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**The construction of Bolsonaro's Myth: the far-right's strategy to co-
opt Brazilian hegemonic masculinities**

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, the rapid transformations in communication taking place over the last few decades enabled the rise of a post-political *zeitgeist* which facilitated the rise of populist leaders capitalizing on hate mongering, such as Donald Trump in the USA, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. In the latter's case, Bolsonaro's ascent to power was intrinsically linked to the political turmoil that befell the country from 2013 to 2016, which saw the removal of Dilma Rousseff, the first woman to ever be elected president in Brazil, from office. Her impeachment process and the public upheaval that preceded it had distinct misogynistic contours which allowed for the co-optation of a segment of the population by Bolsonaro's hate rhetoric, particularly his anti-gender discourse, and most importantly, by his performance of a hegemonic masculinity which was perceived in direct opposition to a woman's heading of a country in crisis. Thus, this thesis attempts to elucidate whether Bolsonaro managed to entrench and consolidate an operative community by the recrudescing of masculinity, particularly through his communication on social media. To this end, qualitative research was conducted which applied inductive content analysis to 3,500 social media commentaries made by Bolsonaro's supporters on publications on Facebook during the height of this political turmoil, allowing the identification of common themes of interest for the authors. Results showed the fast growth of a saviour rhetoric which saw Bolsonaro as the only (male) remedy to savage the country, as well as the growth of a vernacular which clearly delimited an Us versus Them mentality which is common to operative communities, leading to the conclusion the formation of a community was indeed a response to the need to restore hegemonic masculinity to power.

RESUMEN

A nivel mundial, las rápidas transformaciones en la comunicación que han tenido lugar en las últimas décadas han propiciado el surgimiento de un espíritu pospolítico que facilitó el ascenso de líderes populistas que se aprovecharon del discurso de odio, como Donald Trump en Estados Unidos, Viktor Orbán en Hungría y Jair Bolsonaro en Brasil. En el caso de este último, el ascenso al poder de Bolsonaro estuvo intrínsecamente vinculado a la agitación política que sufrió el país entre 2013 y 2016, que resultó en la destitución de Dilma Rousseff, la primera mujer en ser elegida presidenta en Brasil. Su proceso de destitución y la agitación pública que lo precedió tuvieron distintos matices misóginos que permitieron la cooptación de un segmento de la población por el discurso de odio de Bolsonaro, especialmente su discurso anti-género, y lo que es más importante, por su desempeño de una masculinidad hegemónica que se percibía en oposición directa al liderazgo de una mujer en un país en crisis. Por lo tanto, esta tesis intenta dilucidar si Bolsonaro logró afianzar y consolidar una comunidad operativa a través del recrudecimiento de la masculinidad, especialmente a través de su comunicación en las redes sociales. Con este fin, se llevó a cabo una investigación cualitativa que aplicó un análisis de contenido inductivo a 3,500 comentarios en redes sociales realizados por seguidores de Bolsonaro en publicaciones de Facebook durante el punto álgido de esta agitación política, lo que permitió identificar temas comunes de interés para los autores. Los resultados mostraron el rápido crecimiento de un discurso salvador que veía a Bolsonaro como el único remedio (masculino) para salvar al país, así como el crecimiento de un lenguaje que delimitaba claramente una mentalidad de "nosotros contra ellos" común en comunidades operativas, lo que llevó a la conclusión de que la formación de una comunidad fue en efecto una respuesta a la necesidad de restaurar la masculinidad en el poder.

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*The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying
and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum a great
variety of morbid symptoms appear.*

Antonio Gramsci

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INTRODUCTION

“I’m not old enough for this / Gender Ideology! Oh, how gross / I was born a boy, I will turn into a man / God wanted it like this, don’t bother me! / Bolsonaro in my head and in my heart / All Brazilians which my voice can reach / Brazil, I am your son, I will not run away from the fight”. These verses originate from a much-publicized jingle¹ that was promoted wildly during Jair Bolsonaro’s 2018 electoral campaign in Brazil, called “The Myth Has Arrived (Brazil Has Awoken)”, which showcases perfectly the platform the candidate elected to operate from, one that consists in promoting hate rhetoric founded on reviving a virile type of manhood and ostracizing of alterity, specially aiming at combating sexual and gender diversity. The reinvigoration of binary gender identities and roles, however, was a conservative storm that had already been brewing in Brazil since the early 2010s.

Following years of economic prosperity and relative political stability under the rule of Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), Brazil’s labour party, the repercussions of the 2008 American recession were finally felt in 2013, when the economic recession could not be contained by profits stemming from Brazilian commodities. That year, the country was shaken by a popular uprising named “Jornadas de Junho” (June Journeys), when millions of people took the streets over popular, social demands regarding governmental transparency and investments in public services (such as the transportation and health system), in a generalized dissatisfaction regarding the country’s circumstances. These demonstrations happened during PT’s Dilma Rousseff’s first term as President – having been elected in 2010 – and shaped the future of the country moving forward as the far

¹ Ao contrário do que diz corrente viral, música pró-Bolsonaro não é de artistas cubanos | Folha, September 2018

<<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/09/ao-contrario-do-que-diz-corrente-viral-musica-pro-bolsonaro-nao-e-de-artistas-cubanos.shtml>>

right managed to co-opt a lot of the apolitical individuals as result from the demonstrations, which allowed a type of far-right populism to gain fast ground in the country (Fernandes, 2018).

Despite the blow in approval and popularity being felt by the federal government, Rousseff still managed to be re-elected in 2014 in a tight race. Her government would endure further damage in the beginning of her second term, however, when allegations of corruption were brought up by an investigation led by the Brazilian Federal Police, dubbed “Operation Car Wash”, which unveiled major corruption schemes throughout the government, including the Congress, the Senate, and state-owned companies, such as Petrobras (Brazilian oil company). Although the president herself was never implicated in any charges or named in any investigation as a target, her reputation was tarnished and her office would not withstand the misogynistic upheaval that fraught Brazil’s social tissue from that point onwards.

Millions of people, caught in moral panics about corruption and transparency, took to the streets to ask for Rousseff’s removal, demonstrations that had specific misogynistic contours. Encouraged by the sexist outbursts against Rousseff in 2015, as well as the market’s disillusionment with her government and pressure to retain profitability mid-crisis through the application of austerity measures, the Congress approved that an impeachment process was initiated against her in late 2015, only to be formalized by the Senate in May 2016. During this interval, Rousseff faced unparalleled and unprecedented scrutiny as a woman in power – be it over her past as militant fighting the military dictatorship, her image as a divorced, single mother, or her fame as a serious, uptight woman – and proclaimed her innocence through it all. In the midst of this turmoil, one congressman managed to build a cult-like following through the deployment of mechanisms that would create social convulsion across the country. Rousseff’s fall

directly led to Jair Bolsonaro's rise onto the presidential seat in the following 2018 elections, a feat that was nothing short of astonishing given the stark difference between Rousseff and Bolsonaro's profiles, which were elected only 4 years apart. Bolsonaro, a former military man who was a vicious defender of the conservative values of the far-right, such as the Church, the military and the family, was almost diametrically opposed to Rousseff, a lifelong affiliate of leftist parties, who had acted against the military dictatorship in her youth, had never declared herself religiously and did not fit the nuclear familial mould Brazilians are used to. Furthermore, Rousseff had always defended the expression and rights of minority groups, while Bolsonaro relied on hate mongering to gain fast adepts. How did the country's preference for governance turn on a dime?

This thesis attempts to elucidate the question of how Bolsonaro - a man with so little political capital up until that point, being that he only ever managed to approve 2 projects in 27 years as a congressman - managed to co-opt a large segment of the population in such a short span of time. Thus, it is here proposed that Bolsonaro continuously capitalized on his performance of a virile, hegemonic masculinity to create bonds of community. Raewyn Connell (2005) argues that there are dominant forms of masculinity that spawn over different social, historical, and cultural contexts, with societies privileging certain forms of masculinity that are to be culturally valued and aspired to over others, usually prioritizing those with characteristics often linked with displays of authority, power, control, aggression and dominance, which Connell named hegemonic masculinities. Bolsonaro, through allegiances to the military and the Church (male-based institutions), performed an "Average Joe", "people-like-us" routine of an honest, unabashed, no-artifice simple-minded man who was not complicit in the corruption scandals that troubled Rousseff's presidency and who directly opposed what he attempted to label (as many other politicians worldwide) gender ideology.

Bolsonaro strategically coordinated his communication, mostly online, to foment moral panic in the country over matters such as sexual and gender plurality, and the creation of policies that aim at promoting sexual and gender equality. Additionally, the former president issued extremely controversial statements that dabbled in misogyny (particularly against Rousseff herself), homophobia, transphobia and generally intolerant content towards sexual and gender diversity. These were deliberate attempts to signal to a conservative sexist electorate who identified with his *ethos* of hatred towards all and any challenge to the hegemony of masculinity and entrench these groups even further. This proved effective as Bolsonaro was hailed the internet's "myth" for the popularity of his conservative outbursts, first by a niche of men online who identified with his persona, and then most popularly by his legion of faithful followers and electors over the years.

This identification based on masculinity was facilitated after the country was shaken by an economic crisis while it was headed by a woman who held a different cosmovision than that of allegiance to masculinity, which led to a recrudescence (implicit) belief that a man was needed to save the country from certain destruction. This scenario delimited an Us Vs Them line: Us, the defenders of traditional, authentic values (God, the country, virility) of Brazilian people, who seek to restore morality to the country, and Them, the dissidents who seek to destroy said values through subversive ideological indoctrination. This Them, however, is expandable and can grow to encompass anyone who disagrees with other propositions brought forward by Us. Thus, the delimitation of this antagonistic mindset was associated with newfound communication strategies – emulating Steve Bannon's strategy for the Donald Trump's electoral campaign – that bombarded social media users with fake news or misinformation to ensure that internal communication within said groups was aligned with the conservative values Bolsonaro promoted as authentic to the Brazilian people.

This thesis intends to assess if the efficacy of this communication in antagonizing alterity and recrudescing bonds of hegemonic masculinity led to the formation of an operative community, as described by Jean-Luc Nancy (1991). An operative community is one that relies on a sense of shared similarities (sameness), symbolized by communal, seemingly “authentic” values (such as nation, heritage, tradition) that are held by the group subjects. This communion, however, can fall trap to “immanence”, meaning a severance with external communication that makes the group self-sufficient and turns essentializing to its members, who fuse with the community to the point of losing the borders of individuality and fomenting the destruction of alterity. Additionally, the concept of transparency is also explored as a governmental and social mechanism that enables communication to be established in such a way, as it promotes the spread of overwhelming amounts of information while it allows for the fetishizing of unfiltered, unpolished discourse as “authentic” truth, one that is oftentimes linked to the displays of hegemonic masculinities by populist politicians, promoting them as fearless leaders.

Thus, I intend to assess whether or not Bolsonaro’s discourse resonated with the Brazilian public and made him succeed in gaining adepts by mobilizing Brazilian “authentic” hegemonic masculinities and through it create bonds of community, particularly through online means. Due the prolific presence of his followers online, a qualitative analysis was conducted, comprising 3,500 commentaries made by his followers, stemming from three different publications on Bolsonaro’s Facebook page, which date from October 2015 to May 2016, the height of the crisis that struck Rousseff’s government. Commentaries were sorted through categories in an inductive content analysis, a method which enables sorting of categories relevant in discourse, which allowed for visualization and comprehension of what themes were prevalent and thus relevant for Bolsonaro’s followers. The limitation of this methodology is in the reach of

Bolsonaro's communication strategies, which is spread around several types of social media such as Twitter, Telegram, WhatsApp, and so forth. This makes it harder to understand the effects of Bolsonaro's discourse integrally, as many of these represent private, coded message systems and not open publications. Furthermore, the authors of commentaries on Bolsonaro's publications on Facebook are most likely already somewhat invested or engaged with his discourse as they have opted to follow his page or frequently visited it, which makes it harder to measure organic growth of the public's interest in him. However, it does allow the assessment of his supporters' interest in the themes covered by him and the increase of community vernacular over time, as well as identifying how reactions to demonstrations of performed virility or manhood impacted their perception of Bolsonaro.

This dissertation will outline the methods elected to make such an assessment on the first chapter, which encompass an inductive content analysis of social media commentaries made by Bolsonaro's followers. Consecutively, the second chapter will expand on the theoretical framework deployed in the analysis of Bolsonaro's rise to power, particularly the notion of operative communities by Nancy (1991) and hegemonic masculinities by Connell (2005). Subsequently, on the third chapter, these concepts are applied to what transpired in Brazil through Bolsonaro's early engagement with Brazilian masculinities, Rousseff's fall, and the eventual rise of Bolsonaro through the formation of community, particularly online - exploring the historical background in the timeframe here proposed. Lastly, the results acquired from the qualitative analysis will be demonstrated on Chapter 4 (Results) and elaborated upon on the conclusion.

Being that Bolsonaro's government was controversial worldwide, culturally, economically, and geopolitically, other academic productions have already delved into the many appalling policies and discourses adopted by Bolsonaro and his acolytes. I

particularly highlight Rocha's (2021) work on the cultural war taking place in Brazil and his understanding of the establishment of the hate rhetoric, highlighting the role gender politics played in that. Other studies have analysed the unprecedented role of social media and digital means in shaping political beliefs during Bolsonaro's first electoral run (Gomes et. al, 2018), while others focused on the character of Damare Alves, the Minister of Woman, Family and Human Rights in Brazil from 2019 to 2022, and her efforts to put in place an agenda that is essentially anti-women, anti-LGBTQIA+, and actively against the implementation of Human Rights (Martinez, 2022). Guazina et. al (2021) focused on the normalization of the anti-gender agenda in Bolsonaro's government and Melo (2022) detailed the anti-gender crusade highlighting the use of this topic as a "smoke screen" to dominate the public narrative while issuing policies that are harmful to the general population, especially when it came to economy, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the environment. Furthermore, Assumpção (2020) analysed the semiotics of Bolsonaro's Facebook page (particularly the images posted by the account) to highlight the presence of hegemonic masculinities in politics, while Zanello et al. (2023) used the concept to analyse the *meme* phenomenon that potentialized Bolsonaro's online image.

Given this scenario, thinking about the Brazilian context is paramount to understanding how the co-optation of public opinion and imaginary regarding gender theory and feminist activism is one of the far-right's strategies (if not the main strategy) to cause moral panic, sowing hate rhetoric that assures the upkeep of fascist governments and the enactment and legitimatization of their policies through an entrenching of the values attached to traditional manhood, which favour the creation of operative communities. Thus, the originality of this project lies in its focus on the origins of a protofascist populism in Brazil through the stirring of pre-existing conservative

demographics that showed allegiance to hegemonic masculinities into a fused state of essentialized community that can be manipulated toward violent and antidemocratic ends, accomplished by widely targeting feminism, gender and queer theory, and sexual and gender plurality as a whole. It is imperative to understand how these communal bonds are founded in order to prevent the establishment of hate rhetoric as political practice.

CHAPTER 1 - METHODS

1.1 Methods

To assess the scope of Bolsonaro's mediatic power and how his discourse travelled fast and wide within the digital world, methods involved qualitative research focused on Facebook publications. Three publications stemming from Jair Bolsonaro's public page in 2015 and 2016 were selected on the basis of how they dialogued with the theme of this thesis, focusing on how the commentaries dabbled in the promotion of misogyny, the rejection of gender politics (or "gender ideology" as it is labelled) and the lauding of virility and manhood at the height of the crisis in Brazil, hoping to assess if they culminated in the forming of bonds of community through the entrenching of Brazilian hegemonic masculinities.

The methodology intended to emulate research conducted by Dignam & Rohlinger (2019) which aimed at understanding how men's rights groups on Reddit forums helped elect Donald Trump in 2016 American elections. To this end, they used inductive content analysis to analyse 1,762 comments made by forum participants over the course of 3 years. Inductive content analysis consists in the use of an open-ended coding scheme to categorize data in distinct analytical themes. For example, if a user on the forum referred to their alpha status, that comment would be labelled as discussing Sexual Virility and Alpha status by Dignam and Rohlinger (2019). The process helps quantify categories of discourse, and in the case of Trump's following within the men's rights movement, if there were any identity shifts within these groups over time.

However, for the present research's application, there were three fundamental differences from Dignam & Rohlinger (2019) that demanded a change in approach. First, because the main objective of this thesis is to assess community formation through

masculinity at the height of the Brazilian crisis, the analysis was restricted to commentaries left on Jair Bolsonaro's 2015 and 2016 publications because those were the years in which public opinion was at its peak misogynistic period due to the then-recent acceptance of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process by the National Congress in Brazil in December 2015. The research estimated that this was the proper timeframe to analyse whether or not community bonds began to emerge within Bolsonaro's following as a result of the misogyny brought about by the *lawfare* process on one hand and the promotion of masculinity by Bolsonaro on another. A longer timeframe for the research was not feasible for the production time of the present research considering the number of posts and commentaries that Bolsonaro's page attracts.

Secondly, Dignam & Rohlinger (2016) counted on the popularity of Reddit in the USA, as many men's rights groups and other underground factions prefer the forum-style communication, particularly when it comes to controversial social and political standings. The process of revitalizing masculinity in Brazil seems to have unfolded in a less concentrated way, as Bolsonaro managed to hijack public conversations across several platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram. The former president was known to have had a "hate ministry", a digital militia that aimed to foster hate rhetoric and promote misinformation and *fake news* online.² It is my belief that any research that aims to understand the growth of the far-right in Brazil will be posed a challenge as to fully grasp the onslaught of hate promoted by this digital militia as their reach was exponential and their campaign invested heavily on Brazilians' newfound preference for social media over traditional news vehicles, a preference they helped foment by

² PF confirma a existência do "gabinete do ódio" em relatório enviado ao STF | Brasil de Fato, February 2022

<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2022/02/11/pf-confirma-a-existencia-de-gabinete-do-odio-em-relatorio-enviado-ao-stf-leia-o-documento>

discrediting traditional media. This meant they relied less on particularly disputed claims and more niche-communities such as men's rights and focused on the promotion of pervasive pre-existing masculinity values in a conservative country such as Brazil while attacking any sexual and gender diversity and plurality, associating those to the subversion of children, the threat to the traditional family, a supposed moral crisis in the country and so forth. This supposed subversion was oftentimes linked with misogyny being propagated against impeached president Dilma Rousseff.

Thirdly, the process of entrenching of masculinities in Brazil seemed to have followed a different path, as the interest in men's rights groups seems to have grown as an aftereffect of the recrudescence of masculinity in Brazil, as groups rose to national prominence as late as March 2023, when the Red Pill particularly gained notoriety in the country due to Thiago Schutz, one of the leaders of the movement in Brazil threatening a woman's life due to her posting a video mocking his beliefs.³ Unfortunately, due to recent timing of this emergence in the national scene, there also seems to be a shortage in the body of work in Brazil regarding the growth of said groups, particularly online, although they have been present on the sidelines for quite a while. Therefore, it is necessary to dwell on what circumstances enabled such a formation, as their recent development is seemingly the result of years of feeding and reestablishing Brazilian hegemonic masculinities through the figure of the president in office from 2019-2022. This is why this research particularly decided to focus on assessing the recrudescence of this masculinity alliance on their main promoter's page, then-congressman Jair Bolsonaro.

After careful analysis of all the publications made by Bolsonaro in 2015 and 2016, three of them were selected due to their confluence with the main theme and their

³ Movimento Red Pill revela a face cruel e reacionária do machismo nas redes | VEJA, March 2023
<https://veja.abril.com.br/comportamento/movimento-red-pill-revela-a-face-cruel-e-reacionaria-do-machismo>

possibility to show the formation of community bonds as the one proposed by the research. The first publication (Post 1) was made on October 25th, 2015, and it was one of the most controversial of Bolsonaro's posts up to that point as it showed a picture of the ENEM exam (the national exam for public universities' admission, which is organized by MEC, the Education Ministry in Brazil), highlighting a question which quoted the famous excerpt by Simone de Beauvoir in "The Second Sex" (1949), which says "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" and asks the exam taker to select the alternative which correctly states what movement Beauvoir contributed to, a clear reference to the feminist movement (despite the correct answer mentioning gender equality alone). To the picture, Bolsonaro attached a text which read:

More or as grave as corruption is the indoctrination imposed by PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores) to our youth. 'John was not born a man and Mary was not born a woman'. [Their] dream to turn us into idiots materializes itself in many of the ENEM questions – Marxist National Exam – these bastards must be extirpated from power in 2018 through the printed vote or before that, in the same way the Congress revoked the legitimacy of communist João Goulart on April 2nd, 1964 (Bolsonaro, J. October, 25th, 2015, Facebook Status Update)

His text aims to denounce the then-government, led by Dilma Rousseff from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), of using the National Exam to promote so-called gender ideology. It also refers to the military coup of 1964, when President João Goulart was forcefully deposed by the Brazilian military, who claimed Goulart posed a communist threat to the country. The post amassed 15,000 *likes*, 25,000 shares and more than 9,000 commentaries.

The second publication (Post 2) was published on January 19th, 2016, and shows Carlos F. Paixão Araújo, Dilma's former husband narrating his and Rousseff's earlier efforts against the military dictatorship in 1970. The video is scored by dramatic music that aims to intensify the viewer's backlash at the impeached president's behaviour. Bolsonaro's profiled entitled the video as "Dilma is proud of her past, but she never talks about it" (Bolsonaro, J., January 19th, 2016, Facebook Status Update). He goes on to say

that the Brazilian magazine *Época* had Carlos Araújo on the cover that week due to him being investigated by the Federal Police in Brazil, as well as pointing out that Dilma's first husband – prior to Araújo – was also involved in militant activity during the dictatorship, supposedly kidnapping a plane with 96 passengers. The post also claims Rousseff herself was involved in the execution of a military lieutenant and participated in a bomb attack that took the life of a military recruit, both allegations which were proven false.⁴ In fact, Rousseff was never even part of the militant group that was responsible for the action. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's profile also highlighted that in the video her "ex-hubbie" [sic], described his honeymoon preferences with his beloved Dilma, which at the time went by Stela (a militant codename), in an obvious attempt to tarnish the former president's image with sexist and derogatory commentary. It is important to highlight that this post was made in the direct aftermath of the acceptance of Rousseff's impeachment proposal by the National Congress, in December 2015. The publication was watched 603,000 times, received 22,000 *likes* and 1,900 commentaries.

The third publication (Post 3) was made on May 12th, 2016, when the Senate in Brazil approved Rousseff's removal from office, and it comprises a video of Bolsonaro in Israel, where he was traveling to at the time, celebrating the final approval of the impeachment process by the Senate. The video then cuts to a short 1:30-minute video, where Bolsonaro congratulates the "Brazilian people in this special day, the removal of the president. Someone that truly does not represent this people, this wonderful people which are us, the Brazilian people." (Bolsonaro, J., May 12th, 2016, Facebook Status Update). The then-congressman then wishes that God would impart his wisdom onto

⁴ É falso que Dilma tenha participado de atentado que matou soldado Mario Kozel Filho | Estadão, July 2022

<https://www.estadao.com.br/estadao-verifica/e-falso-que-dilma-tenha-participado-de-atentado-que-matou-soldado-mario-kozel-filho/>

Rousseff's vice-president in the coalition, Michel Temer, who would go on to replace her for the rest of the presidential term. The end of the video shows images of the demonstrations that happened over the country against Rousseff and PT throughout the previous months, and a snippet of Bolsonaro's own vote for Rousseff's impeachment in the Congress. The video ends with the Brazilian flag trembling superimposed over the emotional face of a young girl, under a quote which reads "This fight belonged to all of us" (Figure 2). The video was seen 1,7 million times, gathered 81,000 *likes*, and received 5,300 commentaries.



Figure 2 - Image collected from Jair Bolsonaro's publication celebrating the confirmation of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process.

Out of these 3 publications, a total of 3,500 commentaries were analysed using inductive content analysis, which uses abstraction to reduce and group data so one can answer the proposed questions by using concepts, categories or themes (Kyingäs et al., 2020). The researcher goes through the data to identify and sort open codes. The identified categories serve as a basis for reporting the results for content analysis. Each one of the publications were analysed separately to induce categories related to the themes covered in the thesis, particularly the resurgence of masculinity through misogyny and the

rejection of gender diversity and gender-oriented policies. Consequently, the analysis also attempted to identify if this led to the formation of communal bonds entrenched on the alliance of masculinity and to assess if there was a growth in this type of discourse over time-interval proposed by the research – a 7-month gap separated Post 1 from 3. This period – between October 2015 and May 2016 – was chosen precisely due to its potential to show such formation in a time of deep crisis, not only an economical one, but a moral one, being brought about by the perceived corrupted nature of Rousseff's government, which was deeply intertwined with the threat she posed as a woman in a leadership position for the first time ever in the country. Her leadership – oftentimes labelled by Bolsonaro and his acolytes as corrupt and inefficient, or as lacking in charisma – came into unprecedented scrutiny, unleashed not simply by a worldwide recession (which Rousseff had no control over), or simple corruption scandals (which the president herself was never involved in), but by a backlash brought on by the crisis in Brazil's hegemonic masculinities.

The commentaries were imported from Facebook using an online tool that allows exportation of public commentaries on social media. The first 1,000 commentaries were analysed for Posts 1 and 2, and the first 1,500 commentaries for Post 3. Due to the number of commentaries that Bolsonaro's posts attracted, it was unfeasible to analyse them all for the purpose of this thesis completion. Out of this selection, commentaries which were unspecific regarding the target or theme were excluded, as well as commentaries which served as a response to a previous commentary or *tagging* (a special kind of linking that directs the person to that content or publication). Some of the posts were also composed by figures, photos, or links to other websites, which were open and categorized according to their content and a few of the figures will be present in the results section. The resulting commentaries were run through the NVIVO application, a qualitative data analysis

software that allowed for the sorting of the data into open-ended codes and its subsequent qualitative analysis and the comparison between the data stemming from different publications. The names for the authors of the publication will remain anonymized for ethical reasons. Furthermore, the research did not discriminate commentaries based on gender, as there were many women also revindicating a return to hegemonic masculinities.

Commentaries were sorted through different codes for each publication depending on its nature and where similar themes were identified through the different publications, the same category was created as to support the comparative analysis between the data. Each commentary could be attached to more than one code if it related to more than one of the matters in analysis. For example, one reference on Post 1 read:

I would tear this exam immediately, we can't stan these communists anymore. Bolsonaro, you have been our hope, I am already campaigning for you, telling people how competent, strong and worthy you are, what a moral life you live. Brazil needs this Man [capitalized by the author of the commentary] to reorganize families and restore our dignity. We are with you Bolsonaro, the president Brazil needs! (Commentary on Facebook Post 1)

This quote was assessed as belonging to many categories, such as Savior Rhetoric, for when quotes would refer to Bolsonaro as the only hope for the country moving forward; Masculinity, due to the fact the author highlighted qualities that are often associated with manhood and hegemonic masculinities, as well as choosing to deliberately capitalize the word Man mid-sentence; Ideology Accusations due to the general reference regarding communists; Brazilian Crisis and Preserving the Traditional Family for the implicit idea that families are in peril and a moral crisis has taken over the country in "reorganize families and restore our dignity"; Transparency because it refers to Bolsonaro leading a moral life; and lastly, Community Formation as the author chose pronouns as We, Our, and refers to Brazil as a homogenous country regarding needs and wants, as these were perceived as a communal fusion in this analysis. As can be seen in

the commentary, this method proved very effective in showcasing the viciousness of Bolsonaro's followers as well as their loyal allegiance to their leader and their cause, as well as the type of representation he symbolized for his supporters, which became antagonizing to others and propitiated the formation of an operative community through the sharing of common "authentic" values.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From 2015 onwards, Jair Bolsonaro managed to gain a great number of supporters in the middle of a crisis at a national level. It is here theorized that he did this through the instrumentalization of Brazilian hegemonic masculinity to foment bonds of communion, particularly through the promotion of hate rhetoric through social media, targeted at attempts to enact gender plurality and equality – which was labelled “gender ideology” by Bolsonaro’s supporters and himself – and the calculated performance of manhood and virility. The following chapter provides the theoretical framework for how the far-right communication strategies enabled the formation of an operative community in Nancy’s terms.

2.1. Community Theory

Worldwide, the dissolution of the Eastern communist bloc, culminating in the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the communist experience as it was proposed, saw a new era of artificial consensus and the death of political imagination. As posited by Mark Fisher (2009), “capitalism realism” is the pervasive understanding that capitalism is the only viable political and economic system, and there is no possible imagining of a reality that is not aligned with it. This so-called post-ideological era that followed the events taking place at the end of the 20th century created a systematic exclusion of political mobilization and participation: the post-democratic governmental mechanisms such as the politics of transparency and full disclosure, the scaling of internal politics and bureaucracy, as well as the advancement of hybrid war tactics mean that governance is reduced to administration without the radicalities of ideology and conflict. Concomitantly, the postmodernist “politics of self” created the new “politics of conduct” wherein communal political values were replaced by individual moral ones that hold individuals accountable, not the community (Rancière, 2004; Žižek, 1999). Thus, vital to

our understanding of this modern post-politics era of intensified neoliberal capitalism is the longing for a “lost” community that stems from this era of individualism.

In this new political reality, populism emerges as reminiscent of the properly political, the ultimate symptom of the post-political condition, the critical expression of the search for communion. The post-political consensus, through the transparency mechanism enacted by institutions and governments, acts as a substitute for the properly political as it claims full disclosure but fails to create political engagement. According to Slavoj Žižek (2006), encouraged by popular frustration regarding the “politics as usual” – the feeling that all politicians and politics are reproducing a corrupt system - phenomenon, populist movements present a depoliticising alternative of the consensual order. One of the most common features of populism is the invocation of a common threat or enemy, which is characterized as “other” to “us”. This invocation creates a homogenising effect that works toward producing a mythical “people” that is intolerant, reactionary and exclusionary. In post-politics, the artificial consensus that stems from the lack of political alternatives and the absence of properly political action and individuals has resulted in a fraught social tissue that is prime for co-optation by populist movements, particularly by far-right movements. According to Žižek (2006), disaffection with the consensus tends to benefit populist movements as their strategies emulate the properly political in antagonizing action, and their tactics are able to respond to the need for replacement of the properly political field, which is now seen with contempt and suspicion by many. Thus, politics as it is practiced now exists as a balancing act between fragile, fabricated consensus or the rule of fear and hate rhetoric.

This widespread return to conservatism worldwide is explained by Zygmunt Bauman in his posthumous book *Retrotopia* (2017) when dealing with nostalgia in this post-political reality. While capitalism and technology failed to fulfil their promise as the

solutions to human suffering and pervasive inequality, individuals turned to *re* – revival, remakes, reformulations, retrospectives, and so forth – a melancholic response to the disillusion with the present reality that seeks to recover a selective past, one that is idealized. These post-politics engagements can also be identified in the search to recover community, a response to the modern focus on the individual and the subject. As posited by Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), the individual is merely the atomic leftover resulting from the dissolution of community. A European response to the tyrannical regimes that were installed throughout the 19th century, the ontological focus on the subject was lauded as the only path that could bring emancipation to humanity, as well as the standard through which we measure our collective accomplishments or endeavours. The failure of the communist experience, particularly, meant the demise of the community, as the individual subject became central to the neoliberal systems in place and to the modern understanding of society.

However, community still imposes itself as a necessity to which we are all bound. According to Nancy (1991) *clinamen*, the inclination or inclining of one individual towards the other, is imperative. The metaphysics of the subject ignores community due to their understanding of the absolute being, which is perfectly detached, distinct and closed to others and their influence. There is a violence within this separation of individual and community that ignores the relational being and the *clinamen*. For Nancy, being itself happens only through the individual's relation to the imposing of the other, through community.

Nothing seems more appropriate today than thinking community; nothing more necessary, demanded, and heralded by a situation that joins in a unique epochal knot the failure of all communisms with the misery of new individualisms. (Esposito, 2010:1)

Bauman (2011) elaborates further on the search for community in the post-modern reality. The author lists distinct, small and self-sufficient as the main features of community as the concept we know: distinct in the sense that it draws a clear line between “us” and “them” that does not suffer ambiguity, confusion or overlap; small in order to preserve proper communication among its members and avoid outside interference; and self-sufficient, as events where exogenous communication (with individuals apart from the community) are avoided and rare. Provided that these three features are preserved, the community has no reason to self-reflect, self-criticize or experience other modes of sociability. This notion of community entails a common understanding of “sameness” that is extremely vulnerable and in need of constant vigilance. Bauman states that “the really existing community will feel like a besieged fortress being continuously bombarded by (often invisible) enemies outside while time and time again being torn apart by discord within” (2011:15). The latter happens if external communication with individuals outside the community becomes more relevant than the communication taking place within it and the “sameness” evaporates, invaded by “otherness”. Therefore, according to Bauman (2011), community is never impervious to outside influence and contestation, which means it is not a given, but indeed a “contract” that has to be constantly renewed by its members on the basis of their commonness.

Never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades in which communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life [...] Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain. (Hobsbawm, qtd. in Bauman, 2011:15)

It is in this void, this longing for communion, that “identity” emerges as a refashioned, surrogate community. However, according to Bauman (2011), identity cannot replace community as it still resorts to the uniqueness and singularity of the individual to create precarious bonds that are more inclined to exorcise societal anxieties than preoccupied with community-building. Jacques Derrida (1997) further develops the

concept of “identity”, through the various nationalisms that have emerged, which he understands as the encapsulation of identity, identitarianism, self-affirming, self-protecting, homogenising identities that seek to ostracize the “other”, the “different”. These identities are therefore, very inhospitable to others.

This brings us back to Nancy’s theorizations about community (1991). For Nancy, Western society has fallen trap to the nostalgia for a lost, archaic form of community that cannot be regained, which is also aligned with Bauman’s conceptions of nostalgia in post-modern discourse. This loss, however, is constitutive of “community” as Nancy understands that community is not loss, but is indeed what happens to us in the “wake of society” (1991:11). Should we try to regain community as it is idealized, we run the risk of deflagrating *immanence*. Immanence can be found in both pure individualism (and by extension identitarianism) and totalitarianism, by seeking closed borders and a singular social identity, being characterized as a sort of communal fusion that hopes to recreate the feeling of community. Nancy argues that this sort of political or social enterprises that seek a state of absolute immanence (i.e., totalitarian states) have at their core a “truth of death” (1991:12), as its logic is of the suicide of the group being ruled by its will.

The community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader...) ...necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the with or the together that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being of togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. (Nancy, 1991:XXXIX)

This characterizes the operative model of community as proposed by Nancy (1991). The essence of the group in question becomes the foundational traces of the community, usually characterized by identitarian features that are embedded in nostalgia, which elects race, heritage, land, and nation as values above all others. There is a conscious manipulation of the symbols created to make reality accessible and bearable for the community while the individual sacrifices their singularity to be part of the group that is purposefully built to feel authentic and organic due to their sharing of old,

recognizable values. This essence creates an immanent bond that seeks to enclose a space for the community to protect itself from those who do not share the same essentialized traits. An immanent space is, therefore, a space where one is immune to the “other”. According to Nancy, the experience in Nazi Germany was the work of such a community, one in which not only the “other” – “the subhuman deemed exterior to the communion of blood and soil” (1991:12) – was to be exterminated, but even those within the community that were not completely aligned with the criteria of pure immanence. To him, “fascism was the grotesque or abject resurgence of an obsession with communion” (1991:17). According to Maurice Blanchot, author of *The Unavowable Community*, “the community should not entrance itself, nor should it dissolve its constituent members into a heightened unity which would suppress itself at the same time that it would annul itself as a community” (1988: 8).

Conversely, what Nancy (1991) puts forward in direct contrast with this model of community is the inoperative community. In this proposed model, there is an unworking of the very notion of community, as it refuses to set borders and self-enclose. This community is hospitable and vulnerable to others, and in place of immanence, there is exteriority that promotes spontaneous connection. Instead of creating communion or fusion, individuals and singularities connect respecting their borders of alterity, a “mutual interpellation of singularities” (1991:29). As for Nancy, our single communal understanding is mortality (the experience and anxiety we all share), facing death without subterfuge is imperative in the inoperative community, the recognition of our mortality being what enables our vulnerability and open borders.

Thus, for Nancy, only the fascist masses annihilate themselves in the delirium of “incarnated communion” (1991:35), as this type of community is founded on the unleashing of passions, meaning the sharing and communication of sameness. Therefore,

when communication is self-enclosed in such a way, resulting in immanence, it can lead to the eventual self-immolation of that community, while if the members of the community strive to embrace alterity, they can keep an open communication despite the vulnerability implied in hospitality. Therefore, the danger of an operative community is the essentialism which can lead to the mystification and obsession with a particular identity (i.e., religious, national, gender identities). One can only avoid the traps and pitfalls of essentialism as long as it understands the only true communality is finitude and thus, vulnerability to difference is imperative in communicating it.

Furthermore, Bauman (2011) also draws attention to the possibility of community when society is faced with the prime of technology. The protectionist borders set to keep out alterity are that much more fragile when exterior communication is enabled by powerful technological carriers. Nowadays, messages can travel faster than any human can transport and even faster than any means of transportation can carry. The severance of messages from human conduits has meant a disturbance to community as we know it, as the boundaries can no longer be set and preserved between internal and external communication. Thus, for the mobilization of operative communities to happen online, other strategies had to be in place to enable immanent communication, such as the use of fake news, firehosing, and overall reality distortion through the online algorithms, which I will further describe in Chapter 2.

Therefore, the melancholic combination of nostalgia for lost community and borderless individualism within post-modern society has led to the recrudescence of old values that seek to resuscitate identifiable communitarian features and symbols that make individuals feel safe and granted some degree of stability amidst an unsafe, ever-changing society, even if that represents a distortion of their current reality. Furthermore, the rise of other devices of communication further hampered communication and proper political

engagement, which was replaced by the fabrication of artificial consensus, particularly magnified by widespread of information on social media. Given the unruly nature of information, a new mechanism was implemented to concoct such a social consensus: transparency.

2.2. Transparency

The revolution in the means of communication and thus, in community, leads to Bauman's dialogues with what Byung-Chul Han (2015) calls the "Transparency Society". For Han, the current *zeitgeist* is one of transparency, where freedom of information is the sacred motto of neoliberal policies, a demand that has become both a fetish and a totalization, a societal change that is not only restricted to institutional power, but affects all spheres of life, even individual action. While transparency is advocated for from politics to social media, "trust" is a demand, but the meaning of the word has been "compromised" (2015:7). Transparency and trust become a veiled mechanism of control, a "neoliberal dispositive" (2015:8) that ends up eliminating otherness, enabling a compulsory conformity to the system and a fabricated consensus in post-politics analysis. For Deleuze (1992), this new *modus operandi*, particularly when it comes to e-transparency, characterizes a new form of societal control, which is surveilled by disperse mechanisms of power. Installing a supposed "open government" implies that its action is pervasive and its influence boundless. Conversely, the citizen is asked to act as an auditor, to be the watchman, "a key participant in this new informational capitalist-democracy" (1992:6). Thus, the responsibility for keeping a governance honest and accountable is outsourced onto citizens.

Consequently, the expectation that governances, institutions and even individuals give up their right to secrecy or privacy in order to enable "trust" and promote a levelling effect among society has led to "short-term" responses, wherein politics have to react to

all public immediatism and controversy, a temporality that makes the long-term nature of governance somewhat impossible, as planning that takes time to come into fruition does not draw the public's attention (Han, 2015). Furthermore, the era of transparency is further potentialized and fed by technology, as big data promises to dismantle secrecy altogether (Birchall, 2011). Companies and institutions can now display all of their undecipherable procedures, registry and documents online, but that does not equate to making them more accessible and transparent, but oftentimes, even more intelligible.

Concomitantly, transparency works to make individuals compelled to a compulsory form of political-correct speech, which according to Han (2015) can be stifling in the sense that it negates the ambiguity of language and seduction. This type of total control of discourse includes self-policing and self-restraining: “politically correct practices, by contrast, request a form of transparency and lack of ambiguity—so as to ensure maximum contractual freedom and equality, and thus neutralize the traditional rhetorical and emotional halo of seduction” (2015:15). Refusal to abide by such rhetorical codes means a perceived or even real type of censure by individuals who are not discursively restrained, which oftentimes ostracize these subjects from societal discussions of great importance, as they are unfamiliar with the linguistics which are necessary to engage in such transparent discussions. This can lead them to search for types of communions where they can freely exercise communication, unrestrainedly and engaging with the emotional, agitational aspect of communication.

Conversely, politicians can engage in politically incorrect discourse through unfiltered speech and presentation to hide behind a veil of transparency, placing themselves as outsiders to an oppressive system of secrecy and corruption. By refusing to play by the rules of the “politically correct” policing, they are able to attract those who also perceive themselves as dissidents of these social expectations and censorship (such

as cancel culture). Free from the ties of being discursively responsible, such political figures are perceived as more accessible or honest within the framework of transparency, as their unpolished approach to their own image creates a degree of relatability to the civilian who also refrains from partaking in “politically correct” discourse. This foments a “people-like-us” discourse which is sold to constituents as honest and unblemished despite being unrefined, as if their willingness to act in reprehensible ways in public somehow made them less intent to act dishonestly or deceitfully in governance. This is a particularly valuable fame to covet, given the public disillusion with corrupt parties and politicians worldwide. These politicians are much more adept to thrive in this new era as theirs is a discourse and image based on exhibitionism and flamboyance, which are most valuable in the age of unveiling. As a currency, even at its worst reveal, transparency is made to be more valid than secrecy.

This opposition between secrecy and transparency makes itself imperative to explain the post-modern obsession with disclosure. Under today’s supremacy of information, more communication is always preferable to secrecy, which is an obstacle to this new age of communication without borders. However, while transparency is oftentimes preferable when it comes to governance, the moral condemnation of secrecy can suppress the fundamental role it plays in society, mainly through erasing singularity. According to Derrida “if a right to secret is not maintained, we are in a totalitarian space” (2001:59). Ambiguously, secrecy and transparency are both necessary to enable proper governance. Through transparency alone, we risk erasing Otherness as it represents a threat to transparency and fabricated consensus. According to Han,

Communication reaches its maximum velocity where like responds to like, when a chain reaction of likeness occurs. The negativity of alterity and foreignness—in other words, the resistance of the Other—disturbs and delays the smooth communication of the Same. Transparency stabilizes and speeds the system by eliminating the Other and the Alien. This systemic compulsion makes the society of transparency a calibrated society. (Han, 2015: 2)

This intent to suppress singularity is aligned with the immanent community as described by Nancy (1991). Despite the borderlessness of communication within this new age of transparency, this new system still represents the suppression of singularity and the entrenching of bonds of communion and “sameness”, an unleashing of passions that demands full disclosure and objective communication, not suffering secrecy or ambiguity, which leads to self-enclosure and ostracizing of the Other. Thus, transparency for transparency’s sake further potentializes immanent bonds of community.

This is made clear by the nature of algorithms in social media, which refrain the individual from having to interact with information or opinions which are contrary to their own belief, suffering exposure mostly to what is relatable and palatable to them, making what is dissident even stranger and trapping individuals in societal bubbles. The algorithm prioritizing sameness instead of alterity is no mere coincidence, but a reflection of the mechanism of transparency in action. Under the guise of an all-inclusive social vehicle, where overwhelming levels of information reach the user at all times, transparency is promised but never delivered, as these levels amount to the reflection of their own identity and reality, precluding a holistic understanding of reality. This contributes to further the abyss between the individual and the other, as communication is lost and potential relatability, erased.

The inner workings of the transparency mechanism, such as the algorithm, illustrate how the lost community and the longing to find it is a powerful conduit for social mobilization, as can be seen in the newfound populist experience. The feeling of the loss of the “sacred” as described by Nancy (1991) is brought about by new social arrangements and amplified by a misunderstanding over what community truly is, prompting a desperate search for old, recognizable bonds, which individuals hope to find in institutions and/or beliefs. This has led individuals in the post-modern world to a

recrudescence of old, traditional values that are supposed to feel authentic, dependable and immutable, such as religion, tradition, and innate ideas of masculinity and binary gender identity and roles.

Around the world, many political parties and governments have worked towards renovating such communitarian alliances through populism by manipulating individuals pull to commune through the transparency mechanism. To do so, they reinvigorate beliefs and symbols regarding what is supposedly organic and true, be it land and heritage, race and culture, or sexuality and gender expression, through which subjects can relate to each other in the cult of sameness and promote the “unleashing of passions” described by Nancy. These values are sold as an immutable truth, one that is being denied by the “politically-correct” policing, which reinforces the Us Vs Them discourse these leaders seek to promote. Concomitantly, this elevates them as anti-systemic, honest governances who represent true “transparency”, as they are allegedly unbound to current social conventions and mechanisms of secrecy in governance.

One of the features that plays a key-role in reinforcing such perceptions is the hegemonic masculinities device. Being perceived as honest, moral, “speak-it-like-it-is” governance is more often than not tied to masculinity, as these are traits oftentimes associated with the recognition of normalized manhood, tied to a (conscious or not) Christian imagery of virtue, righteousness. Moreover, defying the “politically correct” also entails being perceived as courageous and subversive, unafraid to stand up against new developments in social and gender theory while abiding by conservative precepts. Particularly, publicly rejecting gender and queer theory has guaranteed a gathering of followers to many governances around the world that capitalize on entrenching masculinity, particularly the online “manosphere”. Thus, the backlash by conservative forces through the entrenching of masculinity was timely, strategic, and directly

maintained by the transparency device, which enabled said governances to hide under the veil of unbridled honesty and subversiveness to attack gender and sexual diversity while maintaining an honest, courageous man façade and creating political affiliation with those who sought to reaffirm “authentic”, hegemonic masculinity through the same means.

2.3. Hegemonic Masculinities

Raewyn Connell’s (1987) first definition of hegemonic masculinity refers to the practices and semiotics that enabled men’s dominance over women at a global level. This entailed a normative set of rules and conduct that embodied a way of presenting oneself as a man, which demanded all other men (or the ones who hope to be recognized as such) to position themselves in relation to the pattern. Therefore, the assumption is not that all men will be able to perform hegemonic masculinity, but all who identify this way are somewhat bound to it in either how they conform to it or how they can distance themselves from it.

The concept first emerged from the Gramscian idea of “hegemony” to elaborate on the stabilization of class relations, but was reshaped for application to gender relations, leading to it being used for analysis at a global level. New developments to gender as a field of study meant that hegemonic masculinity as a concept had to be refashioned to enable understanding of masculinities not as a fixed identity or a personality trait of individuals, which could quickly turn essentializing. According to Connell’s (2005) revisiting of the concept, masculinities are, in fact, a set of practices that are enacted through social action, which can vary throughout different social configurations and contexts wherein gender relations transpire. This led to the recognition of non-monolithic identities that are, however, relational and interpellated by individual and group’s understandings of masculinity.

Connell (2005) posits that a certain ambiguity is necessary to enable the (refashioned) use of hegemonic masculinities (plural) as a concept, as it is relevant to recognizing mechanisms of hegemony. Given the different and varied models of masculinity that are posed at a society-level, to set standards for one type of hegemonic masculinity would be impossible, as different conducts can be lauded as masculine in different contexts and through different actors. Religions, mass media, State governances, among others, can all be fields where diverse masculinities can be enacted and stapled as the pattern to be followed. In this construct of hegemonic masculinities, divisions among men are highlighted, especially when it comes to the ostracizing of subaltern masculinities, such as homosexual and non-cisgender men. Indeed, the surveillance of cis-heterosexuality is essential to the maintenance of this hegemony, as dissidence breaks with the masculinities' cosmovision.

According to Lawrence (2022), when discussing masculinities in the U.S., this cosmovision is linked to certain behaviours (which can be performed alone or as a pattern of a larger framework) which can be noticed in men enacting a sort of masculinity that hopes to emulate hegemonic masculinities, particularly devaluating women, being incapable of deep attachment in relationships, showing contempt and aggression toward sexual and gender minorities, neglecting personal health, and ultimately, deploying violent outbursts. These behaviours are a consequence of the socialization process that informs ideologies of masculinity, as men are socialized to understand that aspiring to conform to hegemonic masculinities is their only alternative when it comes to gender identity. Reacting emotionally, expressing vulnerabilities, or not showing dominance would be a violation of these expectations, and because usually women are socially allowed and expected to display their emotions, to show them as men would mean to emasculate or feminize oneself. The American Psychological Association (APA) has

listed “stoicism, competitiveness, dominance and aggression” as the main characteristics of traditional masculinity.⁵ This means that men should not show any traits commonly linked to femininity, should aim for respect as an outcome of successful achievements, never demonstrate any weaknesses, and promote violence when necessary: “the emphasis on dominance, aggression, extreme self-reliance, and restrictive emotionality” (Levant, 2011 apud Lawrence, 2020:50). Violence, for Connell (2002), is characterized not as privilege of masculinity or simply an expression of power, but as stemming from the construct of masculinities, a way to claim or defend privileges, to assert superiority or to gain leverage on others.

However, it is the material relationship men and boys develop to collective images or role models of masculinity, rather than just their reflection of them, that creates real, institutional and structural effects from masculinities. Displays of violence, inequality in education and health, power disparity, and so forth, are consequences of these masculinities in conversation. Despite hegemonic masculinities being a powerful concept to understand how the deployment of cultural templates can lead to diverse practices and socializations, it is not supposed to be used as an umbrella-term or a *catchall* for masculinities, but actually as a way to elaborate the dynamics being analysed within social processes (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, there is enough research to show that hegemonic masculinities are not self-reproducing systems, but historical processes that require proper work and mechanisms to be maintained. The exclusion and discrediting of women, as well as the policing of men and their performance of masculinity are therefore necessary to preserve the hegemony of masculinities. These mechanisms in place in all

⁵ APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men 3 | American Psychological Association, 2018
<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/boys-men-practice-guidelines.pdf>

spheres of life range from Hooper's (2001) analysis of masculinity in international relations and war, when "soft" options are discredited over "hard" options, to violence being enacted against homosexual men (Tomsen, 2002).

Other studies, such as Sharon R. Bird's (1996) discussion on homosociality show the extent of this maintenance. According to the author, homosociality refers to the non-sexual attraction held by individuals towards their own sex. Homosocial interactions enable the upkeep of hegemonic masculinities as they legitimate expressions of masculinities associated with the *status quo* (whatever that may be) and suppress symbols that stem from non-hegemonic identities, as when homosexual masculinities are labelled "effeminate" and invalidated as masculinity. Thus, what studies have shown is that there is a historical construction and reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities. Different contexts and actors negotiate different performances, as well as update, reshape, include, or exclude whatever behaviours are brought on by societal changes throughout history. These allow for new ways of enacting masculinities and, therefore, to frame gender relations.

Furthermore, hegemonic masculinities when performed at an escalated level can lead to toxic masculine traits and expectations being taken to extremes in order to showcase dominance and control, such as in the idea that men should suppress their emotions or distress and maintain an appearance of hardness and stoicalness, and enact violence as an indicator of power. It is a cosmology that thrives on insecurity and fear to trigger violence and aggression, a "constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence",⁶ and "a manhood that views women and LGBTQIA+ people as inferior, sees

⁶ The Problem With a Fight Against Toxic Masculinity | New York Times, February 2019
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/02/toxic-masculinity-history/583411/>

sex as an act not of affection but domination, and which valorises violence as they way to prove [oneself] to the world”.⁷ Indeed, these characteristics oppose any traits of femininity or those related to what is expected of women in a patriarchal society – such as displays of emotion, kindness and vulnerability – and can lead to great degrees of misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and resistance to so-called “gender ideology”.

“Gender ideology” has been used by the Catholic church to name efforts for gender equality and diversity since the early 2000s, when former Pope John Paul II declared that there were “misleading concepts concerning sexuality and the dignity and mission of the woman [...]” which were driven by “specific ideologies on gender” (Corredor, 2019:615). In 2002, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the family claimed that a “feminist ideology known as ‘gender’ has led to misunderstanding of the complementary difference between man and woman and a growing confusion about sexual identity” (Corredor, 2019:615). While the expression flew under the radar for the first decade of the 2000s, it gained strength in the early 2010s, when politicians appropriated it as an “umbrella term”, used to design any and all policies of pro-gender equality and diversity. Campana & Miskolci (2017) claim that the legalization of same-sex marriage in countries such as Argentina in 2010, and Brazil in 2011, was the inflection point that allowed “gender ideology” to evolve into a grammatical delimitator in the battle for moral entrepreneurship. The authors call “gender ideology” a weapon for the conservative groups which aims to enclose the State as a masculine, heterosexual space. – a supposed gender indoctrination project that corrupts binary expectations of gender and sexuality, which is promoted by far-right leaders and religious figures, among others.

⁷ Overcompensation Nation: It’s Time to Admit That Toxic Masculinity Drives Gun Violence | Salon, June 2016

https://www.salon.com/2016/06/13/overcompensation_nation_its_time_to_admit_that_toxic_masculinity_drives_gun_violence [https://perma.cc/MA5L-NJFP].

Thus, "gender ideology" is a mechanism that promotes a false understanding of what gender and queer theory encompass to mobilize hegemony masculinities, alongside misogyny and intolerance to LGBTQIA+ groups.

Therefore, the concept of hegemonic masculinities is a powerful tool not only to analyse social relations between gender identities, but to understand how entrenched binary concepts of gender are still present in our own understanding of gender performances. The pressure to enact a particular type of "manhood" deemed correct, and therefore part of the hegemonic power of masculinity, can be a dangerous gateway into intolerant, oftentimes violent behaviours that seek to maintain a static social order and perceive all divergent behaviour as a threat. Therein lies the alliance that promotes the upkeep of systemic masculinities. This alliance is directly tied to the formation of operative communities as described by Nancy (1991). Recrudescing values such as masculinity and branding it as a given, organic, authentic value is part of the essentializing discourse that allows for an immanent community to emerge. Although other values are tied to it, such as country, heritage, and race, manhood as dictated by hegemonic masculinities and the bonding of said masculinities are reclaimed as traits intrinsic to a natural, normalized male conduct that needs to be enacted. Said bonding, consequently, allows for the growth of a community that shares these values and reclaims the authenticity of this social order based on male communion, as it has been supposedly present from the dawn of humanity.

Recrudescence of this male communion results from new developments in gender theory and shifts in social relations, such as the revolutionizing work of Judith Butler, and the advancement of queer and trans studies, which have been more widely promoted over the last couple decades and have paved the way for new types of masculinities to emerge, as well as other gender identifications that break with binary constructs to be more widely

accepted (in Western society at least). This gender diversity was met with backlash from more conservative sectors worldwide that saw in this emergence a threat to hegemonic masculinities, such as many members and institutions belonging to the Christian community and many far-right politicians, who saw in “gender ideology” a new concept and agenda to elect as their antagonist (Corredor, 2019). Thus, “gender ideology” was the antagonistic other created by conservative forces to entrench operative communities through the urgent need to rescue masculinity and traditional gender roles from the perceived “crisis” unfolding worldwide, which allowed for sexual and gender alterity to become more widely accepted at a societal level. In Brazil, this discourse was particularly effective to elect models of hegemonic masculinities midst the political crisis that rocked the country from 2013 until 2016, as will be argued over the course of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Dilma Rousseff's exit: "Mother" to a sexist nation

Sosa (2019) delved into how sexism and anti-gender rhetoric morphed and heightened the social convulsion experienced in Brazil during Dilma Rousseff's second presidential term (2015-2016), which led to her eventual exit from office. Indeed, the former president had been challenged by sexist outbursts and expectations from her first electoral campaign, back in 2010. At that time, evangelical groups refused to support her campaign until Rousseff made clear her political alignment with the anti-abortion movement and reinforced it with her own personal statement against the legalization of abortion. Securing their support was very important as the evangelical movement in Brazil has been gaining adepts fast since the late 90s – a recent survey showed that 21 evangelical churches are opened every day in Brazil⁸ – and they represent a very significant part of Brazilian demographics. Later, in 2013, the year the "Jornadas de Junho" shook the country, Brazil was caught in a culture war over Brazilians' ideological preferences. The movement in June represented a break with political normalcy and inaugurated a new post-political phase in the country. Then, Brazil had begun to suffer the consequences stemming from the worldwide recession that succeeded the 2008 American crash, which had been so far restricted by the profits secured from the commodities the country was exporting at high rates (Carvalho, 2018). The political, economic, and social turmoil that followed had specific sexist contours to it, being directed particularly at the figure of Rousseff.

⁸ Salto evangélico: 21 igrejas são abertas por dia no Brasil | Globo, September 2022
<https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/eleicoes-2022/noticia/2022/09/salto-evangelico-21-igrejas-sao-abertas-por-dia-no-brasil-segmento-e-alvo-de-lula-e-bolsonaro.ghtml>

It is important to point out that Rousseff had already been a target of sexist scrutiny by Brazilian news vehicles due to her past militancy against the Brazilian dictatorship in the 1970s. Her involvement in Marxist groups and even the torture she underwent during the most authoritarian period of the dictatorship were taken as signs of subversion and illegitimacy, making her unfit for the office she held. In 2008, she was accused of having lied while being tortured by the Brazilian military during a Senate session, when she was acting as a minister. Rousseff's incisive answer was that she had saved the lives of her comrades by refusing to tell the truth and that true strength and character resided precisely in her ability to lie to her tormentors and protect those dear to her from the horrors of the dictatorship (Sosa, 2019). Throughout her time in office, Rousseff would assure that her suffering she and her colleagues underwent during the military dictatorship could be somewhat advocated for through the instauration of a Truth Commission,⁹ which sought to bring to light the crimes of the military dictatorship, which had gone unchecked and unpunished in Brazil as the immediate post-dictatorship moment was of general amnesty, both for militants and military.

Furthermore, during her first and second electoral campaign there was a need to counter Rousseff's image as a "tough", "inflexible", "no-nonsense" and "uncharismatic" woman. This demand came from the comparisons to her predecessor and mentor Lula, who was considered a master political conciliator and a charismatic figure by the public. As a response, Sosa (2019) highlights the attempts by her public relations team to make Rousseff enact a "motherly" role to the nation, as a counterpart to Lula's semiotics as the nation's "father". This was made harder by Rousseff's profile as a divorced single mother who refused to enact a "softer", "kinder", "devoted" posture which was to be expected

⁹ Dilma chora ao receber relatório final da Comissão da Verdade | G1, December 2014
<https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2014/12/dilma-chora-ao-receber-relatorio-final-da-comissao-da-verdade.html>

by a woman. This foretells what succeeded her impeachment as president, when the corrupted image of this “mother”, or even the loss of this as symbol, became a trigger to the fast dissolution of the country’s social fabric and which allowed fragmented groups to be co-opted by populist discourses which assured the restitution of community through the offer of a recrudescing masculinity opposite the crisis that had overtaken the country while it was being headed by a woman for the first time in its history.

This political crisis was triggered during Rousseff’s second term in office. Rousseff’s governability was highly impacted by the most conservative elected congress since the dictatorship (the infamous “bovine, bullets and bible” congress, as the congressmen stemmed mostly from the agribusiness, the arms trade, and the evangelical church) and by the after-effects of the American recession. This had already hampered her governability, but in 2015, news of a big corruption scandal by the government broke – brought about by Operation Carwash, an investigation led by the Brazilian Federal Police – and Rousseff’s image did not go unscathed, even though she was in no way compromised personally by the reports (Carvalho, 2018; Sosa, 2019).

Reacting to the scandals, middle-class conservative sectors of the population took to the streets to protest against Rousseff’s party (Partido dos Trabalhadores), where the former president was vilified and an onslaught of sexist outbursts directed at her. The most popular online hashtags associated with the demonstrations at the time were #tchauquerida (meaning “goodbye, dear”) and #calabocadilma (translating to “shut up, Dilma”), which meant to discredit and silence her (Sosa, 2019). It is important to highlight that, while reactions to previous corruption scandals that broke out in Brazil were sometimes spirited and generally aggressive towards those in power, they were not as visceral and vicious as the hate directed specifically toward Rousseff, even though she was not being accused of anything. This response by the (mostly white, conservative,

middle-class) public prompted the Brazilian congress to vote for Rousseff's exit from office in 2016, even though the charges against her were based on a legal technicality, with her opposers relying on *lawfare* to justify her unfair trial and impeachment process.

Her political rivals accused her of using Brazil's pension fund to cover up budget gaps,¹⁰ a manoeuvre conducted by many of her (male) predecessors and which had never been cause for controversy, much less for impeaching a president. Throughout that year, Rousseff reiterated her innocence several times, as the politicians and the public continuously demoralized, mocked, offended and vilified her. Sosa (2019) has Rousseff embody the image of feminist *killjoy* as first conceptualized by Ahmed through refusal to stand down and insistence to denounce her forced removal from office, facing her (mostly) male antagonists head-on. Later, evidence that Rousseff suffered a *coup* due to her refusal to collude with politicians she deemed corrupt came to light, with one of her opposers caught on a tapped call saying there was a "big national pact, involving the Supreme (Court), involving all", and that changing the government was necessary in order to "stop the bleeding" (meaning to stop the investigations happening at the time over corruption claims).¹¹

Thus, it is clear that Rousseff's *faux* impeachment was not only politically motivated, but was shaped by the fast-rising sexist hysteria that overtook the country. The debates around corruption, governability and morality gained very specific misogynistic connotations, which sought to hold Rousseff accountable for the crisis through pinning her as unfit for office and symbolically sacrificing her to keep the Brazilian congress's

¹⁰ Relembre o processo de Impeachment de Dilma Rousseff | Folha de São Paulo, December 2016
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/tv/poder/2016/12/1844031-relembre-o-processo-de-impeachment-de-dilma-rousseff.shtml>

¹¹ Ouça trechos dos diálogos entre Romero Jucá e Sérgio Machado | G1, May 2016
<https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2016/05/leia-os-trechos-dos-dialogos-entre-romero-juca-e-sergio-machado.html>

status quo. This allowed for the interest of the market in applying austere measures in response to the economic crisis to prevail (Carvalho, 2018). Although one cannot say that the motivations to remove Rousseff were solely sexist, it is hard to imagine the same treatment being afforded to a male president. The attempt to pass Rousseff as a “mother” to the nation failed as she herself failed to fit the mould of what it means to be a woman in a sexist country, especially one that is occupying the most important public office in Brazil. Her past experience as a leftist militant, her “tough” profile, her divorced single mother lifestyle, and her unwillingness to leave quietly were all used as munition against her not only as a president struggling in a time of crisis, but as a failure to comply to what being a “proper” woman entails.

Unable to assume the role of a merciful, proper “mother” to a dissatisfied nation, the backlash she faced seemed to be an attempt to regain bonds of community when the country was faced with the dissolution of these familial ideals within politics and the fraught reality brought about by the economic crisis. The hatred towards a woman in power was the fire necessary to kindle bonds of male alliance based on the common threatening of hegemonic masculinity, which enabled the foundation of an “operative”, “immanent” community in Brazil, which thrived on the delimitation of “us” and “them”. Us, the defenders of morality and transparency, which stand against a corrupt woman who was once labelled a terrorist and enemy of the State, and Them, anyone that did not align with the belief that removing Rousseff from office would bring an end to the Brazilian crisis, be it her direct supporters or not.

This became clear following Rousseff’s exit. Her term was completed under the rule of Michel Temer, her vice-president, and the next elections, held in 2018, saw the victory of Jair Bolsonaro, one of her most vicious antagonists, who had fuelled the conservative hate against the former president for many years. The country went from

electing their first female representative in 2010, one that had a past based on defiance of the military dictatorship and who suffered political repression, to opting in 2018 for a former military man who once said that the only mistake the military made during the dictatorship was choosing “to torture and not to kill”.¹² Thus, in the next chapter I compile Bolsonaro’s early engagements with hegemonic masculinities leading to the 2015-2016 crisis that saw Rousseff’s exit from power, which eventually allowed him to consolidate an operative community online.

3.2. Bolsonaro’s Engagements with Hegemonic Masculinities

3.2.1. Bolsonaro’s Public Persona: His Crusade Against Feminism and Minorities

Bolsonaro’s platform has always been the performance of a hegemonic, decaying masculinity, first and foremost. A former military man, who was expelled by the Brazilian armed forces in 1988 after being accused of planning a bomb attack in Rio de Janeiro, he was first elected as congressman from 1991 and went on to be elected several times until 2018 when he was elected president. Bolsonaro changed parties seven times during his tenure as congressman, but was still held as an outsider with little influence, known for his speeches supporting the military dictatorship (Fonseca, 2018). Despite having already been an elected congressman for 21 years up to that point, he first came to gain notoriety in the national spotlight in the early 2010s, especially after he participated in a sensationalist TV program in Brazil called *Superpop*. In one of his appearances on the show in 2011, he ranted for an hour about a variety of topics which would later become commonplace in his electoral hate rhetoric. Particularly, this program highlighted his stance against the LGBTQIA+ community, about whom the then-congressman said: “Just

¹² Frases polêmicas do candidato Jair Bolsonaro | Exame, September 2018
<https://exame.com/brasil/frases-polemicas-do-candidato-jair-bolsonaro/>

as you change the behaviour of a child [...] if [they] turn ‘a little gay’ [sic.] for sure a harsh beating can redirect him to being a man in the future”.¹³

In the same episode, Bolsonaro also expressed oppositional views about queer couples adopting children which he called “another absurdity [...] A boy being adopted by two homosexual men will grow up in their image”. He mentioned fearing that homosexuality was turning into an imposition as:

There are thousands of adepts and activists [...] thousands of men across the country and abroad, in any movement, in gay parades, with enormous resources from the Federal Union, from states and municipalities [...] and now they want to impose a code of conduct that is not aligned with what is man and what is woman, with our religion.¹⁴

It is important to highlight that these declarations came from an elected congressman taking part in a TV program being broadcast on open television, specifically on a sensationalist show that is unbothered to conduct any follow-ups, rhetoric or rebuttal of the information presented. These first brushes with controversy were also his first attempts, conscious or not, of engaging in community-building. Addressing homosexuality in such a way, Bolsonaro began to show his allegiance to hegemonic masculinities, invalidating sexualities and masculinities that differ from what is idealized manhood, and starting a communion of masculinities which are intolerant to the otherness of non-heterosexual, non-cis male identities. This male-bonding was not a difficult relationship to establish, given Brazil’s own history with sexism, as previously stated.

Furthermore, this was also the first time Bolsonaro addressed the Brazilian audience more generally and was able to hijack public narrative through deploying discourse that was anything but “politically correct”. The fact that this type of

¹³ Deputado Bolsonaro no programa Superpop | Youtube, April 2011
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXkdxA7EXMo>

¹⁴ Deputado Bolsonaro no programa Superpop | Youtube, April 2011
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXkdxA7EXMo>

communication gained him adepts¹⁵ meant that in the future, Bolsonaro would rely on unabashed discourse as a tool to promote himself as an outsider who was willing to reinforce organic community values that would be deemed lost in the crisis that befell the country. Nation, patriotism, and most importantly the reinvigoration of masculinity were all values identified discursively which can be assessed as early as this interview in 2011, where Bolsonaro demonizes all alterity and paints it as compulsory in order to incite public outcry against it. This mechanism of transparent, unrestrained communication would prove to be even more useful and advantageous later on, not through TV broadcast, but through even more powerful vehicles: social media platforms.

Indeed, Bolsonaro's rise from a relatively anonymous congressman to the most dangerous right-wing Brazilian leader of all time is deeply intertwined with his campaign against so-called "gender ideology" and supposed "gender indoctrination", and his crusade against feminism and LGBTQIA+ activism was the fundamental puzzle piece that elevated him to "myth" status, as he is known by his followers (Gomes da Costa Santos, 2021; Rocha, 2021). The co-optation of a widely sexist and conservative demographic through the widespread use of derogatory language to refer to women (feminists especially) and the LGBTQIA+ population was the first political strategy Bolsonaro adopted as a congressman (Rocha, 2021; Melo, 2020), as can be verified by his participation on open television, which eventually allowed him to enlist a following of mostly cisgender, white, and straight males who saw in his figure an echo of their own personal sexist *ethos*, promoting their anti-ideology and hate rhetoric unapologetically.

It is my intent, in this chapter, to compile his journey from an unassuming congressman, who was first elected due to his military past and enthusiasm for the armed

¹⁵ Qual foi o papel de CQC, Superpop e Pânico na popularização de Bolsonaro | UOL, October 2018 <https://tvefamosos.uol.com.br/blog/mauriciostycer/2018/10/29/qual-foi-o-papel-de-cqc-superpop-e-panico-na-popularizacao-de-bolsonaro/>

forces, to a presidential candidate that built his ideological and political platform on enticing and entrenching Brazilians' pre-existing hegemonic masculinities. This was enabled both by an unprecedented propaganda machine and by the perceived ever-growing “threat” of feminism, gender theory and gender equality, which conservative populists worldwide labelled “gender ideology” (Corredor, 2019), which came on the heels of the crisis triggered during the government of Dilma Rousseff. Through these bonds born from the performance of a conservative and intolerant masculinity when faced with a political, economic and societal crisis – which took place during a woman's government – Bolsonaro could enact his hate rhetoric.

Following Bolsonaro's first engagements on television, his attacks on women, feminists, and the LGBTQIA+ grew increasingly frequent, which, appallingly, did not affect his political credibility and popularity within the country, but conversely, potentialized it. In 2011, in yet another talk show, when asked what his reaction would be if his sons decided to date black women, his answer was: “I will not discuss promiscuity with anyone. I'm not at risk for this. My children were very well-educated and haven't lived in environments like yours, fortunately.”¹⁶ falsely equating promiscuity with black women. In 2014, while addressing the congress, he said that he would not rape his fellow congresswoman Maria do Rosário because she “did not deserve it”, a declaration he had already given on camera during an interview when he was interrupted by her. In the first occasion, he threatened the congresswoman with violence and called her a “bitch” and “too ugly to be raped by me”. Bolsonaro was eventually condemned to pay her compensation and to apologize publicly.¹⁷

¹⁶ 9 times Bolsonaro attacked women's rights | Brasil de Fato, March 2022 <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2022/03/08/veja-nove-vezes-em-que-bolsonaro-atacou-os-direitos-das-mulheres>

¹⁷ Legal order has Bolsonaro apologize to congresswoman Maria do Rosário | Folha de S. Paulo, June 2019

Bolsonaro also weighed in on the question of women's wages. In another interview, the then-congressman claimed that it was hard being a businessman in Brazil as there were "too many labour rights", particularly concerning women, going on to say that employers were rightfully questioning whether it was advantageous to hire women, as their proclivity to marry and give birth would eventually cause a loss of profit for the business. Furthermore, he also implied that women should have lower wages than men due to this, and should they not be pleased about it, they could pursue other jobs.¹⁸

In April 2016, Bolsonaro participated in the congress session that chose to impeach Dilma Rousseff. The occasion saw an onslaught of ludicrous remarks by many congressmen, but Bolsonaro's vote for the process to be initiated was the most controversial of all. In his speech Bolsonaro paid homage to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, one of the biggest symbols for political repression in the country, and the person responsible for the torture endured by Rousseff herself during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). Bolsonaro called Ustra Rousseff's "dread"¹⁹, as he was her tormentor, and said that "they lost in 1964. They lost in 2016", indirectly calling the 1964 military a victory for whoever "us" it encompasses. Bolsonaro would also go on record to question Rousseff's torture in December 2020, saying "they say Dilma was tortured and her jaw fractured. Bring the X-ray so we can see the fracture".²⁰

<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/06/por-ordem-judicial-bolsonaro-pede-desculpas-a-deputada-maria-do-rosario-do-pt.shtml>

¹⁸ As mulheres, por Bolsonaro e seus seguidores | Revista Fórum, Agosto 2022

<https://revistaforum.com.br/opiniaio/2022/8/29/as-mulheres-por-bolsonaro-seus-seguidores-por-walter-barretto-jr-122387.html>

¹⁹ Relembre 7 vezes em que o governo Bolsonaro se espelhou no Brasil da Ditadura Militar | Brasil de Fato, 2021

<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/03/31/relembre-7-vezes-em-que-o-governo-bolsonaro-se-espelhou-no-brasil-da-ditadura-militar>

²⁰ Bolsonaro ironiza tortura sofrida por Dilma: "traz o raio-x pra gente ver" | IG, December 2020
<https://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/politica/2020-12-28/bolsonaro-ironiza-tortura-sofrida-por-dilma-traz-o-raio-x-pra-gente-ver.html>

During the same speech, he also mentioned his vote was toward protecting the “family and the innocence of children in the classroom”, a clear reference to the much-debated *gay kit*, a farse that the far-right created to sow disruption in the country. Bolsonaro and his allies claimed a *gay kit* was being made available in Brazil’s public schools and universities, aimed at “turning” students LGBT.²¹ The *gay kit* panic started back in 2011, when an action aimed at combating homophobia was promoted by the Ministry of Education, and was immediately labelled *gay kit* by the opposition. The *gay kit* was one element in the far-right’s discourse that truly created a moral panic that rippled throughout the country, and despite there not being any truth to the claims, the online communication enacted by Bolsonaro’s team was so effective that following his election in 2018, a report showed that 84% of his voters believed this preposterous news.²²

Bolsonaro’s controversial vote in the now infamous Congress session that chose to impeach Rousseff is perhaps the most solid example of the delimitation of a self-enclosed “us” – even though his discourse never made truly clear who this entails, but clearly defined who “they” encompasses. By paying homage to a known torturer who was personally responsible for the torture of the impeached president, as well as igniting the debate over the *gay kit*, Bolsonaro ingeniously placed a bet on the recrudescence of conservative values related to gender, sexuality and masculinity in Brazil in response to a crisis that was (falsely) being attributed to the rule of a woman over the country. First, bringing back the memory of her assaulter reinforced the notion that she should be the one punished (even violently) for not being able to lead the country and for destroying

²¹ Material que originou o ‘kit gay’ apareceu em 2010. | Folha de São Paulo, September 2022 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2022/09/material-que-originou-fake-news-sobre-kit-gay-apareceu-em-2010-entenda.shtml>

²² Pesquisa mostra que 84% dos eleitores de Bolsonaro acreditam no kit gay | Congresso em Foco, November 2018 <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/area/pais/pesquisa-mostra-que-84-dos-eleitores-de-bolsonaro-acreditam-no-kit-gay/>

the “us”, the community. Secondly, falsely equating an education leaflet to a *gay kit* which represented a supposed attempt by the government to forcefully turn children gay (the Them) also potentialized the rhetoric that the government was promoting gender indoctrination through authoritarian measures that threatened the “traditional” Brazilian family (the Us) and its values, which added to Rousseff’s history as a leftist militant, was quickly escalated to an attempt to install a communist dictatorship – even though Rousseff’s political and economic measures grew more liberal by the day. Thus started Brazil’s cultural war.

Still in 2016, in October, Bolsonaro granted an interview to Elliot Page, a trans actor, for a documentary. Bolsonaro went on to call Page very pretty on-camera, saying that should he see her in the street, he would whistle at her (Page identified as a woman at the time of the interview) and that gay people needed to be administered “corrective violence”.²³ This interview immediately went viral and saw many outbursts on the internet, particularly by white straight males, who declared Bolsonaro to be “fearless” in his handling of gender and sexual diversity and proclaimed him a “myth”.

It is interesting to dwell on the reason for Bolsonaro’s alias. Although the word “myth” is old, the term was re-signified online through the gaming community over the last decades. According to the dictionary, the verb “mitar” – to mythologize, as it is used by Brazilian *gamers* – means to attribute the character a myth or legend or to elevate someone from human status to represent something fantastic, heroic and legendary. Non-coincidentally, it is also a term intrinsically linked to the men right’s movement, which in the early 1980s through the 1990s had a famed branch of activities known as the *mythopoetic* men’s movement (Kimmel, 1995), which sought to reclaim an authentic,

²³ Elliot Page: actor that announced to be trans questioned Bolsonaro about homophobia in a 2016 interview | BBC News
<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-55157914>

primordial, lost archetype of masculinity, though this was promoted in a self-help fashion. It is important to highlight that this movement was also a response to the second feminist wave, much like the recrudescence of hegemonic masculinities in Brazil happened in response to the rule of a woman during a time of crisis). Bolsonaro capitalized on this reclaiming of a masculinity myth and cult and was branded a hero, a representation to all those who sought to reaffirm themselves through enacting hegemonic masculinities. The fact that this hero transcendence stemmed from demeaning or acting inappropriately towards women or disenfranchising alternate masculinities through homophobic and transphobic commentary is not a circumstantial occurrence but a causal one. Bolsonaro relied on the strength of male alliances to build a political community he could rely on and eventually make loyal to a fault through discrediting all alterity. These were the mechanisms that Bolsonaro's propaganda machine put in use in order to create social convulsion across the country.

Throughout these early engagements, Bolsonaro and his family, especially his three sons – who also serve as congressmen in Brazil – promoted the use of “gender ideology” as a term to label every challenge to conservative understandings regarding gender. The expression has been used constantly by Bolsonaro and his associates on social media. A survey conducted by Agência Diadorim²⁴ shows that the term was repeated in Bolsonaro's family's social media platforms at least 206 times between 2014 and 2022. The survey also shows that the authors are unbothered to define “gender ideology” in most of these publications. In 97% of occurrences, the expression was accompanied by other themes, such as the supposed struggle against communism and Marxism, abortion,

²⁴ ‘Ideologia de gênero’: como o clã Bolsonaro usa internet para atacar LGBTI+ | Carta Capital, September 2022
<https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/ideologia-de-genero-como-o-cla-bolsonaro-usa-internet-para-atacar-lgbti/>

the decriminalization of drugs, the need to protect children and even liberalism. In such publications, advocating against LGBTQIA+ intolerance is always portrayed as promoting “homosexuality” [sic.], promiscuity, early sexualization of children through sexual education in schools, and imposing the end of the gender binary. Furthermore, many publications associate homosexuality with paedophilia, often purposefully distorting the struggle against prejudice and discrimination as an “inversion of family values”.

The survey also shows that the first time the term was used by the Bolsonaro clan dates back to 2014, but that its use grew exponentially until it reached its peak in 2016, when they referred to “gender ideology” 53 times. This is precisely the period where Brazil went through the political crisis of Dilma Rousseff’s irregular impeachment from office and saw the invigoration of conservative values, especially those related to the upkeep of the gender binary and gender roles. The exponential growth of this term’s usage by the Bolsonaro clan over the years and its height in 2016 in particular is no mere coincidence but a deliberate strategy to link Rousseff to a “gender ideology” agenda due to her political profile as a woman, former activist, and member of a progressive leftist party, who advocated for gender equality and rights for women and the LGBTQIA+ population in a sexist country. For the Bolsonaro clan, being for the latter automatically pitted the former president against the supposed traditional values and morality of the “Brazilian people”.

Thus, although these previous unbecoming commentary and crass-behaviour has been typical of Bolsonaro since he first started to act politically, 2016 can be credited as the year when Bolsonaro’s *modus operandi* truly started resonating within the country. His behaviour and reinforced hate rhetoric was then directly aligned with the recrudescing sexism that followed Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process that year, which led to the

consolidation of his candidature and, eventually, to the presidency (Sosa, 2019). Furthermore, the political tides had changed worldwide, as Trump's election and the UK's decision for BREXIT proved that hate mongering was no longer a far-flung concept restricted to rally the darkest corners of the internet, but actually a real populist success. The events that took place in 2016, nationally and worldwide, meant a turn for Bolsonaro's popularity, who began the year as a burlesque figure responsible for outlandish ideas and finished it with a solid, tangible electoral platform for the next elections, a possible response to his success in consolidating an operative community in Brazil, one that was born from the recrudescence of masculinity.

3.2.2. Bolsonaro, "The Average Joe": Strategic Use of Religion and Hegemonic Masculinity

The rise of the far-right movement and the formation of this community also relied on the strong religious undertone of the moralist discourse that overtook the country. The deeply-embedded Christian mentality and the emergence and widespread adhesion to the evangelical movement all over the country from the 90s onwards have assisted in promoting a recrudescence of belief in normative roles within society that emulate the religious, dimorphic binary of Adam/Eve, man/woman, that place man at the centre of the home, to which all other members of the household must be subordinate to (Lemos, 2007). Aligning to the evangelical church's agenda and interests is essential to ensure governance in Brazil, as their congregations compose a major part of the electorate, which further complicates politics in the country. Bolsonaro tended to this relationship constantly as his personal slogan during his campaign and office-rule was "God above everything, Brazil above all", showing his allegiance to Christianity. During the second term of the elections in 2022, Bolsonaro still counted on 51% of the evangelical

electorate²⁵, which further assisted him in enabling bonds of communion based on the alterity of non-believers, which were implied to be against the country, and even worst, against the rule of God.

However, even before the evangelical movement gained strength, Brazil suffered from an overtly sexist society, which tended to place women as inferior to men and suppress all other forms of gender identification and sexual expression, circumstances that were particularly heightened during the military dictatorship (1964 – 1985) and shaped the country's social relations and understandings of gender and sexuality in the present (Matté & Santos, 2018). The economic and social gains of the early 2000s under the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva saw a lot of dissent over social matters such as gender politics muffled by the popularity his government had under conciliatory terms (Carvalho, 2018; Fernandes, 2019). However, the crisis that followed during Dilma Rousseff's government, as previously stated, brought about the sexist, conservative contours of the Brazilian population. Thus, the reaffirmation of masculinity is here understood to have been a response based on fear and insecurity in uncertain times. Though political crises are common, this turmoil was unusual in the sense that it happened when the country was under the presidency of its first-ever elected woman, which certainly contributed to the feeling that a “man”/“men” and “masculinity” were not in control, and therefore needed to assert their dominance and hegemony even if that required anti-democratic attempts.

In this context, Bolsonaro's early engagement in sexist commentary and anti-gender/sexual diversity struck a tone with a country that was experiencing the resurgence of a not-so-dormant sexism. Bolsonaro presenting himself as the *ethos* of a decrepit

²⁵ Bolsonaro tem 51% evangélicos, e Lula, 27%, segundo pesquisa Quaest | CNN Brasil, August 2022
<https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/bolsonaro-tem-51-entre-evangelicos-e-lula-27-segundo-pesquisa-quaest/>

Brazilian masculinity also echoed the hegemonic masculinity enacted by the military during the dictatorship years in Brazil. In his calculated presentations, Bolsonaro performs an “average Joe” lifestyle as former military personnel, religious family man, father to five children, and a man deeply-concerned about the country’s morality. His entire persona is built on the emulation of whatever he considers proper for a “man” to do and what would gain the acceptance of fellow “men”, walking the thin line of what hegemonic masculinity represents, and hoping that this performance will gain him adepts as an accessible, honest, authentic Brazilian man (a “salt of the earth” type of exhibition). For example, one picture posted to the then-president’s social media showed him eating bread with condensed milk over the table without any plates and serving his own coffee, while sporting a football shirt and shorts in a very casual pose (Figure 1). Again, such displays are strategic and aim to reinforce his connection to the “everyday man”, conducting his own tasks in simple, humble ways and enjoying normative male activities such as football. Furthermore, the fact that he breaks the decorum expected of the person holding the highest office in the country also works in his favour as it makes him one of the “Us”, the organic “People”, unwilling to compromise his simplicity and self-sufficiency in order to appease the political strata by parading on expensive suits or buying ostentatious food. These displays are aligned to the idea of a transparent governance, one that works in favour of these “organic” people without compromising his own “authentic” male identity. Proving that such strategy worked efficiently, Bolsonaro’s unusual snack – bread and condensed milk – became a trend in Brazilian bakeries.²⁶

²⁶ Pão com leite condensado de Jair Bolsonaro é aprovado nas ruas | Extra, November 2018
<https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/pao-com-leite-condensado-de-jair-bolsonaro-aprovado-nas-ruas-23216709.html>



Figure 1 – One of Bolsonaro's successful attempts to present himself as an accessible, "every-day man".

Furthermore, Bolsonaro successfully claimed the “transparency” title by fully admitting to his own incapacity and unfitness. During his 26 years as congressman, he managed to approve only 2 out of 171 projects he presented. In his campaign, he was always proud to demonstrate that he had no real experience in many areas (i.e. economy) and would rely on the expertise of his ministers to lead in said areas.²⁷ Unlike Rousseff before him, Bolsonaro’s perceived ineptitude for office was not rejected, but lauded as anti-systemic, meaning he was on the outside of the structure of power and deceit and could therefore interrupt it. Promising to end the legacy of corruption in Brazil, even when he was implied in many scandals himself,²⁸ he managed to position himself as an outsider, much like Trump did in the U.S. His unfiltered speech appealed to many as he was

²⁷ Bolsonaro não precisa ser expert para ser político | Exame, July 2018

<https://exame.com/colunistas/sergio-praca/bolsonaro-nao-precisa-ser-expert-para-ser-politico/>

²⁸ Relembre os casos de corrupção que assolam o Governo Bolsonaro | Jornalistas Livres, September 2022
<https://jornalistaslivres.org/relembre-os-casos-de-corrupcao-do-governo-bolsonaro/>

perceived as a politician without artifice and strategy, an “average Joe” who was not interested in manipulating the public with false promises, but to restore the country with a long-gone morality that was destroyed by his predecessors. This was made possible by fallacies and simplifications in communication, wherein all who opposed him or were not aligned with his political agenda were “communists”.

Through this mechanism of transparency, Bolsonaro managed to directly oppose himself to the previously perceived “secrecy” instituted by the leftist governance before him, particularly the corruption scandals that broke out during Rousseff’s rule. Her governance and that of her party became attached to this perception of lack of trust, immorality of gains and distribution of bribes, something Bolsonaro capitalized on thoroughly in his campaign. Thus, Bolsonaro’s image and public persona as an “honest man with a mission” were orchestrated to counter Rousseff’s image as a liar, dishonest, morally bankrupt president following her impeachment process, even though no denounces or charges were ever brought against her. The corruption image was stapled onto Dilma as a liability to her government while Bolsonaro’s self-proclaimed transparency worked in his favour.

On the other hand, Bolsonaro’s identity and allegiance to hegemonic masculinities is also intrinsically linked to his passionate defence of unrestricted civilian gun-bearing and the promotion of violence against his opposers. The former president’s pro-gun legislation views (a discourse suspiciously similar to Donald Trump’s), and mostly pro-violence discourse includes statements such as: “Jesus [Christ] did not buy a gun because it was unavailable”,²⁹ and that he would facilitate gun ownership for the “average

²⁹ Bolsonaro diz que Jesus Cristo ‘não comprou pistola porque não tinha’ | UOL Notícias, June 2022
<https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-estado/2022/06/15/bolsonaro-diz-que-jesus-cristo-nao-comprou-pistola-porque-nao-tinha.htm>

citizen”.³⁰ Previous research has linked gun ownership and usage to the outward display of aggressive masculinity. Borgogna et. al (2022) conducted an experiment which showed that men whose masculinity was seen as threatened demonstrated increased interest in owning firearms when in contrast with men whose masculinity was boosted or not impacted. Furthermore, gun violence and gun culture have been shown to be a gendered phenomenon which is mostly performed by men. This proves an escalated performance of masculinity, mostly in acts of suicide, intimate partner violence and mass shootings (Lawrence, 2023).

Lawrence (2023) explored the hero/villain dyad that seems to prevail in these cosmologies of masculinity. The bearing of firearms is directly linked to the fulfilling of a civic duty, wherein one needs to protect their fellow citizens by defeating the “wolves”, in the “wolf/sheep/sheepdog” analogy. “Sheepdogs” are the citizens that dare to arm themselves to fight the violent “wolves”, in contrast to the “sheep” which are defenceless. This sense of duty is heightened by the overall perception that the world is increasingly more dangerous. For example, during the height of the COVID pandemic, gun sales skyrocketed in the US, largely due to the period of fear and uncertainty that followed the spread of the virus. The “protect yourself”, “prove your toughness” discourse feeds a social phenomenon narrated by Iris Marion Young known as the “masculinist protection” (2003). Men are “good” or more valuable when they are willing and able to protect others, which empowers them to use aggression/violence for moral causes (as established by them). Thus, when men arm themselves or commit acts of violence, they are defending their fellow men or even fulfilling a civic duty.

³⁰ ‘Facilitamos para cidadão comum’, diz Bolsonaro sobre mais armas no Brasil | UOL Notícias, August 2022

<https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/08/04/bolsonaro-facilitamos-armas-para-o-cidadao-de-bem.htm>

This also aligns with Bolsonaro and his acolytes' understanding of "good" and "bad", where there is a moral judgement and condemnation of the ones who are on the other side of the political spectrum, as they are essentialized as "communists", lovers of "bandits" and defenders of "corruption". Bolsonaro's followers, on the other hand, see themselves as "good citizens" who are on a moral high ground for refusing to collude with previous (leftist) governments (Kalil, 2018). In fact, accusations made by Bolsonaro and his followers about ideological indoctrination promoted by the previous government and all institutional powers are often stapled to all and any measures toward social advancement (including and specially the promotion of gender diversity) as well as the defence of human rights. This discourse capitalizes on the misunderstanding of what communism actually entails as a political system and what policies are within governments' social democratic attempts to promote tolerance and equality to all. In this way, "communist" became a *catchall* term to define anyone who opposed Bolsonaro's hate rhetoric and did not acquiesce to the recrudescence of traditional values as organic, a strategy so successful that a survey conducted as recently as 2023 found that 52% of Brazilians still believe that Brazil is under threat of a communist takeover,³¹ even though there was never any evidence to support this claim. Furthermore, Bolsonaro himself is known to encourage violence against his supposed "communist" opposers, such as when during one of his rallies in 2018 (during his pre-electoral campaign), Bolsonaro used a camera tripod to emulate a rifle and called out to his followers: "Let's shoot the PT" *Tralhada*

³¹ Datafolha: 52% acham que o Brasil corre risco de virar comunista | Folha, July 2023
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2023/07/datafolha-52-acham-que-brasil-corre-risco-de-virar-comunista.shtml>

[popular derogative name for PT supporters]”³² or when he claimed he would “eradicate communism in Brazil”.³³

Thus, the operative community is born from the establishment of the Us Vs Them, Sheepdog Vs Wolf rhetoric, a phenomenon that turns a group to immanence, to the essentializing of the other and ultimately, to extermination of alterity. This can effectively be assessed in Brazil as cases of political violence – meaning cases in which the only motivation was political affiliation or preference – grew widely following Bolsonaro’s election. According to a survey conducted in 2022,³⁴ up until 2018, one person was a victim of political violence every 8 days in Brazil. From 2019 onwards – the first year of Bolsonaro’s government – episodes of violence were reported every 48 hours. The study analysed the period between September 2nd, 2020 and October 2nd, 2022, where they mapped 523 illustrative cases of political violence. In this period, 54 murders, 109 attempted murders, 151 threats, 94 aggressions and 104 offenses, as well as 5 invasion cases. These appalling numbers are the *de facto* inheritance of Bolsonaro’s rule in Brazil – subjects so fused in community that they would rather embrace self-destruction (meaning the legal repercussions and social ostracism of their actions) than welcome alterity. Also, most of these aggressions were committed by men, probably seeking to enact a violence associated with the performance of hegemonic masculinities.

In line with this “bearing of arms” and violent discourse, Bolsonaro’s constant lauding of the military forces and the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) is

³² Em 2018, Bolsonaro defendeu “fuzilar a petralhada” | VEJA, July 2022

<https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/radar/em-2018-bolsonaro-defendeu-fuzilar-a-petralhada>

³³ Sob gritos de “Fora, Flávio Dino”, Bolsonaro fala em erradicar o comunismo | Congresso em Foco, October 2020

<https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/area/governo/sob-gritos-de-fora-flavio-dino-bolsonaro-fala-em-erradicar-o-comunismo/>

³⁴ Sob Bolsonaro, violência política e eleitoral aumenta | Rede Brasil Atual, October 2022

<https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/politica/sob-bolsonaro-violencia-politica-e-eleitoral-aumenta-400-no-brasil/>

another factor that seems to reaffirm his own manhood and attempt to promote a hegemonic form of masculinity which is deeply intertwined with the performance of military power. The former president has gone on record to defend the military dictatorship several times, once stating that should Brazil not have gone through that period of austerity, it would have become “banana republic”,³⁵ as well as defending the torture practiced by the military during this time, as previously stated.

Higate & Hopton (in Kimmel et. al, 2005) posited that military service provides men with resources to build a masculine identity that is characterized by emotional control, overt heterosexual displays, the cult of physical fitness, self-discipline, self-reliance, the intent or willingness to engage in violence (verbal or physical) and to take risks. These perceived qualities are also in alignment with the ideals of hegemonic masculinities, which are available to be acquired by the military institution through military training and service (i.e., reliable, steady paycheck and demanding physical training). According to Connel “hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power” (1995: 77). Thus, the military power provides men with the tools to claim and perform hegemonic masculinity through an institutional apparatus, a past that granted Bolsonaro the role of Captain and imbued him with a perceived authority as part of this established power, which further reaffirmed his male alliances and allegiance.

Lastly, Bolsonaro constantly attempts to reaffirm his own virility and manhood through foul, oversexualized language. He constantly refers to his sexual prowess, such as at a rally in September 2022, when he claimed to be “unflappable”, a reaffirmation of an earlier statement where he claimed to be “never limp, undying, and unfuckable

³⁵ Bolsonaro, sobre o golpe de 1964: Sem ditadura, ‘seríamos uma republiqueta’ | UOL Notícias, March 2022
<https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/03/31/bolsonaro-obras-ditadura-militar.htm>

[sic.]”.³⁶ He also celebrated himself for producing 4 male heirs, then went on to lament that on his 5th child, he “weakened, and a girl was born”,³⁷ in a statement implying that women are worth less as progeny than men, and again ratifying his allegiance to hegemonic masculinities. Contrary to his undermining of women, however, Bolsonaro was always extremely admiring and even loving to other males who enacted a similar masculinity performance as his, such as when he declared himself to Donald Trump during the United Nations general assembly in 2019, saying that he “loved” the former American president, to which Trump replied “nice to see you again”.³⁸ This remains one of the few times that the word “love” ever appeared in Bolsonaro’s public vernacular, and very interestingly aimed at a man he sought to emulate several times, as Bolsonaro was lauded a “tropical Trump”³⁹ many times over. This “love” for another (similar) man is a representative of Bolsonaro’s engagement with homosociality, that is, the personal preference to socialize with other (cis, straight, white) males, as well as reserving and showing love and affection only towards another male, albeit not in a romantic way, which is shown over and over again by Bolsonaro’s demining of women and propping up of men.

Therefore, through all angles, Bolsonaro embodies the deeply-imbued sexism that shows itself through religious and military sentiment, crude language toward women and the LGBTQIA+ population, and (cis, straight, white) male/male alliances, prioritizing

³⁶ ‘Nunca fraqueja’ e ‘viril’: veja como a imprensa traduziu estrangeira traduziu ‘imbrochável’ | Terra, September 2022

<https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/mundo/nunca-fraqueja-e-viril-veja-como-imprensa-estrangeira-traduziu-imbrochavel,4a4c882a1c4d3d78d79121eda34ba21co99tz6nl.html>

³⁷ Para Jair Bolsonaro, só nasce uma mulher quando o homem fraqueja! | VEJA, April 2017

<https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/reinaldo/para-jair-bolsonaro-so-nasce-uma-mulher-quando-o-homem-fraqueja>

³⁸ Bolsonaro diz “I love you” para Trump mas não recebe “te amo” de volta | IG, September 2019

<https://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/mundo/2019-09-25/bolsonaro-diz-i-love-you-pra-trump-mas-nao-recebe-te-amo-de-volta.html>

³⁹ ‘Tropical Trump’ takes Brazil’s democracy to the brink | Washington Post, September 2022

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/30/bolsonaro-trump-brazil-election-democracy/>

homosociality as the *status quo*. His commentaries, alongside his unfiltered *macho* gun-bearing, god-fearing, military *persona* resonated with an electorate that was reeling from the turmoil of Rousseff's impeachment and highly-engaged in misogynistic discourse and propaganda, particularly online. As previously stated, hegemonic masculinity does not encompass one single identity, but outlines the mostly intangible profile of what it *truly* means to be and act like a man, with most falling short of this ideal. In Brazil, the male electorate that responded to Bolsonaro's misogynistic and homophobic profile are anything but homogeneous. Kalil (2018) listed and profiled the groups that had chosen to elect Bolsonaro through a sample analysis. From the male groups, three main characters prevailed: the "family man", the "macho man", and the "nerds".

The "family man" is part of a larger group of people (that also includes women) that believe themselves to be moral beacons in society, what is called in Brazil "cidadão de bem" (the "good citizen"), meaning they are mostly middle-class workers that are not involved in any illicit activity (at least outwardly) and are mostly white, religious, law-abiding, tax-paying "family men". It is also used to distinguish themselves from people that vote for the leftist political spectrums, which to them is invariably linked to supporting corruption. This group believes there should be a strengthening of institutional powers to bring more corrupt, non-law-abiding people to justice, as they regard Brazil legal system and its procedures flawed and insufficient. Some in this group even hold a return to the repression of the dictatorship years as a positive thing, as they understand Brazil as land where impunity is the rule – which can apply to all dissidents, from low-level street-criminals and narcotraffickers to corrupt politicians. Bolsonaro's efforts to appear transparent is something that deeply resonated with this group, who believes that because Bolsonaro speaks unrestrictedly, without artifice; he represents a "transparent"

politician that does not engage in corruption and cannot be bought through immoral political practices.

The second type is the “*macho* man”. This group greatly resembles the “family man” figure, with the exception that they believe “justice” should be carried out by citizens themselves, not by institutions. This profile is more common among men between from 20 to 35 years and that enact masculinity based on the performance of “virility”. They echo Trump’s electorate in the USA in their claims for Brazil to be a gun-bearing nation which favours individual “solutions” to crime and impunity. They also defend the use of arms as a personal way to defend themselves against a possible “communist dictatorship” or any type of leftist authoritarian government. Their motto is “a good bandit is a dead bandit”. Bolsonaro’s discourse, which interpellates with their understanding of proper (even violent and deadly) punishment being afforded to wrongdoers, greatly appeals to them.

Lastly, the third type was labelled by Kalil (2018) “nerds, gamers, hackers and haters”. According to the author, the profile of the individuals in this group might or might not be intertwined with the virile masculinity type. This group is comprised mostly by conservative men between 16 to 34 years old that interact on restricted chat forums, online games, and commentaries on *pop culture* websites. On these mediums, they promote hate speech about characters stemming from the entertainment world (games, comics and movies), specifically regarding material that includes or promotes gender diversity, LGBTQIA+ groups and storylines, and women in prominent roles. This group’s mobilization for Bolsonaro would prove to be decisive for his win in the 2018 elections as their widespread creation and promotion of online *memes* lauding Bolsonaro fomented the imagery around him as the “Myth”, the one saviour capable of bringing the Brazilian moral, economic, political and societal crisis to an end.

3.3. The Construction of the “Myth”: The Role of Social Media in Promoting Masculinity Niches in Brazil

Worldwide, feeding and strengthening the ‘manosphere’ (online niches where men are free to engage with hegemonic masculinities) has been a sure way to enlist adepts to the far-right’s cause (Farell et. al, 2019). Dignam & Rohlinger (2019) explained how Donald Trump’s electoral campaign was boosted by the engagement of misogynistic groups online. These groups, such as the *incels* (involuntary celibates) and *Red Pill* followers attempt to “reclaim” masculinity and believe feminism to be their biggest antagonist in this struggle. Their understanding of reality is that masculinity is at risk of being extinguished due to a supposed feminist oppression, as women are gaining space in prominent spaces that were previously male-dominated. These groups were offered a solution to their “woman” problem by the American alt-right. Represented by white supremacists such as Richard Spencer, this far-right project has self-proclaimed Nazis and sympathizers in their midst, and they seek to restore traditional conservatism everywhere, building a male-centred white state. Echoing the claims of online groups, these groups defend that the man’s position in the Western world is threatened by the rule of feminism, leftist policies and political correctness. According to them, gender theory and feminism have bent the world to their will, distorting binary perceptions of “natural” gender and emasculating men. In their perspective, men are not the perpetrators and beneficiaries of gender violence and sexism, respectively, but the victims of a newly-formed system that aims to oppress them.

Dignam and Rohlinger (2019) narrate how the alt-right speech managed to co-opt the online groups directed toward reclaiming masculinity. At first, these groups were not engaged politically, but simply limited themselves to spew hate rhetoric online, in anonymous forums messages. According to the authors, it is very likely that the behaviour

enacted by these men online and the opinions expressed by them on the safe environment of the forum did not reflect their real-life persona nor did it taint their perception of politics or influence their votes in any way up until 2016. The authors highlight that throughout this year, the forum participants started to rally politically around the candidacy of Donald Trump, as they elected Trump as a figure untouched by the necessity of “political correctness”, being free to fully enact his “masculinity” or be an “alpha-male”, as they call it. Being an “alpha-male”, of course, means to have a lot of money and possessions, speak about women derogatively and unabashedly, and have attracted upon himself the scrutiny of the free press and particularly that of “cancel culture”, which they consider a badge of honour as that is supposedly an anti-systemic act. Even the charges against Trump due to sexual harassment were treated as either one more reason to vote for him or as fake reports planted by the “forces” colluding to stop him. Those who did not identify with Trump’s candidacy were immediately ostracized from the groups and labelled traitors.

The fact that Trump’s discourse and the alt-right rhetoric managed to mobilize these groups solely based on their anti-gender positioning and Trump’s performance of a flailing masculinity demonstrate just how certain male demographics are willing to engage with the over-the-top performances of hegemonic masculinity and through it base their political decisions and affiliations, as if being a man was intrinsically linked to demonstrating efficacy, strength and power when achieving positions of authority. Certainly, the likes of *incels* or *redpill* followers are more extreme cases of groups where misogyny runs rampant, but that does not mean that other men who identify with that type of masculinity (either through enacting it themselves or seeking to) are immune to this type of male engagement.

In Brazil, radicalized groups in the “manosphere” were the main groups responsible for propagating Bolsonaro’s image in his pre-campaign period – what contributed significantly to his popularity. They hailed Bolsonaro a “myth” through building the online semiotics of a man unafraid of the “politically correct” tribunal, who was willing to fight back against the new “imposed” ways of being that were brought about by the new gender politics. This meant the creation of *memes* online that had the objective of co-opting more followers through humour and accessible language, as well as the dissemination of hatred online, on forum posts, commentary sections, etc. Zanello et. al (2023) surveyed social media and analysed *memes* from Bolsonaro’s followers. They examined 56 memes that manipulated viewers’ emotions through content related to masculinity. The authors identified that, in general, the memes were centred on the construction of negative stereotypes and attacked the masculinity of men in the leftist-spectrum. One theme that was recurrent related to homophobia, and painted all leftist men as gay and “not real men”. The other theme present was emasculation, in which the masculinity of leftist men was portrayed as “penetrable” (not just physically, but emotionally, which echoes Bolsonaro’s own calls of being “unfuckable” himself). These men’s masculinity was represented as a risk to society for being emasculated and weak. These memes reinforced the logics of hegemonic masculinity, and clearly set a line between “us/bolsonaristas/real men” and “they/leftist/emasculated”.

This community’s association with Bolsonaro escalated to launching an online game named “Bolsomito 2k18” on October 5th, 2018, on the evening of the first round of elections that year as narrated by Gomes et. al (2018). In this game, players control *Bolsomito*, a “good citizen” that is “tired of living in a society corrupted by his enemies”, who then undertakes a “great journey” to destroy the “Red Army”. The game is composed by stages where Bolsomito has to annihilate his antagonists, wherein each stage

represents a different enemy who composes the Red Army. In one of the stages, Bolsomito is expected to fight the feminists (represented as women with masculinized names, dyed hair and exposed bellies and breasts) who are trying to legalize abortion. In another chapter, Bolsomito has to fight the LGBT community who seek to destroy the “traditional family”. Throughout the game, the character of Bolsomito uses varied types of violence to vanquish his enemies (Gomes et. al, 2018). The launching of this game seems to have been the apex of Bolsonaro’s consecration as a “myth” by a reinvigorated masculinity in Brazil, which was promulgated online. It fully showcased the viciousness of Bolsonaro’s campaign which so far, had been more discernible at a discourse level. Bolsonaro had talked about “killing communists” and “vagabonds”, but this game saw him represented as a virile hero who fully enacted different levels of violence against his antagonists, which was a perfect encapsulation of Brazilian’s recrudescant masculinity at that point, as well as what he meant to the public that chose to elect him later the same month.

As can be seen, online engagement was absolutely essential to solidify Bolsonaro’s image as a virile hero able to “save” a country in a masculinity crisis. This reverberates with what Lawrence (2023) elaborated on masculinities’ election and hailing of “heroes” and “villains”, which are potentialized in times of crisis such as the COVID pandemic or the political crisis that preceded his candidacy. In 2022, even after his mishandling of the COVID crisis through his government – which saw more than 700,000 Brazilian dead as a direct result of his negligence in acquiring vaccines – Bolsonaro was still the most popular candidate online for the elections that year.⁴⁰ Earlier this year, research showed that social media is more likely to favour populist campaigns such as

⁴⁰ Popularidade digital: Bolsonaro lidera ranking | Folha de São Paulo, June 2022
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2022/06/bolsonaro-lidera-ranking-de-popularidade-digital-lula-cai-ao-contrair-covid-e-ciro-sobe.shtml>

Bolsonaro's.⁴¹ The internet's engagement with imagery and flamboyance enacted through the transparency mechanism might explain the political preferences that emerge from it.

Indeed, Bolsonaro's public relations were consistently incendiary online, aiming at creating controversy, fomenting hatred, and mobilizing his acolytes through hate mongering. Through methods first developed and applied by Steve Bannon in the American context, such as fast-spreading fake news and fire hosing (Azevedo Jr., 2021), Bolsonaro managed to hijack the political narrative and further entrench pre-existing prejudices, founded on orchestrating panic and fomenting misinformation regarding topics such as sex education at schools and the use of gender pronouns, to name a few (Guazina et. al, 2021). In this context, Empoli (2019) states that Bolsonaro's campaign and government represent a new age of "digital populism", which unites traditional populism and the power of algorithms to use as a political weapon. Populist governments use the algorithms to identify patterns of interaction and the affects in evidence to produce the most engaging publication or commentary online. For example, they can publish messages that reinforce the opposition between the organic "people" and the rulers, if the former are already particularly unsatisfied with the latter, stirring their passions, inflaming their fears and agitating them politically. According to the author, populist campaigns thus manage to promote the union of radicalized individuals and the convergence of their conservative ideals, creating communities of affect online, which greatly dialogues with what Nancy (1991) proposed as operative communities. Bolsonaro's online engagement was essential to monopolize the internal discourse of these groups through the bombarding of fake news and misinformation, which worked to discredit opposing sources (even traditional media vehicles) and prevent exterior communication which

⁴¹ Redes favorecem radicalismo de Bolsonaro, diz pesquisador | Folha de São Paulo, Abril 2023
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2023/04/redes-sociais-sao-feitas-para-favorecer-radicalismo-de-bolsonaro-diz-pesquisador.shtml>

might fragment the community. This creates an “unleashing of passions”, that being, the relishing of sameness, and creation of an enemy, an antagonist force that works to destroy all commonly shared values by the operative community.

Thus, the use of online and media tools to create widespread hysteria regarding a supposed political agenda to promote “gender ideology” allowed Bolsonaro to come into prominence as a spokesperson for Brazilian conservative values. This enabled a deeply conservative society based on Christian fundamentalist principles and dormant sexism to fall trap to moral panics and identify with him as a supposed ‘defender’ of their conservative beliefs, electing him as a male representant which was bound to save the country from the moral crisis which had befallen it. This allowed for an escalation of this supposed ideological war, which needed to be fought by conservative forces in all corners, from the political field to the entertainment industry. Although not all of Bolsonaro’s electors believed his absurd claims about gender or were aligned entirely with his hate rhetoric, it is still the “ideological” aspect of his candidacy that enabled him to gain the favour of many that identified with the reinvigorating conservative values that were thought to be gone at the end of the military dictatorship – the patriarchal rule, the nuclear family, which were preserved by an authoritarian government that normalized binary gender identities and roles. Particularly, the engagement of hegemonic masculinities with the recrudescence of these values proved widely successful in creating a community of affects online.

Finally, assuring the engagement of the “manosphere” proved essential to construct Bolsonaro’s image as the “myth”, a man who displayed a type of traditional masculinity (linked to other traditional institutions, such as the Church and the military) that could save the country from the crisis deflagrated by the mishandling of a deceitful woman and the dissolution of the paternalistic model enacted by his predecessors. This

image could only be manufactured through online engagement, where communication is simplified and consensus fabricated. On the *manosphere*, Bolsonaro could create bonds stemming through the fear rising from the threat posed to hegemonic masculinities and to the social order as it is known by new developments in feminism and queer theory and by the presence of Rousseff, a woman, holding power during a turbulent economical time in the world. This enabled him to recrudescence particular values to clearly delimitate an “us” versus “them” politics and deflagrate a culture war in the country, which enabled the formation of an operative community as posited by Nancy (1991), which does not suffer alterity and ostracizes all “others”. Thus, the results demonstrated next show that these community bonds were formed online during the height of the Brazilian crisis, in 2016, when the reality of the fraught social tissue led to unprecedented political fear when potentialized by misogyny, which eventually escalated to the full regression to traditional hegemonic masculinity’s values. The entrenching of such values, by enabling male communion and the formation of an operative community, enabled the ascension of the far-right into power.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Post 1

Post 1 (dated from October 2015) referred to the question posed at the National Exam for university admission, promoted by the Education Ministry. 27 codes were identified in this publication and can be seen in Table 1, including Aggressive Commentaries, Bolsonaro and the Military, Bolsonaro President, Brazilian Crisis, Calling Bolsonaro Myth, Community Formation (with sub-codes Us Vs Them and Sameness), Compulsory Gender Ideology, Criticizing the Brazilian Government (with sub-codes Secrecy and Lies), Disgust, Fake News, Gun-bearing Discourse, Homophobia, Ideology Accusations, Insults to Dilma Rousseff, Masculinity, Misogyny, Preserving the Brazilian Family, Protecting Brazilian Children, Rejection to Gender Diversity, Religious Commentary, Savior Rhetoric, The Military, Transparency and Violence (Table 1).

Table 1 - Codes identified for Post 1.

Codes	References
Aggressive Commentaries	27
Bolsonaro and the Military	8
Bolsonaro President	55
Brazilian Crisis	56
Calling Bolsonaro Myth	16
Community Formation	51
Sameness	2
Us Vs Them	12
Compulsory Gender Ideology	29
Criticizing the Government	77
Secrecy and Lies	7
Disgust	114
Fake News	7
Gun-bearing Discourse	2

Homophobia	24
Ideology Accusations (General)	108
Insults to Dilma Rousseff	13
Masculinity	24
Misogyny	15
Preserving the Brazilian Family	13
Protecting Brazilian Children	28
Rejection to Gender Diversity	72
Religious Commentary	29
Savior Rhetoric (Bolsonaro)	23
The Military	24
Transparency	3
Violence	22

The commentaries in this publication referred mostly to accusations of ideological manipulation by the government and expressions of disgust over the question asked on the National Exam. There was a recurring theme of accusing the government of Dilma Rousseff and her party (Partido dos Trabalhadores), of using the exam to promote a compulsory “gender ideology” and “force it down” Brazilians’ “throats”. 108 commentaries generally linked the presence of the question to ideological indoctrination, while 29 specifically referenced a compulsory “gender ideology” being promoted by the government. One user wrote “we are, unfortunately surrounded by these minds, with halter ideologies. It is a hard change to those who want to make this country different, but I am ready to support anyone who has enough ‘manhood’ for it”, an interesting commentary as it highlights the connection to manhood as an attempt to halt the progress of these supposed ideologies. Other commentaries seemed to misunderstand PT’s ideological stances, purposefully or not, by calling them Nazis and linking the struggle for gender diversity to satanic endeavours: “This band of Nazi, anti-Christ satanists, besides wanting to change Brazilians’ people Christian values, now make us the ‘bad wolf’ in History.” Another user went as far as to describe the question as “a crime against

the country. Treason, ideological attempt to our youngsters, terrorism, being even graver still for coming from a federal institution, which criminally reaches the youth with dishonesty when they hope to be in ‘good hands’.” Linking gender diversity to Nazism and satanic practice shows just how religious and moralistic concepts rule Bolsonaro’s followers’ perception of reality. Defying these “authentic precepts” is understood as an ideological pursuit instead of tolerance and acceptance, and the “good hands” of Rousseff’s image as Mother to the nation is broken repeatedly by her governments’ efforts to promote gender and sexual plurality.

This feeling of compulsory ideology was reinforced by a general feeling of disbelief and disgust over the presence of the question in the test altogether. 114 commentaries were categorized as “Disgust” to describe the tone of the remarks. References read “What absurdity! This is against nature, there has always been male and female, man and woman, ever since the world exists and now PT wants to change this [...]”. Another user said:

It’s an aberration. Unfortunately, this disgrace is taking over Brazil. Many young people can no longer resist the ideological trash because they have been suffering irreversible cerebral damage, so I can only lament. The utmost aberration is the propagandists and idiots who see the acceptance of this disgrace as society ‘advancing’. Only if it is advancing towards the end of humanity! (Commentary on Facebook Post 1)

It is clear that the thought of the youth embracing gender diversity and binary identities is considered a threat to the rule of the gender binary, and consecutively, to hegemonic masculinities. The fatalist tone which claims the advance of gender and queer theory might bring about the end of humanity highlights not only this threat, but the fragility of this group’s cosmovision: betraying their precepts of what is authentic, and organic is equated to the end of humanity itself. Associated to this type of commentary which denounced an ongoing ideological manipulation were many aggressive commentaries which made use of foul language to refer to what the public seems to perceive as the

absurdity of gender theory. One reference read “This bunch of [PT supporters], vagabonds, bandits. Your end is near”, while another states “Let’s end the villainy of these filthy bastards”.

Furthermore, a lot of these remarks referred to PT’s administration, a few of them highlighting the participation of Dilma Rousseff negatively. A few of the commentaries referred to the government’s agenda in promoting gender diversity as forceful and unwelcome: “Ridiculous posture by this pathetic government. To respect diversity is one thing, but to make it a rule is a bit much”. Another user assumed a violent, even murderous intent towards the government, stating “This government should be exterminated from power, even if through their pain and death and that of those who support them”. The 13 instances when Rousseff was brought up were accentuated by misogynistic hatred towards her or described her as a totalitarian leader. Many of these commentaries make up the Misogyny category as well (accompanied by insults towards Simone de Beauvoir). References read “What to expect from a failed socialist government? The last whimpers are always the noisiest. We are listening to the last whimpers of the former PT government. The bitch [sic.] cries in Brasília”, in reference to then-president Rousseff in the Brazilian capital. Other commentaries stated “dumbing country that disgracefully has an intellectual nullity as president”, “your president is a dyke [sic.]”, and “how to expel a dictator to Cuba?”, hoping to attack her intellect, her (supposed) sexual preferences and her ideological allegiances, respectively. Particularly referring to her as a “dyke” seeks to link her promotion of gender plurality and sexuality to her own sexual preferences, as if Rousseff was forcing an agenda of her own interest, despite Rousseff declaring herself a straight woman.

Post 1 preceded the acceptance of the impeachment process by the National Congress, and it is possible to notice the misogynistic storm that had been brewing in the

country up to that point, and that would gain even more intense contours by the end of 2015 and early 2016, when the impeachment process was made a reality. 7 of these commentaries were sub-categorized “Secrecy and Lies” as they referred to the corruption scandals and allegations PT had been facing, with one remark going as far as saying that the debate over gender was “one of the ways PT has found to alienate the Brazilian youth, while the student is concerned about sexual options, they forget about the real social problems and corruption that consume Brazil, as a plague that destroys and consumes everything this country produces”.

Furthermore, 72 commentaries were highlighted as particularly rejecting gender diversity and by extension, gender theory, given the nature of Simone de Beauvoir’s quote and her own fame as a pioneer in the feminist movement. These commentaries were oftentimes intolerant to different gender expressions and saw it as unnatural and a defiance of biology altogether. Commentaries read: “Bullocks. What defines male and female is the type of sexual organ at birth. The rest is just the rest.”; “Before the aforementioned affirmations one can conclude that biology is an invention of the conservative homophobic right and genetics and X/Y chromosomes do not exist. This is the great Brazilian ‘discovery’ for humanity [laughter emoji]. Bolsomyth [sic.] save our country”; “We are with you Bolsonaro, keep defending the Brazilian family. God made men and woman, the rest is all talk”. Commentators also misunderstood the rest of Beauvoir’s quote that reads “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine”, with replies such as “What type of shit [sic.] question is this? Castrated males are women? Are there only transvestites in the world?”. Furthermore, a great deal of commentaries also seems to confuse gender identity and sexual orientation, with many

asserting that biology was put into question for gender identity but used as an argument when it comes to sexual orientation: “Interesting that man is not born man, woman is not born woman, but gay is born gay. What kind of logic is this?”.

Keeping in this line, 24 commentaries were also explicitly homophobic and used derogatory curse words to refer to homosexual people, even though the question was not approaching the topic of homosexuality or even sexuality at all. Commentaries read: “A way to impose and develop ACQUIRED GAYNESS [sic.], introducing in these people’s head, mostly teenagers that take the ENEM exam. How can someone not be born man or woman? A sex question? Or a moral question?”; “No, they are born fags [sic.] and lesbians, with vaginas and penises [laughter] [...] crazy people, they should disappear”; “Translating: think like a faggot [sic.] if you want to pass the ENEM exam”; and “These bastards’ dream is that all men use their excretory organ to feel pleasure”. There is a sense in these commentaries that being homosexual precludes being a man, and that identifying as such in terms of sexual preference impacts directly upon gender identity and performance, as the reference read “they are born fags with penises”. The failure to comply with compulsory heterosexuality betrays the precepts set by hegemonic masculinities, which means a failure to be a “man”. Furthermore, the violence implied in which “Them”, who deviate from “Us” in gender identity and/or sexual preference should disappear for not participating in the group’s communion of sameness.

Associated to these moral panic topics, 56 commentaries also dealt with a perceived crisis that had befallen Brazil, but most of the remarks perceived a moral crisis instead of an economic or political one. This theme was particularly intertwined with the need to preserve the Brazilian family (13 commentaries) and protecting the Brazilian children (28 commentaries) from this supposed ideological indoctrination and forced gender discourse. References read: “They want to end family and gender. Make the

population a slave to the regime. [...] Perfect totalitarianism.”; “Besides filling our children’s heads with bullocks, they say ‘look, you can be a gay [sic.] and that’s normal’ and:

I am tired of such manipulation in our lives. I am very concerned about my children’s learning [...] sometimes my eldest son who’s only 13 years old says horrible things about what his teachers do. Badly-paid and unprepared teachers who want to fill our children’s heads with absurd things. I consider you a friend, Jair Bolsonaro, for defending the causes that interest my family and my children’s future. [...] we’ll keep being faithful to you. (Commentary on Facebook Post 1).

The element of a moral crisis is deeply intertwined with the economic, political, and even religious turmoil that the country went through in the past 10 years, but it makes itself much more visible when it comes to the gender debate, as the perception of Bolsonaro’s followers was that Brazil is riddled with debauchery and subversion of traditional values, which are highlighted as being impactful to innocent children. The fallacy promoted by Bolsonaro was that the government promoting tolerance and equality for gender plurality and diversity equalled a forceful totalitarian ideology that is corrupting the youth, a belief that that sent his followers downwards into a moral crisis, led by a feeling of impotence and fear over what alterity means – usually understood as abnormality.

Subsequently, 24 commentaries also advocate for a recrudescant hegemonic masculinity which seems to be a response to the coming of such expansion of such abnormality and the uncertainty felt during a crisis time. One commentary read “[...] unfortunately today it is wrong to be straight, white, honest, and a non-drug user. Conversely, we are the delinquents”; and “if my son is born with a 17 cm penis, he will not be an alpha male? Go to hell leftists.”. One reference read “one of the few things I am proud about myself is being a man. I am screwed, not even that?”, making it clear how the claim of manhood is valuable and how even the mere discussion of gender roles supposedly threatened that identification, when in fact Beauvoir’s quote – at least the one

in the question's prompt - does not question masculinity at any point. Regarding this claim to masculinity, Bolsonaro's figure emerges as a possible saviour, as 23 commentaries refer to his potential as the male figure to bring the country out of this moral predicament. One reference read "Captain Bolsonaro, pride of the nation of good citizens! [...] Myth of myths", while other repeatedly said "Leader, leader, leader [...] rule over us". The use of the title of Captain to refer to Bolsonaro is linked to his military career, a rank he is no longer entitled to as he was expelled from the institution. However, as it will be verified throughout the commentaries, his supporters refer to him repeatedly as Captain, seemingly in an attempt to reaffirm his authority as a saviour to a demoralized country, as well as revelling on the nostalgia of the military dictatorship period.

Some compared Bolsonaro potential as a saviour to Dilma's destruction in a possible future government: "Jair Messias Bolsonaro, you should become the president of Brazil and return this country to its due place as a 1st World country... a privilege Dilma has taken from us. I bet millions of Brazilians would support you"; "Unfortunately, the lack of culture by a great part of the Brazilian population made this corrupt bunch rule this great country, but I know God will rise a man to rule over this country with an iron fist against the corruption and violence that spread in this country". The latter commentary which describes a "a man with an iron fist" truly demonstrates what expectations were associated with Bolsonaro's rule, that a strong, virile, authoritarian man could perform said traits towards fixing the moral problems that afflicted the country, as opposed to the rule of a woman, which had triggered the problem in the first place. The religious connotations of Bolsonaro's image as a messiah are also further assessed here by the idea that "God will rise a *man*". Furthermore, a particularly interesting commentary seem to resonate with Lawrence's dyad of hero/villain in masculinity, stating "the U.S. has their super-hero, Captain America... it's time we had our own, Captain

Brazil!”, attached to a photoshopped image that showed Bolsonaro as a super-hero (Figure 3). Linking Bolsonaro to a patriotic hero image further demonstrates how intrinsic concepts such as masculinity still are to the Brazilian collective psyche, as the hero imagery shown here elects a supposedly powerful, awe-inducing, incorruptible male to save not just individuals, but an entire nation through the performance of manhood.



Figure 3 - Photoshopped image that reimagines Bolsonaro as a Brazilian super-hero; the Brazilian colours and flag are superimposed by the saying “Bolsonaro President: Honour and Country”.

Within these commentaries regarding crisis and recrudescence masculinity, 8 commentaries also delved into Bolsonaro’s former connection with the Military forces, by referring to him constantly as “Captain”, such as one reference which read: “We need to change the country right now... otherwise it will be too late. Help us, Captain!”. 8 others asked for direct intervention by the military in the country as a way to stop the spread of the perceived ideological forces in motion: “I hope militarism returns in this

country to end this idiotic imposition; a country that claims to be Christian cannot accept said things”; “They ended my country. Only the armed forces can save Brazil! No one can take it anymore!”. There is thus, the presence of a direct link (conscious or not) between manhood and morality to the military as opposed to the perceived depravity of gender diversity, promoted by the government. Perhaps a single man alone would not be sufficient to halt the spread of these “ideological machinations”, being that an army of men is needed with the intent of “cleaning and purifying the country”, as another reference reads.

This search for a saviour leads to a recurring theme that is present in Posts 1 and 2 as well, which many supporters already envisioning Bolsonaro as President as far back as 2015, years before Bolsonaro made his campaign official. 55 commentaries ask for Bolsonaro to become a candidate or outright refer to him as president. 16 posts also refer to Bolsonaro as Myth, a theme that is deeply attached to his performance of masculinity and supposed subversion to the compulsory ideologies being promoted by PT. This alias is often bestowed upon Bolsonaro when he makes remarks such as this, aimed at reinforcing his allegiance to hegemonic masculinities through misogyny and attacks to sexuality and gender diversity, reflecting the incipient community growing around his figure. References read: “I am ashamed of this country, but I hope tomorrow’s Brazil will have the Myth on the presidency” and “Myth, we count on you to take down this horde that has taken over the Federal District”.

Electing Bolsonaro as the saviour of a lost masculinity that would restore the country to a supposed glory was the first step to guarantee a cohesive community, one that is ideologically aligned to the principles of manhood and preoccupied with the maintenance of gender identities and roles. For the category Community Formation, vernacular which showed bonds of communion such as pronouns “We”, “Us”, “Our” or

“They”, “Them”, “Theirs” and references to “good/moral/honest citizens”, as well as calls for the “Brazilian people” (without ever identifying who this category “people” encompasses and what is the criteria to be part of it) were selected to identify the formation of a community that Bolsonaro would continuously count on as an electoral base and faithful army throughout his years in the presidency. 51 references were identified, which included: “We need a united people to remove this bunch from power, they are really diabolical rats, seeking to contaminate and confound the human mind”; “Damn PT supporters, I am disgusted by this race [sic.]”; “Worse than this horrible PT are the people that support this nastiness”; “Every Christian must separate from these bastards that want to destroy the entire nation”; “These are the gay activist shitheads [sic.] with PT wanting to destroy society.”. This type of commentary reflects the nature of the Us vs Them opposition which was facilitated by the anti-gender rhetoric promoted by Bolsonaro, which reinforced the bonds of masculinity that enabled the detection of an early community formation as far as 2015. Calling PT supporters a different “race”, “diabolical rats”, and so forth, all work toward dehumanizing any alterity to the cosmovision proposed by Bolsonaro’s supporters, allowing for their ostracizing and potential destruction.

This Us vs Them rhetoric was also escalated to a violent discourse which shows the severity of the polarization brought about by the communal bond entrenched in masculinity. Discourse that promised violence or even the threat of war against the supposed ideological forces in action was present in 22 commentaries: “Only a war would be capable to destroy these monsters”; “It disgusts me to leave the house... only thinking that I can run into some idiotic PT militant wanting to impose certain things, I will beat them up”; “we should eliminate PT and their allies with bullets”; “This alone justifies a power takeover by force and the public execution of the leaders of this regime”. Another

commentary goes as far as saying they “miss DOI-CODI”, the military facilities where opposers to the dictatorial regime were kept, tortured and killed.

4.1.2. Post 2

Post 2 (dated from January 2016) referred to the post denouncing Dilma Rousseff and her former husband for supposed crimes they committed during the military dictatorship and proven to be untrue. 28 categories were identified, which included: Bolsonaro President, Bolsonaro’s Military Past, Calling Bolsonaro Myth, Savior Rhetoric, Subversive Bolsonaro (all included in major category Bolsonaro), Brazilian Crisis, Community Formation (including subcategories Sameness and Us Vs Them), Dilma & Corruption (Secrecy), Dilma’s Militant Past, Insults toward Dilma, Punishment for Dilma (all included in major category Dilma Rousseff), Dilma Vs Bolsonaro, Gun-bearing Discourse, Homophobia, Ideological Accusations, Masculinity, Misogyny (including subcategory Violence Against Women), Preserving the Brazilian Family, Religious Commentary, The Military, Transparency (including subcategory Honest Bolsonaro), and Violence.

Table 2 - Codes identified for Post 2.

Codes	References
Bolsonaro	158
Bolsonaro President	108
Bolsonaro's Military Past	8
Calling Bolsonaro Myth	16
Savior Rhetoric	41
Subversive Bolsonaro	5
Brazilian Crisis	54
Community Formation	78
Sameness	7
Us Vs Them	36
Dilma Rousseff	323
Dilma & Corruption (Secrecy)	63

Dilma's Militant Past	170
Insults toward Dilma	83
Punishment for Dilma	27
Dilma Vs Bolsonaro	9
Gun-bearing Discourse	2
Homophobia	4
Ideology Accusations (General)	14
Masculinity	29
Misogyny	43
Violence Against Women	14
Preserving the Brazilian Family	8
Religious Commentary	16
The Military	40
Transparency	23
Honest Bolsonaro	13
Violence	18

Given the nature of the publication, most of the commentaries in Post 2 refer negatively to Rousseff's past as a militant acting against the military dictatorship. These 170 commentaries perceive her activities in the 70s as terrorism and not as a struggle against an authoritarian government. The supposed crimes she is charged with by the publication are deemed unjustifiable by the authors and considered a stain on her past that make her unfit for office, not an accomplishment she should be proud of. References read: "Bandit! Enemy of the nation!" and "I just hope that from now on the Brazilian people will learn how to better choose their candidate. I know that many times we choose wrong, thinking it is right, but voting on a former bank robber is like handing the henhouse for the fox to look after". Some commentaries describe disbelief that a woman with her history could have achieved the presidency: "This woman is worse than we knew! Only in Brazil could people like this reach the presidency! Bolsonaro urgently to try and salvage whatever's left", while another user wrote "How could a person like this become President? Only in Brazil... this demoralized Zone, Lawless land" [sic.]. Other

commentaries even accuse her of purposefully sabotaging the country in an attempt to take revenge for the torture she endured during the military dictatorship, and someone with no control over her emotions, an accusation typically used against women in power: “She is revengeful, she came to punish us for what they did to her, she tries by any means to dismantle the stability of the country, and she is nearly succeeding [...]”; “We need to divulge this so that everyone knows that this woman hates Brazil. She wants to end our Nation. A person with grave emotional problems. Something needs to be done”; “[...] she has always been a bandit and always will be. [...] Everything this woman can do to sack Brazil and enslave the people to keep herself in power, she will do. From now on, there will be only evils against the nation. She has always been a criminal. I hate this woman”. It is important to highlight that these misogynistic attacks extrapolate pure political hatred to attack Rousseff’s personal intentions and feelings, not her governmental plan.

Furthermore, 83 of the 323 commentaries that mentioned Rousseff contained insults directed at the former president, which represents about 25% of these remarks. Commentaries range from “anta” (the name for the animal tapir in Portuguese, which is also used in popular speech to refer to a person as very ignorant or stupid), “bitch”, “whore”, “trash”, to “devil” and “sociopath”. One commentary was linked to an image which showed Rousseff imagined as a devilish figure, with horns, red eyes and spitting while speaking exasperatingly (Figure 4). This category was split from the category Misogyny as most commentaries that contained misogynistic insults towards Rousseff were very general and short, refraining from engaging in more developed criticism of her figure. Thus, 43 commentaries which contained other types of misogynistic accusations or claims, and even threats of violence against her, were included in the category Misogyny. 10 of these commentaries were in regards to Rousseff’s physical appearance, such as: “I admire these men that were brave enough to see her naked in bed”; “What

scares me the most is that she had a husband... even two”; “To be Dilma’s husband you have to be a warrior in order to face such a dragon”. Other commentaries referred pejoratively to Rousseff’s sexual history as vast on account of her two husbands, mentioned in the post: “This woman has been around the block”; “How come such an ugly woman like stupid Dilma has been with so many men?” “This bitch, she likes to talk a lot about her clean slate in the past [laughter] the only ones who believe this are the ones who do not know this whore’s past”.



Figure 4 - Dilma Rousseff is pictured as a devil-like creature in one of the commentaries from Post 2.

Lastly, and perhaps most concerning, 14 remarks were subcategorized as Violence Against Women within the bigger category Misogyny. These commentaries

were highlighted as promoting violence exclusively against women, as opposed to the other major category Violence, which was limited to general threats of violence particularly against PT supporters. They included: “They could throw a bomb on her ass [sic.] and when she is catching fire put it out with gasoline” and “What a husband, huh? You deserve a dry corn cob up your dirty ass, you bitch [sic.]”. Other commentaries censored the military for not hurting her further or even killing her, while others questioned if she was ever tortured to begin with or tried to justify it if she indeed was: “The only mistake the military regime made was beating this ‘woman’ too little, if she was even ‘tortured’, and if she were, there were reasons”; “The military dictatorship made one grave error... they did not exterminate her” and “Bolsonaro, do you know who was wrong in all of this? The DOI-CODI military that did not finish the job”.

Another topic which was constantly touched when it came to Rousseff were the allegations of corruption against her government, which despite never naming Rousseff herself, did not stop accusations against her. 63 commentaries referred to Rousseff and her party, PT, as corrupt and liars, which is directly linked with the notion of secrecy. References included: “It is absurdity that the Brazilian people have a criminal president and the faction that represents her in power. We need to get rid of this horde for the sake of the future generations”; “She is going to destroy the country. We cannot wait until 2018, Brazil will not be able to take it!” and:

It is appalling how Brazil can have a president at this level while leftists talk about the dictatorship. Dictatorship is what we are under right now and it is going to get worse. Petrobras [Brazilian federal oil company which was investigated over corruption claims] has already gone down the drain and now what is to come? I expect everything from PT supporters. (Commentary on Facebook Post 2)

27 of these commentaries also included requests for Rousseff to be punished for her past militancy and for the perceived crisis: “Jair Messias Bolsonaro, where are you to

place this woman in jail?” and “such a terrorist should be in jail and not out destroying the country”.

Similar to Post 1, commentaries seemed to refer to a larger crisis at work, one that is deeply tied to the downfall of morality and the implementation of ideology (although which one is not always specified). 54 commentaries were identified again as Brazilian Crisis when they referred to such a feeling of loss of morality in the country, such as: “Shameful chapter of our history. I hope the next elections can bury once and for all this stain on our Republic.”; “In God’s name, Jair Messias Bolsonaro help us moralize and make our country our pride, I am losing hope.”, and:

It is disgusting to watch how we have fallen when it comes to choosing a president, how many wrong things are coming to light, leaving a bunch of corrupt communists to rule our nation, destroying and changing the country’s ideology, bringing the country to chaos. Making the Brazilian people slaves to a corrupt and inhumane system. (Commentary on Facebook Post 2)

14 commentaries were also identified as denouncing the supposed ideological indoctrination of PT or referring to the government and their supporters as “communists”, for example: “Thinking that this woman rules the country makes me sick and fills me with sorrow for the people at the same time. [...] but there is hope. With serious politicians that do not get involved in this communist trash. We are with you Bolsonaro”.

Through this scenario of crisis, Bolsonaro again appears as a moral saviour, with 41 commentaries in the greater category Bolsonaro referring to him as the only one capable of rescuing the country from this crisis. Commentaries read: “I hope you can reestablish everything this bunch has taken from us, the values of the Christian family, the dignity of the Brazilian people [...]”; “The people await your 2018 campaign and election anxiously, deliver us from this cursed race”; “Bolsonaro, I am proud of you! Thank you for not giving up on our country. The good citizens are thankful” and “My friend Bolsonaro, you are the only one that can save the next generation because mine

only wants to steal, kill, have babies at 14 and support this repugnant being called Dilma”. These commentaries paint Bolsonaro as a leader to a growing community which attempts to recover its hegemony, one composed by good, moral citizens who represent the organic “people” against growing immorality taking over the country.

Analysing such commentaries, Bolsonaro’s potential to salvage a country in crisis is directly attached to his ability to perform hegemonic masculinity and to the cult that gathered around this enactment. 29 commentaries boosted Bolsonaro’s manhood and the features associated with hegemonic masculinities (such as courage, aggression and strength), such as: “If it were a lie our future president would not post it. He has to be very macho to do it. Bolsonaro president in 2018. You represent me.” This commentary is particularly interesting as it shows the construction of communal bonds through the identification of masculinity and its performance, and how decisive this relatability (or search for it) can be in inspiring political loyalty. Figure 5 was an image linked to one commentary which shows a montage of Bolsonaro being able to lift Thor’s (Nord God and comic-book/movie superhero), which is only supposed to be lifted by those who demonstrate enough value to do so. This image is particularly interesting, as the hero imaginary is again evoked (as in figure 3), one that is deeply attached to the *modus operandi* of masculinity.



Figure 5 - A montage shows Bolsonaro being able to lift Thor's hammer, which is only supposed to be lifted by those who show enough valour to do so.

Other commentaries highlight the need for a man (or men) to be in power in Brazil: “Brazil needs men like these. Imagine a double-presidency with Joaquim Barbosa [former judge in the Brazilian Supreme Court]”. One commentary was also linked to a collage that showed suggestions for Bolsonaro’s government in 2018, one that is composed exclusively by men (Figure 6). One remark also referred to the “matriarchal” government of Rousseff negatively in contrast to Bolsonaro potentially occupying the position: “Bolsonaro, I have been your elector since last year. This matriarchal government which benefits only crime and criminals have hampered the country a lot and it’s time we end

this faction”. Linking Rousseff to a motherly figure that is too compassionate towards crime is yet another way to promote masculinity, as the crisis transpiring is apparently perceived by his followers as being solvable through an “iron fist” attitude – a fear-based response. Another referred to Bolsonaro as a “shark” – an aggressive, dangerous predator - as opposed to Rousseff’s “rat” – a small “cowardly” animal: “The boat is sinking and the rat is terrified because the shark is surrounding it”. The latter is also among 9 other commentaries identified as Dilma Vs Bolsonaro, which directly pitch and compare the impeached president and the then-congressman capabilities and qualities, always disparaging towards Rousseff’s government, such as: “while my president jumped, the ignoramus president robbed”, in reference to Bolsonaro’s time in the military, where he served as a skydiver.



Figure 6 - Collage that shows potential government for Bolsonaro in 2018, exclusively composed by men.

Bolsonaro's time in the military was also referred to 8 more times, usually placed in opposition to Rousseff's past as militant against the regime, which were in direct conflict during the dictatorship. The then-congressman's allegiance to the military forces is also reinforced by a commentary which showed another collage (Figure 7) of a potential Bolsonaro government, but this time his government is composed of military institutions alone (the Navy, the Airforce etc.). Other 40 commentaries also touched on the Military in general, some even asking for a new intervention by the military forces in order to put an end to the crisis, such as "Intervention right now! The people beg the Armed Forces for help!". Others question why the military had not acted yet: "I do not understand why the military have not retaken Brazil, sad and disappointing.". A few commentaries minimize or deny the torture and austerity underwent throughout the military regime in order to criticize Rousseff's government: "The military were so evil, so evil, that they allowed these bastards to remain alive and healthy to finish Brasil. The ones who died, died of something else, cancer, terrorist gang fights, AIDS, but not by the hands of the military"; "There are still idiots that idolize these people [former militants like Rousseff] and criticizes the old generals who saved us for so long, but now we are screwed".



Figure 7 - Bolsonaro's potential government being represented by an allegiance to the military institutions in Brazil.

Again evidencing this recrudescence of masculinity, the number of commentaries that asked for his participation in the next presidential campaign or called him president increased considerably in Post 2 compared to Post 1. 108 commentaries referred to him as President or supported a potential (and eventual) campaign in the following 2018 election, while 16 commentaries continued the trend of referring to him as Myth. Other categories referred to Preserving the Traditional Family and Bolsonaro's potential to defend it from these supposed ideological forces (8 commentaries). 23 commentaries also touched on Bolsonaro's supposed transparency and honesty, again in direct opposition to Rousseff's government and the corruption scandals it was implicated in. Commentaries read: "It's about time the truth defeats the lies. #BolsonaroPresident." and "Congratulations for the honesty and transparency Bolsonaro". Interestingly enough, some commentaries associated honesty with other qualities typically listed as part of a hegemonic masculinity profile: "Bolsonaro we need your honesty, determination and guts to save Brazil from the corruption that emanates from the Congress, the backtracking the country is undergoing. You have not only my vote, but all my family, neighbours and friends'. [...] #Bolsonaro2018".

Furthermore, 78 commentaries were identified as Community Formation. Again, commentaries described very different visions and plans for the country which opposed the current government's and those who still supported it, drawing a clear line between the "real" Brazilian people, the "real country" and the reality of the country at the time: "Those who support bandits, thieves and corrupts are? If after everything that has happened in the last 10 years there are still people that defend them, it is clear what type of people they are"; "It's unbelievable what 54 million Brazilians have done to this country. They elected these destroyers who spend their lives screwing around [sic.]" and "God protect us so that we will not be vanquished until 2018". Bolsonaro's potential

election was therefore a solution to solve the Brazilian crisis and restore Brazil to some previous lost magnitude in a similar trend to Trump's "Make America Great Again":

Bolsonaro, this is the man I will vote for in 2018, maybe then Brazil can return to being Brazil" and "There are still stupid people that support this communist race... but in 2018 we will be firm and strong toward the Planalto [reference to the executive seat in Brazil] with the faith of God and the help of the people. Jair Messias Bolsonaro will rewrite history. (Commentary on Facebook Post 2)

Finally, many commentaries also refer to a possible civil war, or refer to the opposers of the Rousseff government as an army, again assuming a Us Vs Them antagonism against any and all who dissent: "We are fighting these guys by supporting your candidacy to the presidency. Stay with us Bolsonaro and we will be your patriotic army." and "Our nation bleeds [...] only an INTERVENTION with MARTIAL LAW so we can regain the dignity and honour of a nation before the civilized world and exterminate definitively this cheap socialist communism. Or we will have a real civil war [...]" and "It will only end when a civil war is declared in Brazil as we already live in one, we only need to make it official". This trend is also connected to 18 other commentaries that made threats of violence against the government and PT supporters in general (not against Rousseff alone, which were previously touched upon as Violence Against Women). Commentaries included desperate pleas for help in stopping the government through force: "Bolsonaro, are the goddamn Armed Forces going to put the house in order in this country? [...] I alone cannot rain bullets into Lula and Dilma, please help me for the love of God" and "When I served the country in 74, I was not lucky enough to run into these people, it would have been my pleasure to exchange fire with them, History would have been different for them".

4.1.3. Post 3

Post 3 is, chronologically, the last publication analysed (dated May 12th, 2016) and it shows the video of Bolsonaro in Israel, celebrating Rousseff's impeachment process being approved by the Brazilian Senate, an apparent end to the crisis the far-right and Bolsonaro particularly had been capitalizing on for months. 28 categories were identified, including: Bolsonaro President, Bolsonaro's Military Past, Myth, Oppression, Savior Rhetoric, Subversive Bolsonaro (all part of major category Bolsonaro), Brazilian Crisis and Community Formation (including sub-categories Sameness and Us Vs Them). Greater category Dilma Rousseff included sub-themes: Dilma & Corruption (Secrecy), Dilma's Militant Past, Insults Aimed at Dilma and Violence Against Dilma. Other categories identified were: Dilma Vs Bolsonaro, Homophobia, Ideology, Masculinity (with sub-topics Gun-bearing Discourse and Violence), Preserving the Brazilian Family, Religious Commentary, The Military and Transparency.

Table 3 - Codes identified for Post 3.

Code	References
Bolsonaro	449
Bolsonaro President	313
Bolsonaro's Military Past	20
Calling Bolsonaro Myth	105
Oppression	8
Savior Rhetoric	54
Subversive Bolsonaro	3
Brazilian Crisis	37
Community Formation	115
Sameness	6
Us Vs Them	26
Dilma Rousseff	104
Dilma & Corruption (Secrecy)	16
Dilma's Militant Past	5
Insults Toward Dilma	26
Violence Against Dilma	1

Dilma Vs Bolsonaro	9
Homophobia	1
Ideology Accusations	12
Masculinity	27
Gun-bearing Discourse	5
Misogyny	8
Preserving the Brazilian Family	21
Religious Commentary	71
The Military	7
Transparency	44
Violence	3

The most relevant category in this analysis referred to Bolsonaro himself. On the video published, despite there being no indications in Bolsonaro's speech of any intention to launch a presidential campaign to run in the following 2018 elections, supporters flooded the commentaries with 313 commentaries categorized as Bolsonaro President out of 449 commentaries that mentioned Bolsonaro in general. Through the use of hashtag or otherwise, many followers expressed their wish that Bolsonaro would eventually assume the highest office in the country, under the pretext, again aligned with Savior Rhetoric, that he was the only one able to save the country: "I want to see you in the Presidency in 2018, Bolsonaro! You are our only hope! #rootingforyou #Bolsomyth" and "I'm only waiting to see a good person takeover, and this will happen soon with our myth getting the presidency, we rely on you to give hope to the Brazilian people. Little by little our victories are granted".

The second most detected sub-category was hailing Bolsonaro a myth, a word that was repeated 105 times (either alone or as part of the alias Bolsomito – Bolsomyth – another way his followers tend to address him). As can be seen by the word cloud (Figure 8) of this theme, the most relevant words were president, 2018 and myth. 54 commentaries were also categorized as Savior Rhetoric when they showed Bolsonaro as

the entrenching of this community, who position themselves as “warriors” in an “army”. Unlike Posts 1 and 3, more commentaries were linked to Gun-bearing Discourse (5 remarks), furthering this warlike cosmovision that started to be adapted by this community of “Us”. These commentaries were sub-categorized in Masculinity: “Bolsonaro, today the sun of freedom has shone again, we count on you [...] to bring down the aberration that is the disarmament statue, Brazilians want to have the right to defend their families and houses” and “Bolsonaro, let’s legalize gun-bearing!”. One image (Figure 9) shows a picture of Bolsonaro holding a gun in front of a world map that highlights the perimeter of Brazil, and on top of it, a quote reads “Where is the problem for me to solve?”.



Figure 9 - Picture of Bolsonaro pointing a gun with a quote which reads "Where is the problem for me to solve?"

20 of the commentaries which mentioned Bolsonaro also referred to his past in the military forces, mostly referring to him as Captain (his position before he was exonerated from the Armed Forces), such as: “I congratulate my brother in arms Jair Bolsonaro for his tireless fight for Democracy, for the Military Family, for Freedom and Justice. Onwards Comrade!”. Few commentaries (7) also referred to the Military,

particularly highlighting the memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, who was responsible for commanding the torture of Dilma Rousseff during her time in prison in the military dictatorship, echoing Bolsonaro's vote during the Congress session that decided for Rousseff's impeachment. Commentaries read: "In memory of the dear Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra: Goodbye, darling!" and "In memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, Dilma Rousseff's terror. I'm with you Captain, 2018 is right around the corner". Interestingly, the references to Ustra are always linked to his full name and army title, which seems to aim at invoking an authoritarian perception of the man.

Furthermore, unlike previous posts, 8 commentaries also dabbled in trying to either deny Bolsonaro's escalating fame as an oppressor of minorities or even labelled him oppressor as a positive character trait. References read: "[he is called] oppressor, rapist, fascist... then you see videos like this one"; "Bolsonaro Oppressor 2.0, I would like you as the future President of Brazil" and "My preferred and adored bad man. Never change and you will have my vote". It is noticeable that this title was not seen as one to avoid, but to laud his character. Threats which were categorized in Violence, however, were less commons than the previous posts, appearing in only 3 commentaries, such as "Bolsonaro, get some missiles and ask kindly to our Israeli brothers to throw some of them at the people who defend bandits here in Brazil".

Conversely to the "oppressor" fame, 44 commentaries hailed Bolsonaro for his supposed transparent nature, as opposed to the government then-in-power. Significantly, many commentaries also seemed to link political transparency and honesty with Bolsonaro being an accessible, identifiable figure, as opposed to political figures that are shrouded in secrecy, particularly during the moral panic that had overtaken Brazil regarding corruption scandals. Commentaries read: "Besides being a serious man who

respects the people, he is a character. Get ready to take care of our PEOPLE, PRESIDENT. May God continue to bless you. We are together until the end. #Bolsonarowins.”; “Let’s go congressman! He is a character! Such a nice guy.”; “Who would have imagined the myth hugging people on the street? He is the best! [...] #BolsonaroPresident.”, and:

Brazil starts to see today, even if far away, a light at the end of the tunnel! Hope renews on this day, which is memorable for all! Thank you, congressman Jair ‘Myth’ Bolsonaro, and to all who contributed for this day to finally come. God bless and protect all of us so that we can move on with more hope in the future and with the certainty that we will have someone like Jair Bolsonaro always with us for a better Brazil. [...] to you all my respect and recognition for your tireless job in defence of everything good, worthwhile and true! (Commentary on Facebook Post 3)

This was directly opposed to their perception of Dilma Rousseff, whose global category included 104 commentaries. 16 of these commentaries referred to the corrupt nature of Rousseff’s government and holding her personally accountable for it: “[Rousseff] can already ask for unemployment insurance, bitch is the very least to you, thief”; “First woman to be elected president in Brazil, Dilma Rousseff leaves the presidency and won’t be missed, her government was incompetent and disastrous, headed by the greatest faction that has ever occupied the Planalto Palace [Brazilian seat of power] [...]” and “Phew, this bandit took a long time to leave”. 30 of the overall commentaries used the hashtag #TchauQuerida (which translates to Goodbye, Darling) to refer to Rousseff’s impeachment being formalized by the Senate. The word cloud generated by NVIVO (Figure 10) shows that within the global category Dilma Rousseff, the word “querida” (dear) is the one most widely used, a reference to a call that was tapped and leaked to the press in which former president Lula says goodbye to Rousseff in this manner.

but the backlash to the perception of a larger crisis at work, one that involved ideological manipulation and triggered the need to regain morality and preserve the Brazilian family: “PT has destroyed Brazil, but we are insured and hope the insurance will give us a new Brazil, our insurance is the strength and force that emanates from the people which will elect you president to return the morality and good customs that were taken from us with this culture that forcefully installed itself in the country”; “[...] we want to rescue the concept of family, rescue our youth, and put the house in order. I will work a lot for your campaign #bolsonaro2018”, and “Goodbye, Value Inversion! [...] Goodbye, Communists! [...] Goodbye, Gender Ideology! Goodbye, Gays! Goodbye, NGOs! [...] Goodbye, PT... The party that thought they owned Brazil! Hurray to the family! Hurray to the police! Hurray to Brazil”.

Lastly, Post 3 seemed to be more filled with vocabulary and statements that pointed to a more consolidated community, one focused on raising Bolsonaro to the highest office in Brazil. 115 commentaries were identified as Community Formation. Words like “Our”, “Us”, “People”, “Represents” were more popular than in the previous posts (Figure 11). These commentaries address a totalizing “people” that was apparently liberated from Rousseff’s leadership: “Our Victory!”; “2018 will be our victory. #HurraytheRight #HurrayBolsonaro”; “[...] this victory is ours, of all the honest Brazilians in this country” and “Let’s resume our lives, our schools, our companies, our jobs, our culture, our education, our economy, our health, our security, everything that has been stolen from us!”.

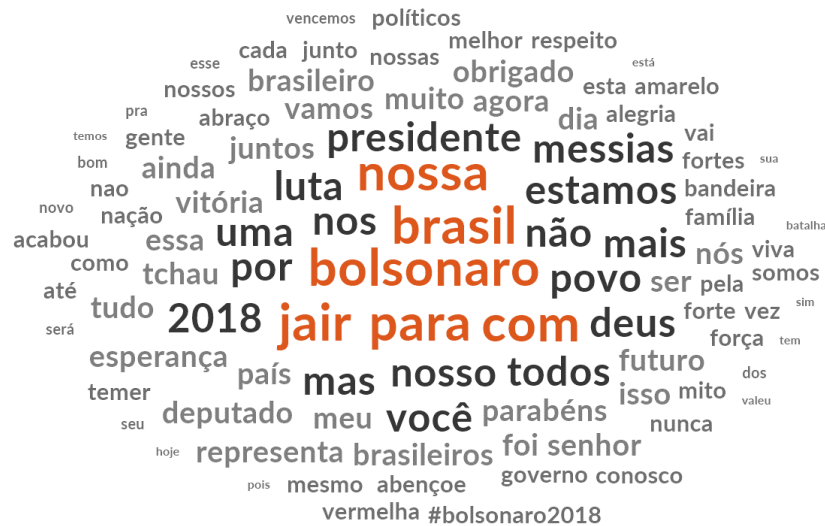


Figure 11 - Word cloud showing Community Formation on Post 3 commentaries.

Commentaries also retained an Us Vs Them mentality that seemed to escalate further to a totalitarian mindset which encourages a combative, aggressive and even violent behaviour toward any dissidents: “Have we won the battle? I guess so. The war? God help us” and “Either the nation is free, or we die for Brazil”. Finally, 6 commentaries were identified as Sameness, due to the authors relating to Bolsonaro and his discourse, such as: “We are Bolsonaro” and “Bolsonaro, you represent me!”. One image (Figure 12) that was collected from the commentaries shows a picture of Bolsonaro with a superimposed statement which reads: “You don’t agree with Bolsonaro? I know you are a junkie, a bastard, a drug dealer, a thief, gay, feminist or receiver of the Bolsa Família [PT program that provides financial help for the extremely poor]”. This image seems to illustrate the feeling of community which was taking hold of Bolsonaro’s public, which associates all people not aligned to Bolsonaro’s ideas to illegal behaviour or social movement affiliation, which in this cosmovision are inherently evil.

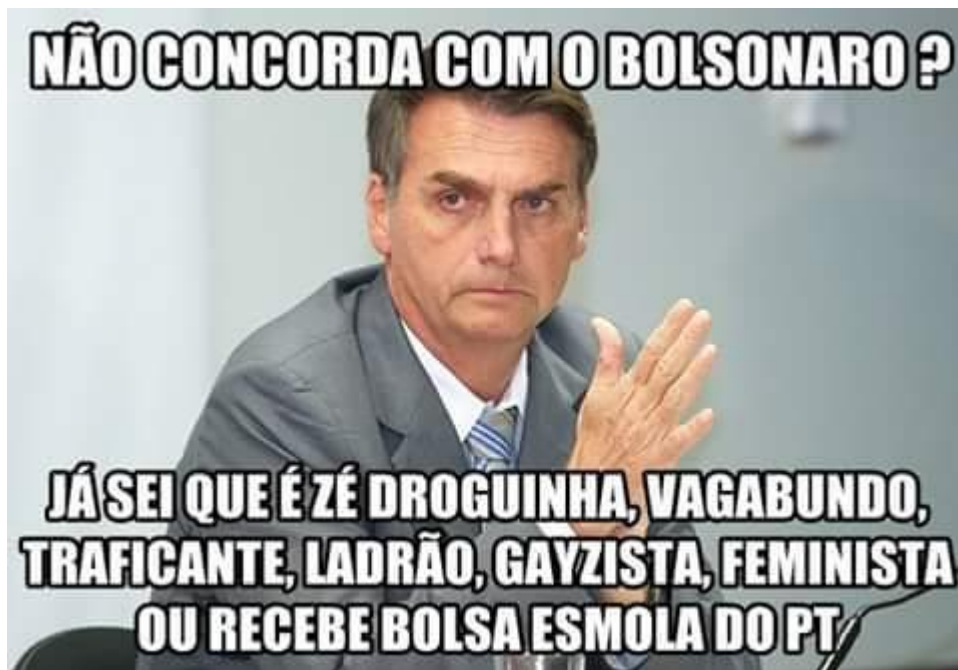


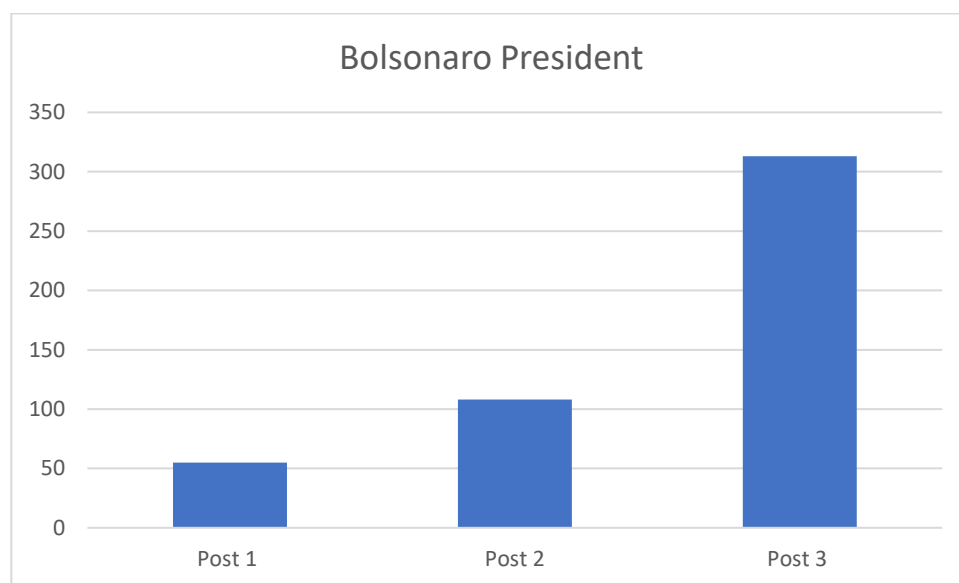
Figure 12 - Bolsonaro's montage showing indicators of community formation.

4.1.4. Posts Comparison

19 categories were identified throughout all 3 posts: Bolsonaro and the Military, Bolsonaro President, Brazilian Crisis, Calling Bolsonaro Myth, Community Formation, Us Vs Them, Sameness, Gun-bearing Discourse, Homophobia, Ideology Accusations, Insults to Dilma Rousseff, Masculinity, Misogyny, Preserving the Traditional Family, Religious Commentary, Savior Rhetoric, The Military, Transparency and Violence. Given the distinct nature of each publication, specific categories were exclusive to each particular Post. 4 categories in particular showed significant growth through the months that separated the date of the publications, and none of them were topics discussed in the publications themselves.

Most shockingly perhaps is the fast increase of commentaries that presented the potentiality of Bolsonaro's presidential campaign in the following 2018 elections (Graph 1). There was a 96,3% increase from Posts 1 to 2, and a 189,8% increase from Posts 2 to 3, which shows that Bolsonaro managed to acquire adepts during the height of the

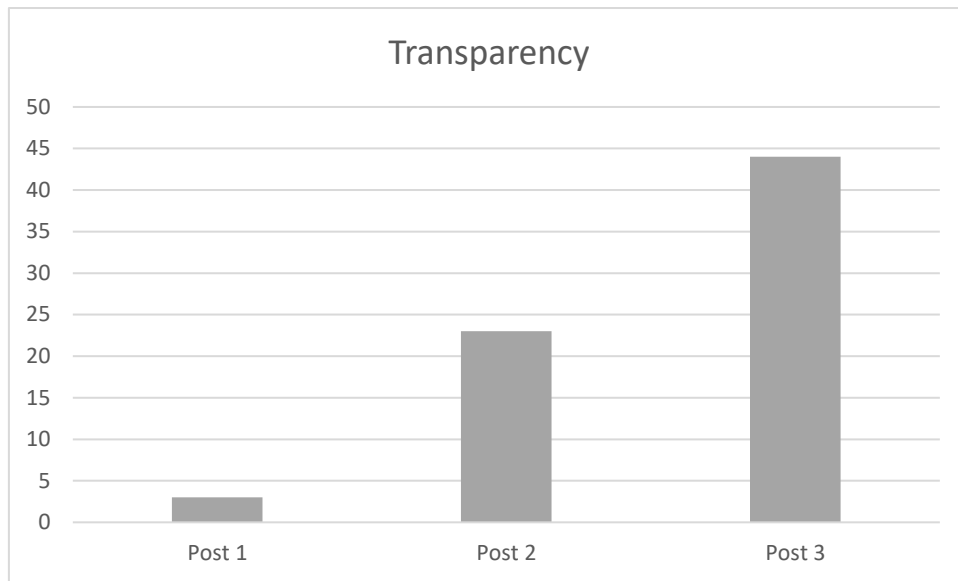
Brazilian crisis, who apparently started to picture him as a viable presidential candidate, even though none of the publications showed any intent on Bolsonaro's part to announce a campaign. Likewise, Calling Bolsonaro a Myth was also a category that showed significant growth. Both Posts 1 and 2 showed 16 commentaries, while Post 3 demonstrated a 556,25% increase compared to the previous ones.



Graph 1 - Growth of Bolsonaro President theme throughout the publications.

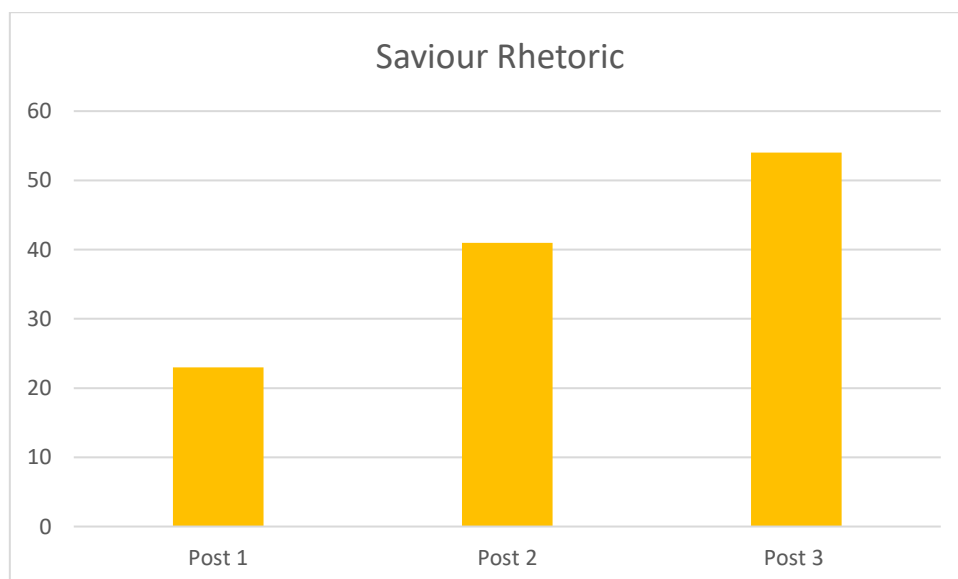
Another category that showed relative increase was Transparency (Graph 2).

There was a 666,6% increase from Posts 1 to 2, and 91,3% from Posts 2 to 3. It is important to highlight that none of the posts dealt with the theme Transparency directly, and most of these commentaries were organically linking Bolsonaro to values such as honesty, accessibility and relatability.



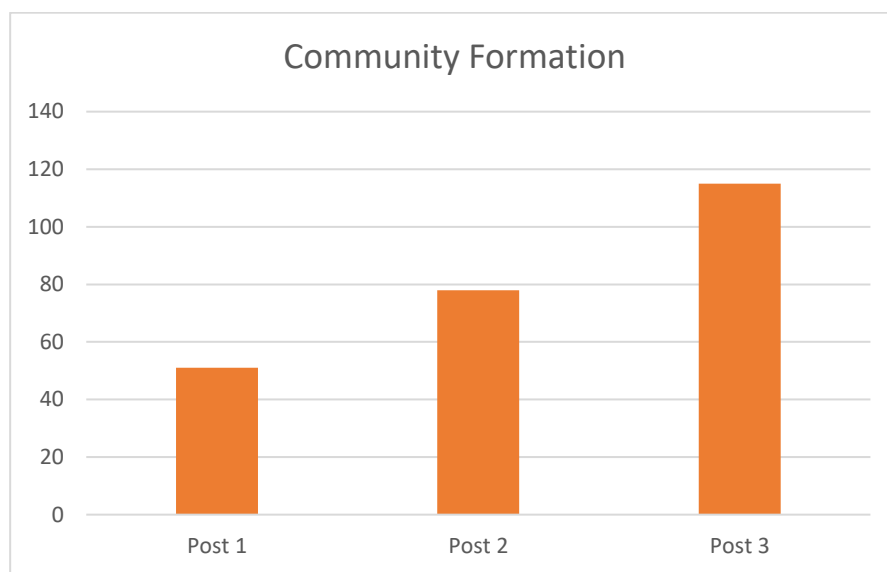
Graph 2 - Growth of Transparency theme throughout the publications

This tendency seems to be directly attached to the simultaneous growth of the Savior Rhetoric (Graph 3). From Posts 1 to 2 there was 78,26% increase, while from Posts 2 to 3 the numbers grew 31,7%. The fact that this category grew parallel to the tendency to elect Bolsonaro as the next President seems to be linked to Bolsonaro presenting himself as not just a moral saviour, but a male option performing hegemonic masculinity midst a political, economic, and social crisis happening during the first time a woman even held office in Brazil.



Graph 3 - Growth of Saviour Rhetoric theme throughout the publications.

Furthermore, Community Formation was also a fast-growing category (Graph 4). Throughout the 3 publications, community bonds seemed to have gotten stronger or more pronounced, evidencing the success of Bolsonaro's strategies for gaining adepts. From Posts 1 to 2, there was a 52,9% increase, while from Posts 2 to 3, there was a 47,4% growth. Other prevalent categories did not show significant variations or demonstrated high variations based on the particular topic approached by the publication, which makes it impossible to organically assesses interest increase by the commentators.



Graph 4- Growth of Community Formation theme throughout the publications.

However, another category of interest which serves to intensify the bonds born from “othering” and community formation was Religious Commentaries. The religious engagement was constant throughout all three posts, and despite this not being the main theme of this analysis, the expansion of the evangelic movement in Brazil is also directly tied to the recrudescence of masculinity and conservative values. Post 1 included 29 commentaries which referred to the defiance of Christian morality by gender diversity and who begged religious figures for the country's future. Post 2 had 16 commentaries of a significant religious nature, while Post 3 had a significant increase to 71 commentaries. This is due to the fact that the video published by Bolsonaro to celebrate the impeachment showed him in Israel, where he was baptized, which seemed to aim at building a religious

mythology around his persona and elect him as the chosen “saviour” to lead the country out of the crisis. Commentaries on the last post read: “I have tingles... the myth got baptized while Dilma was expelled from office”; “Brazil above everything, only under God, this would not have happened without the Myth [...]”; “Messias [Bolsonaro’s middle name in Portuguese translates to Messiah in English] in Jerusalem, what a great omen. God, save Brazil! #BOLSONAROPRESIDENT” and “[...] now we can yell MESSIAH, the son of God, the Myth has arrived”. Therefore, the religious component seems to also be paramount to understanding the construction of the “myth” of masculinity that was built around Bolsonaro.

CONCLUSIONS

The advent of social media has made it more and more necessary to understand its pervasive impacts upon communication, particularly the ones that reverberate into economic, political and societal changes. While many positive changes have originated from the potentiality of online engagement, it has also created great dissonance in communication which allowed for the co-optation of many individuals into hate discourse, intolerance and even anti-democratic attempts. Thus, it is imperative that we elucidate the reach of social media as a promotor of community bonds, as it is decisive in enabling civilian participation in a post-political, artificial consensus era. Although the bonds built online may be fabricated, they have material causes and repercussions that ripple through the fabric of society, as can be seen in the case argued here for Brazil.

Thus, in Chapter 3, we concluded that the rise of economic instability in Brazil also triggered a moral panic which was masterfully manoeuvred into a full-blown crisis by the far-right. As previously explored, scrutiny over Dilma Rousseff's government preceded the recession that hit the country, and her inability to fit the mould expected of her as a woman, being a former militant, a divorcé, religiously lapsed and a no-nonsense woman meant that misogyny followed her throughout her time in office, as could be seen in the results shown. At the height of the crisis, the number of insults directed at her portrayed her variedly as either a sadistic, maniac, corrupt, revengeful, even demonic figure who is intent in destroying the country as payback for her suffering during the military dictatorship or as an inefficient, ignorant woman that has no significant attributes to allow her to properly conduct a country in crisis. The ambiguous way her image was perceived is directly attached to the need to disqualify her as president as she was never involved in claims of corruption like many throughout the government – be it through painting her as a criminal mastermind or an imbecile, even though these two profiles are in no way

cohesive. The results showed that added to her failure to conform to the mould of appropriate femininity, Rousseff suffered an onslaught of misogynistic attacks from a great part of the public as a result of the Car Wash investigations, one that condemned her for crimes she was innocent of, circumstances she was powerless to stop, and worst, the social causes her government promoted, particularly the defence of gender diversity. Later cases of corruption, however, were not met with the same vicious attacks by the public, particularly the ones committed by Bolsonaro during his term in office.

Furthermore, results showed that Rousseff's history acting as a militant against the military dictatorship in the past was perceived as a crime of terrorism and not an act of resistance, which meant she was a belligerent person who seeks out trouble, not a person struggling against an authoritarian regime who underwent torture and repression. The fact she was involved with this type of activity also earned her a reputation as a communist ideologue, which associated with her and her party's intention to promote sexual and gender plurality and equality as the president was falsely equated with ideological manipulation and distorted as an attempt to install compulsory "gender ideology".

Indeed, the commotion assessed in the commentaries on Post 1 clearly demonstrates the backlash experienced in Brazil as a result of advocacy for gender plurality and equality being made prominent in popular culture and even education endeavours. The disgusted, outraged reactions to the question posed in the Brazilian National Exam regarding Beauvoir's understanding of gender and "becoming a woman" showcases the fragility of the gender binary regime and the roles associated with it in the country, as well as how Bolsonaro's followers understood the question as a personal attack to their common values. The fact that a harmless question managed to elicit such enraged, inflamed responses also reflect a society that is deeply ruled by a moralistic

cosmovision, founded upon religious, sexist, conservative precepts that found footing in the rejection of new developments in gender and queer theory.

As assessed in the results, this supposed compulsory “gender ideology” at work was also inherently correlated with claims made by supporters about protecting both the family and the youth. The traditional law-abiding, Christian-following, conservative Brazilian family is a pillar of the “good citizen” belief system, one that reflects a nuclear, cis, heterosexual family which struggles against the degeneration of their values and dissolution of the familiar institution as it was envisioned. By extension, young people are used as fodder to justify intolerance, as it is perceived that “gender ideology” is a project of indoctrination which seeks to co-opt young minds to eventually achieve a communist end or totalitarian sort of government, as gender ideology is understood as part of cultural war at large. Thus, the maintenance of the family as an institution and of young people as targets is fundamentally intertwined with the idea that Brazil was undergoing a crisis that stretched beyond the economic level, reaching a moral predicament.

In fact, as concluded in Chapter 3, the coming of the economic recession, coupled with the instability provoked by the aftermath of the far-reaching demonstrations that overtook Brazil in 2013, had already inaugurated a new era in Brazilian politics, one that is defined by the public’s deep suspicion and mistrust of politicians and political parties, which are deemed extremely corrupt as a rule and unreliable as leaders. This post-political storm was further worsened by the discovery of the government’s corruption scandals in 2015, and the subsequent investigations and arrests made by Operation Carwash. The fact that accusations of ideological machinations gained fast ground during that period is no mere coincidence, but deliberate attempts by the far-right to conquer those who had been left distressed by what was unfolding in the country at the time and fearful of what was

to come next. Fear made them prime targets to populist speeches who attempt to co-opt the public through nostalgic invocations of traditional values, “authentic” to the country. The *zeitgeist* of political mistrust was ideal to hijack public opinion into believing all forms of machinations by the government, which was considered morally bankrupt. Wagering on the latent morality in the country regarding sexuality and gender was thus, the method chosen to capitalize on the fear brought about by the political turmoil and potentialize it into full-blown social convulsion, which meant personal, religious and political values became entangled in a war for Brazilian culture and hegemony.

In this climate, commentaries demonstrated that Bolsonaro’s figure was elected as a direct response to the break with Rousseff’s government, being positioned as her perfect antithesis and an outsider to an unreliable system. A former military man whose political platform had been based on lauding the military forces and rejecting gender diversity and politics, his blatant and unrepentant misogyny, homophobia, and general intolerance was perceived by his followers as the ideal remedy to the Brazilian crisis precisely because it meant a return to masculinity – a safe, recognizable value that the public melancholically turned to for answers and shelter.

As shown by the results, despite his inefficacy as a congressman, Bolsonaro managed to gain adepts by acting unabashedly against the mechanisms of the “politically correct”, which to many, made him an honest, accessible, relatable politician who was unafraid to face what were now regarded as the degenerating political forces in place. His behaviour and enactment of an “Average Joe” routine, aligned with the status achieved by having been a member of the military forces – despite having been expelled by said institution – elevated his standing as a transparent representative, one that was not shrouded in secrecy and corruption as a governmental *modus operandi*. The fact that the demand for transparency was one of the fastest-growing themes identified in the analysis

illustrates how instrumental the title of transparency is for current governments to operate.

Indeed, transparency was one of the guises in Bolsonaro's playbook, one that is in tune with his performance of hegemonic masculinities, as posited by Connell. In addition to his misogynist, homophobic persona, which aims at subordinating any alternative masculinities, his self-aggrandizing, aggressive (even violent) discourse resonated with the public that identified with this *ethos*. Being hailed a myth, having his image glorified as a hero-like persona by his followers (as shown by previous images here), constantly emphasizing of his manliness or even being referenced as "Captain" – years after his disengagement with the institution – revealed how relevant his brushes with manhood and virility were to inspire trust and loyalty in his followers, reeling from the onslaught of misogyny against Rousseff and seeking a saviour to lead the country out of the crisis.

Furthermore, revelling in the nostalgia over a period where order was seemingly prevalent and the country was led exclusively by authoritarian men, Bolsonaro was fashioned by his followers as the dictatorship's second coming and the rescuer of masculinity, answering calls to bring about the country's stability when faced with an ideological threat – and a woman in office. Throughout the commentaries on his publications, the growth of this saviour rhetoric as a response to the moral crisis is the most evident testimony to how deep the allegiance to hegemonic masculinities runs in the Brazilian public's belief system and how any threats to its primacy can lead to significant political and societal turbulence, allowing for the emergence of *messiah*-like figures which mingle with the country's own mythology, as can be testified by the hailing of Bolsonaro as a "myth" - an alias bestowed upon him precisely for rejecting perceived threats to the hegemony of masculinities under the "gender ideology" concoction. To this, he also added the religious imagery of a God-chosen saviour by aligning with the

evangelical agenda. Thus, Bolsonaro cultivated a persona which allowed for a recrudescence of hegemonic masculinities, and specially, the claim for its return to power.

Not coincidentally, the recurring theme that was the most prominent in all publications under analysis was the constant demand for Bolsonaro to run for presidency in the following 2018 elections, with many already taking his victory for granted. This is particularly alarming as there was little indication previous to Rousseff's removal that a potential campaign or eventual win by Bolsonaro was a feasible future. Much to the contrary, up to 2015, Bolsonaro was seen as a ludicrous character and an ostracized politician whom only a small niche community favouring hate discourse listened to. The responses analysed painted a completely different picture, as this incipient community seemed to be sure of his aptitude for the highest political seat in the country, and not just supportive of him as a disruptor or congressman. Thus, Rousseff's fall from grace allowed him to be perceived as a leader alternate to more traditional right-wing candidates, which did not attempt to co-opt the fearful, nostalgic public through hate rhetoric, and were thus seen as "more of the same" or complicit with the system in place. Bolsonaro's reinvigoration of hegemonic masculinities was understood (subconsciously or not) as the only efficient medicine to remedy a country led to the brink by a woman in power.

Clearly, this is also to the merit of Bolsonaro's proficient social media use, as being able to grow so quickly in the polls and gaining so many adepts are the result of the enabling of the closed-loop communication by social media platforms. Through the use of the algorithm, information niches were created that allowed users to only see content that represents their previously existing thoughts and opinions, favouring the communion of sameness – populism – and the banning of alterity. Furthermore, by discrediting traditional means of communication – even threatening to shut down Brazilian media

altogether⁴² – and assuring that his followers were only kept informed by vehicles where news could be manipulated, altered or forged altogether, he was able to sever communication to difference and truth altogether, which enabled the formation of an operative community as argued by Nancy.

Through these vehicles, followers were exposed to Bolsonaro's agenda of championing Brazilian conservative values and renovating the public's alliance to hegemonic masculinities while disenfranchising them from most oppositional arguments and individuals. This also served as a limitation to the research, as these commentaries' authors were already aligned as his supporters, which does not answer the question of how he managed to co-opt enough people to get voted in office. It is precisely the severing of communication also enacted the setting of an Us Vs Them line, which positioned all to be for or against this growing community - Us, the good, moral citizens willing to defend the motherland against subversive, degenerating forces and Them, the supporters of depravity, ideology, and disruption. The promotion of communal values which are made to seem authentic and organic to a particular people, such as country, honour, race, heritage, and especially highlighted here, masculinity, was fundamental not only for Bolsonaro's rise to power, but for the maintenance of the immense loyalty he still attracts, which surpasses the bounds of political affiliation.

The communion of sameness is what Nancy calls the "unleashing of passions", which can be seen by the fast growth of the category Community Formation. The increase of terms like "We", "Us", "Our", "They", "Them" and "Theirs" indicate the embryonic formation of a community that would be used to further the far-right's agenda in Brazil. This is illustrated particularly by the need the users showed in claiming the "Brazilian

⁴² No dia da Liberdade de Imprensa, Bolsonaro sugere fechar mídia brasileira | Uol Notícias, June 2022 <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/06/07/jair-bolsonaro-imprensa.htm>

people”, a demographic that was aligned to the recrudescence of these traditional values, which apparently did not include the thousands of people who did not support Rousseff’s removal from office.⁴³ Oftentimes, the users on Bolsonaro’s page, members of this growing community, envisioned the deployment of real violence (even murderous intent) against their detractors, which further demonstrates the need to suffocate all exterior relation to preserve sameness and identification. Over the years that followed the crisis here reported, and after Bolsonaro’s election to presidency, these bonds would grow even more visceral, emulating fascist bonds of communion in death, as also described by Nancy.

During Bolsonaro’s mishandling of the COVID crisis, the former president promoted unapproved, extremely questionable medical treatment for COVID-19, such as chloroquine,⁴⁴ which had not been proved to be efficient by the scientific community. Additionally, he repeatedly questioned social distancing measures and self-isolating periods,⁴⁵ and neglected to purchase the newfound vaccines⁴⁶ when companies approached the federal government with offers; he also refused to release up-to-date, accurate information about contagion and death tolls through the federal government’s communication channels.⁴⁷ When State governances purchased vaccines, Bolsonaro

⁴³ Manifestantes fazem maiores atos a favor de Dilma desde o ano passado | G1, March 2016
<https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2016/03/manifestantes-fazem-ato-em-apoio-ao-governo-dilma-pelo-pais.html>

⁴⁴ Bolsonaro defendeu uso de cloroquina em 23 discursos oficiais: veja frases | Globo, May 2021
<https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/bolsonaro-defendeu-uso-de-cloroquina-em-23-discursos-oficiais-leia-as-frases-25025384>

⁴⁵ Bolsonaro ataca quarentena: “Não está difícil saber o que nos espera” | UOL Notícias, April 2020
<https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2020/04/19/bolsonaro-ataca-quarentena-nao-esta-dificil-saber-o-que-nos-espera.htm>

⁴⁶ Pfizer diz ter oferecido 70 milhões de doses de vacina a governo brasileiro para entrega a partir de dezembro de 2020 | G1, January 2021
<https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/vacina/noticia/2021/01/08/pfizer-diz-ter-oferecido-70-milhoes-de-doses-de-vacina-a-governo-brasileiro-para-entrega-em-dezembro-de-2020.ghtml>

⁴⁷ Especialistas criticam recontagem de óbitos pelo governo | Estadão, June 2020
<https://www.estadao.com.br/saude/especialistas-criticam-recontagem-de-obitos-pelo-governo-subnotificacao-e-problema-no-pais/>

questioned their efficacy and promoted conspiracy theories regarding their production and finality, saying that taking the vaccine could potentially turn one into an “alligator”.⁴⁸

Bolsonaro also renewed his allegiance to hegemonic masculinities during this period by claiming that because of his “athletic history” he “would not need to worry in case he got COVID”,⁴⁹ equating physical prowess, which he usually associated to manhood and virility, to resistance to a deadly virus. This implied that those who do not comply to manly fitness as envisioned by him did not deserve the efforts to be preserved from the virus contagion. This overall mismanagement led to over 700,000 deaths in Brazil,⁵⁰ one of the highest COVID-19’s mortality rates worldwide, a number which could have been prevented. Bolsonaro never expressed grief or solidarity to the victims and their families, and once, when asked about that day’s fatality count, replied “I am not a gravedigger, ok?”.⁵¹ Bolsonaro’s denial tactics, instead of rebutted, were echoed by his followers, with many failing to get vaccinated,⁵² spreading *fake news* about the vaccine,⁵³ and refusing to comply with the measures proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO), such as self-isolation and social distancing, going as far as claiming WHO was a communist institution. This demonstrates an inclination for communal death, for self-

⁴⁸ ‘Se virar jacaré, é problema seu’: o que Bolsonaro já disse sobre vacinas | UOL Notícias, May 2023
<https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2023/05/03/jair-bolsonaro-vacina-covid-19.htm>

⁴⁹ Ao contrário do que disse Bolsonaro, passado de atleta não é garantia de proteção contra coronavírus | UOL Notícias, March 2020

<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/equilibrioesaude/2020/03/ao-contrario-do-que-disse-bolsonaro-passado-de-atleta-nao-e-garantia-de-protecao-contracoronavirus.shtml>

⁵⁰ Brasil chega à marca de 700 mil mortes por Covid-19 | Governo do Brasil, March 2023
<https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/marco/brasil-chega-a-marca-de-700-mil-mortes-por-covid-19>

⁵¹ ‘Não sou coveiro, tá?’, diz Bolsonaro ao responder sobre mortes por coronavírus | G1, April 2020
<https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2020/04/20/nao-sou-coveiro-ta-diz-bolsonaro-ao-responder-sobre-mortos-por-coronavirus.ghtml>

⁵² Ricos, brancos e bolsonaristas são grupos que menos tomaram vacina contra Covid | Folha, August 2022
<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/equilibrioesaude/2022/08/ricos-brancos-e-bolsonaristas-sao-grupos-que-menos-tomaram-vacina-contracovid.shtml>

⁵³ Bolsonaristas voltam a espelhar fake News sobre vacina contra Covid | Estado de Minas, January 2022
https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2022/01/07/interna_politica,1336147/bolsonaristas-voltam-a-espelhar-fake-news-sobre-vacina-contracovid.shtml

immolation, such as the fascist groups described by Nancy.

Even now, after Bolsonaro's exit from presidency, the aftereffects of his incumbency are still felt in Brazil. From 2022 onwards, unprecedented criminal phenomena, such as hate attacks in schools⁵⁴ and virtual crimes, promoted by misogynistic, hate-based communities on social media platforms have been unveiled. While these tragedies are known to happen in the United States, they are a fast-spreading novelty in Brazil. As recently as June 2023, a faction of young male criminals was arrested for using Discord to stream crimes,⁵⁵ particularly rapes, revenge pornography, torture, and paedophilia against 12, 13-year-old girls. Reports claim the misogynistic content is of extreme cruelty and viciousness. The deputy in charge of the crimes says "they are sadists and misogynists, who are disgusted by women".

Thus, this is the aftermath of the Myth's promotion of hate discourse, particularly the unleashing and promotion of hegemonic masculinities ideal, which will likely demand a long time to be dismantled. The formation of communities stemming from this recrudescence can be assessed in the search for communion, even when that means a self-immolating ideal. It is my intention that investigation into the growth of online misogynistic groups parallel to Bolsonaro's rise to power become a future project, as this is still a relatively unexplored topic in Brazil when compared to after-Trump's America, for example. Although there were limitations to the range of analysis available by Facebook commentaries, inductive commentary analysis proved effective in assessing the formation of community bonds by enabling sorting out of themes and interest growth

⁵⁴ Brasil teve pelo menos 30 ataques violentos a escolas desde 2002, mostra estudo | G1, June 2023
<https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2023/06/19/brasil-teve-pelo-menos-30-ataques-violentos-a-escolas-desde-2002-mostra-estudo.ghtml>

⁵⁵ Rede sem lei: no Discord, criminosos violentam e humilham meninas menores de idade | G1, June 2023
<https://g1.globo.com/fantastico/noticia/2023/06/25/rede-sem-lei-no-discord-criminosos-violentam-e-humilham-meninas-menores-de-idade.ghtml>

throughout time. Thus, it is my hope that the present research can assist in elucidating how the bonds founded on a common hatred of “gender ideology” and the demand for reinstitution of masculinity to political power enabled the material circumstances for Bolsonaro’s rise to power, eventual election, and maintenance of his influence during his time in office, and how they were instrumental in building Bolsonaro’s Myth.

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