the encounter of the Messianic religiosity of the past with the plurality of contemporary Brazilian Christianity.

While describes how the inhabitants of the former administrative unities kept in the Americas by the great European empires came to understand their locations as homeland, Anderson picks religious pilgrimages as model journeys. The juxtaposition of people from the most different origins would only make sense if they could see themselves as part of a community—this is the essence of the imagined communities—"the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of

each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Something alike happened with the descendants of Europeans living in the Americas, generically called *criollos*. When they were in Europe, usually for a short stay on duty, they were treated unequally—after all, they didn't had the local aristocracy titles. In their own regions, although, they developed solidarity ties in their pilgrimage from one post of regional bureaucracy to other.

But what can be done to build the idea of a community in places that were so diverse? According to Anderson, fabricating a common past is a very effective forms of doing it. "If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future" (Anderson, 2006, pp. 11–12). In this sense, Latin American States are nations "produced through the labors of shared history" (Castells, 2018, p. 101). This history, as one can apprehend even through contemporary context, is always subject to rereadings and to conflict of narratives.

The rereading made by Brazilian Protestantism starts from social exclusion. Laws of Brazilian monarchy proclaimed freedom of worship in a peculiar way—non-Catholic temples were allowed since they didn't have the appearance of a church when seen from the outside. Still in the first half of twentieth century, there were frequent depictions of religious services interrupted by demonstrations of religious intolerance (Iacomini, 2017, p. 39). So, logically, the nation imagined by Brazilian Protestants was a land with real freedom of worship. In a not too long term, this wish became something distinctive: an unrest on mass conversions, that could make Brazil a mostly evangelical country. A symptom of this was the foundation of a Pentecostal denomination named "O Brasil para Cristo" (literally, "Brazil for Christ"), a pioneer in the use of radio programs to evangelize.

Desiring "Brazil for Christ" was in any way an accidental formulation, but a formulation with some tacit understandings. It brings out the urge for freedom of will and also the aspiration for a nationally uniform moral code and the dream to have a leadership obedient to God as in a civil religion (Bellah, 2005). Thus resurfaces the influence of the United States—as writes Rubem Alves (1979, p. 239), the United States of America, with its long list of presidents affiliated to Protestant churches and constant mentions to God in national symbols, became "the implicit utopia of Brazilian Protestantism". Alves (1979) also observes that Latin

American Protestantism can be read both as a utopian project of liberation and subversion to the established order (the Catholic America Spanish/Portuguese order) or as a project for ideological legitimacy to the *status quo*, represented by North American influence over the hemisphere. The tense coexistence of these two visions is summarized by Gedeon de Alencar (2019, p. 24):

> Are the Pentecostals easily adherent to political parties? What about the banks and great fortunes of this country? We are not dealing with the values of the Gospel of Jesus (hunger and thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5.6), but dealing with the interests of major financial corporations, needs of TV networks, concrete aims of publishing houses, recording companies etc. This requires the articulation of political channels and partisan political maneuvers. Why did the Evangelical Parliamentary Front *[EPF]* supported FHC,[5] then Lula, then Dilma? Why was it in the inauguration of Temer and is now a major supporter of the president-elect[6]? Because EPF represents interests that need effective responses from those in power, whether left or right-wing orientated. It is the instrumental use of power —and here we are not making value judgments. Power has power. And that power is there to be used.

General idea, thus, is that the generic objective of expanding the faith justifies temporary support to political projects aligned to the values professed by Brazilian Evangelicals. It should also be remembered that there are far more prosaic advantages in orbiting the power. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz states that the leadership of the *coronéis* over his *jagunços* was "perfectly patrimonial" (Queiroz, 1960, p. 70), in the sense that proximity to the political leader transferred benefits to the subordinate, even if such a leader presented himself also as a reference in the spiritual field.

It is also worthy of note that the Pentecostals are at the base of Brazil's economic pyramid. According to 2010 Census data, 63.7% of Pentecostals lived on a monthly income of less than one minimum wage ($ 289 / month).[7] Not surprisingly, Pentecostal population envisions a different Brazil, organized around the church that for them is the only social structure that has served as both a source of hope and a safety net. To this context of economic oppression is added a perception of loss of control and socio-cultural references (provided by a relaxation of values typical of contemporary globalized society), which demand a

reaction. "God, nation, family, and community will provide unbreakable, eternal codes, around which a counteroffensive will be mounted against the culture of real virtuality. Eternal truth cannot be virtualized" (Castells, 2010, p. 69). All this sets up a scenario in which Brazilian Protestants (whose *persona* is inseparable of Pentecostalism, given the majority presence of this group) will pursue protagonism in society. In recent years, this search concentrated in an individual to whom many evangelical leaders attributed characteristics compatible with a messianic identity—Jair Messias Bolsonaro.

Final Toughs: The Israel of God in Brazil

Let us return to the main issue of this paper: to understand the reasons and mechanisms that led part of the Brazilian evangelical population to identify Jewish symbols with the far-right political militancy. The approach was divided into three aspects—dispensationalism, millenarian messianism, and the imagined communities. Together, these three elements explain the use of Jewish symbolism and much of the political moment Brazil is going through.

Dispensationalist theology sanctions the use of Israel-related images by Brazilian evangelicals. Similarly to what occurs in other places where this theological variant resonates, it is common in Brazil the presence of elements such as the Star of David, the flag of the State of Israel, the menorah and Hebrew texts in the decoration of Brazilian churches. There are not necessarily political connotations in this symbolism—they are signs that this particular group of people has a religious hope that is associated with the victory of the people of Israel over earthly adversity. This happens because, in this particular theological conception, confrontations must take place for the final victory of Jesus and his thousand-year reign.

In Brazilian context, however, these symbols are combined with others, referent to an imagined country. In it, the flag of Brazilian Empire and that of the State of Israel are placed side by side. The banner of the house of Orléans and Bragança (reigning family by the time of Brazilian monarchy, 1822–1889) brings back an idealized past, in which Brazil had an enlightened monarch. The flag of Israel refers to a double image of the future, on the physical ground and on the spiritual plan. Earthly speaking, Israel is the model nation, with whom Brazil wishes to strengthen relations and receive technology transfer in the field of seawater desalination, fire fighting, environmental emergency treatment,

among other topics. Spiritually, Pentecostal Brazilians want to take part in the blessings reserved for the people of Israel in the millennial reign of Christ—they want to be with the people of Israel when the final victory is confirmed. It should also be remembered that the community envisioned by conservative evangelicals in Brazil is not only aligned with Israel, but also with the United States. Reproduction of the North American way of life is the political goal of several Pentecostal leaders, for whom secular leadership should also be identified with some kind of religious primacy. Additionally, Brazilian Evangelicals have been nourished a minority political view, in which redemption comes with the taking of power. The country imagined by the Pentecostals is therefore monarchical, religious, politically centralized and capitalist.

Which leader would be able embody all these characteristics? The momentary leader, who was smart enough to pack all these hopes into a seductive speech, is Bolsonaro. He is not a messianic commander like those of rural Brazil, but he received his powers by the evangelicals. He was anointed by religious leaders as a guardian of Christian values, even though they seem incompatible with his practice—the captain calls himself a defender of the traditional family even though he is in his third marriage. It is in the context of these assignments that the approach of Israel and the promise to transfer the embassy to Jerusalem, the iconic staging of river baptism, the braggery of naming someone "terribly Christian" to the Federal Supreme Court and other statements should be read. The question remains whether this anointing will be maintained even with the loss of the 2022 elections and the allegations of connections with crime that have arisen in relation to him and his family.

Notes

1. The pre-millenarism is a theological understanding according to which the second coming of Christ will be marked by his physical presence on earth and by a reign with the duration of a thousand years.
2. Reference to the Portuguese king D. Sebastião, dead in the battle of Alcácer-Quibir (also known as Battle of Three Kings ou Battle of the Wadi al-Makhāzin), fought in Northern Africa against the sultan Abd Al-Malik, in 1578. The battle was lost by the Portuguese and the disappearance of the king led to a vacancy of the throne that, in 1580, would make the Spanish monarch, Filipe II, to vindicate

the sovereignty over the Portuguese territory. This situation, known as the period of the Iberic Union, lasted for 60 years and resulted in the impoverishment of Portuguese people. D. Sebastião faced the war on Northern Africa as a kind of crusade, which contributed for it to be exalted as saint. His body was never recovered, generating among the Portuguese the legend that he didn't die at all and would return to take the throne and lead the country to a time of prosperity and military victories.

3. The Institutional Act n. 5 (AI-5) was the decree that inaugurated the most restrictive period during the Brazilian military dictatorship. The act gave the government the power to close the National Congress and the Legislative Power of the States. It also instituted a censorship over the press and artistic expressions and gave the Executive the capacity to destitute any public employee, including those elected through vote.
4. The *coronéis* were regional political leaders whose emergence is linked to the transition from Brazil's condition from a Portuguese colony to an independent nation. In 1831, the Brazilian government created the Civil Guards, which replaced the colonial militias. The rank of colonel (in Portuguese, *coronel*) in these structures corresponded to a municipal or regional command, whose leader was chosen because of their economic or social power. The *coronel* was often a large landowner. These leaders, who exercised their power in an almost despotic way and were succeeded in a hereditary way, became the main source of power in many regions of Brazil. Its paramilitary personnel, the jagunços, were violent and feared. For more, see Leal, V. N. (1977). *Coronelismo: The municipality and representative government in Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB).
6. Referenced article was written when Jair Bolsonaro was not inaugurated as Brazilian president.
7. National minimum wage in force during 2010 was BRL 510. The average exchange rate in the year was BRL 1.7603 per dollar, according to the Institute of Applied Economic Research (the amount can be found at https://bit.ly/2sqijXt).

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