



Journal of
**Conflict
Transformation**
and
Security

Vol. 9 | No. 1 | 2021

Special Issue:
COVID19 and Redefining Human Security

Edited by Nergis Canefe

Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security



Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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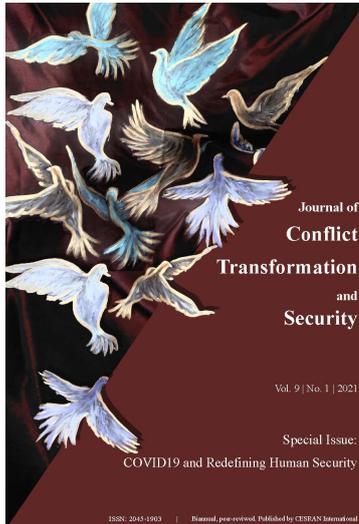
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Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue on COVID 19 and Redefining Human Security

Nergis Canefe - Co-editor

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a vast array of social, economic and legal implications, necessitating us to critically revisit the notion of human security. In addition to political and civil rights such as liberty and privacy being curtailed in relation to public health measures, social, economic and legal responses to the pandemic continue to have a far greater impact upon populations who are marginalized, who are on the move, as well as displaced communities and refugees, in radically unequal ways. The dimensions of specific populations' subjectification to unequal measures are related to their nationality, legal status, race, gender, disability, vulnerability and social class. In particular, interventions and resort to extreme measures cause further hardship in the plight of temporary and migrant workers, asylum seekers, internally displaced peoples under COVID-19 governance regimes.

In order to deepen the public understanding of the socio-political and economic dimensions of the current crisis related to the COVID 19 Pandemic in a global context, this special issue of JCTS addresses:

- Global differences in public access to healthcare;
- The situation in conflict zones, refugee camps, border areas, marginalized communities concerning the differential effects of the Pandemic;
- Exclusion of vulnerable communities, non-status peoples, minorities and precarious labour from the networks of protection put in place in relation to the Pandemic;
- Comparative analyses of social justice issues associated with COVID 19;
- Global forms of precarity that this Pandemic makes more visible;
- Regional and national effects of health care cuts or insufficient access to publicly funded medicine;
- Long-term implications of the Pandemic on our perception of human security.

The special issue includes three full articles, a commentary, and a lengthy interview. The proliferation of narratives on COVID 19 measures makes it much harder to make sense of the prevailing cacophony and to engage in critical reflections to such an unstable landscape of policy, politics and law, as pointed out by our authors. As an alternative to this chaotic and panic-ridden environment, the authors contributing to our special issue discuss how they see COVID affecting specific communities in relation to the larger society as well as developments in their area/region of research in relation to the global context. The contributions as a whole also identify potential transformative outcomes arising from the Pandemic, and share with us the ongoing work required to build those outcomes. As such, we invite our readers to think above and beyond the politics of exigency that continues to silence critical debate on uses and abuses of power in the name of redefining human security under pandemic conditions as part of the global response to COVID 19.

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Choosing The Wrong Path: The (Non) Response of Bolsonaro's Government to COVID-19 in Brazil and Its Consequences for The Brazilian International Image

Andre Sena*

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, was perceived with skepticism and distrust by Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro. Between March and July of this year the Brazilian governmental institutions proved to be not only inefficient, but also irresponsible in its attempts to combat the epidemiological pandemic. With public statements that claimed that COVID-19 was a media exaggeration, collective hysteria, or an international Chinese conspiracy, the president of the republic and members of his government struggled to take concrete actions to protect the population. Disqualifying the WHO's recommendations and promoting Hydroxychloroquine as a medical treatment instead, the government would lead the country to a dramatic situation approaching 100,000 dead and 3,000,000 infected by the end of July. The present article seeks to map out and analyze the behavior of the Brazilian government between the months of March through July, by measuring the main factors that contributed to the current Brazilian situation and its contributions to the country's image on the international scene, spawned by accusations against President Bolsonaro for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court in The Hague in July 2020.

Keywords: Covid-19, Bolsonaro Administration, Pandemics, Prevention, International Politics

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“The main enemy of the powerful, though hidden as all that is false and fragile, is none other than their own power”

(Augusto Monterroso – The Rest is Silence)

Introduction: a general overview of the Brazilian republican political history between 1989-2018

The Brazilian re-democratization process started in 1985 with the arrival of what political historians called the “New Republic”. After 21 years of a constitutional exception regime that from 1964 onwards became a military dictatorship, the country resumed its democratic normalcy by announcing a new constituent national assembly and direct elections for the presidency of the republic, which would take place in 1989.

Between the end of the 1980s and 1994, the country would go through numerous economic and political crises, especially hyperinflation that reached 1000%, following the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Melo, in the following decade. With the fall of Collor, his vice-president Itamar Franco tried the double maneuver of creating a government of national unity, while at the same time, seeking a new economic model based on a culture of fiscal responsibility. The policy of monetary and fiscal stability and the attempt at inflationary control generated in 1994 the greatest economic reform that Brazil has undergone since the foundation of the republic in the 19th century: The Plan Real.¹

Conceived by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then Minister of the Economy, the initial success of the implemented economic measures would end up producing power relations of a new type in Brazil, which can be designated by the formation of two political eras that would be deeply impacting: the Era FHC (1995- 2003) and the Lula Era (2003-2010).

Regarding the relationship built between the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and the

Workers Party (PT) to the present day, the 1994 election can be seen as the first antagonistic moment between the parties and their members in the political scenario / Brazilian supporter. Previously approximated, as during the drafting of the 1988 Constitution (the PSDB had not been founded until that moment, but we can think, according to the study by Kinzo (1989), the position of the party from its future founders and members) and the election of 1989, it was from the government of Itamar Franco, from the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), and evidently during the presidential election of 1994 that the antagonistic disputes between the parties and their members started, which continues until the today at various institutional levels, such as within the National Congress.²

This period produced in Brazil the emergence of two majority political blocs: the first, consolidated in power by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, had as its decision center the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), originally center-left oriented, which gradually became a more center/right wing force in the country. The administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso tried to combine a progressive model in the field of Human Rights with the approval of important projects in the area, such as the National Human Rights Program I and II, while in the economic field it sought the privatization of important state companies, unpopular measures of economic austerity and wage reductions for the working class.

The Lula Era was a critical and forceful response to the PSDB's power project, bringing the Workers' Party (PT) and the left political forces to power in Brazil in 2003. Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, the elected President, one of the most important figures in Brazilian trade unionism was the symbol of important changes that would come to the country. The arrival of a leftist bloc to power in Brazil was also

¹ See BATISTA. O Plano Real à luz da Experiência Mexicana e Argentina (Plan Real compared with the Mexican and Argentinian Experience). Estud. av. vol.10 no.28 São Paulo Sept./Dec. 1996

² See FREITAS. O Primeiro Grande Antagonismo entre PSDB e PT (The first serious antagonism between PSDB and PT) Opin. Publica vol.24 no.3 Campinas set./dez. 2018, P. 549

unprecedented in its political history in 114 years of republic. The traditional political oligarchies in Brazil have alternated in power in a more or less uniform way until then, with some populism upsets and an attempt at fundamental reforms perpetrated by the military coup of 1964. The year 2003 in fact inaugurated a new political phase of Brazilian democracy.

Several factors that led to the decline of the Lula era and the rise of a new type of conservatism in Brazil. Key to understanding the process that brought Jair Messias Bolsonaro to power in 2019, lies in the political and economic challenges faced by Lula's successor, President Dilma Vanja Rousseff, who ruled Brazil from 2011 until her fall by impeachment in 2016.

Democratically elected in 2010, Dilma Rousseff represented the continuity of the Workers' Party and its unprecedented reformist agenda in power. At the same time, it symbolized the democratic modernization of the country with the arrival for the first time of a woman in the highest national office. However, the crises that Dilma would have to face would be countless, without the economic comfort generated by the Lula years in the country, with a rising unemployment rate, a problem that was never in fact solved by any government of the New Republic. Added to this are important accusations of corruption that hit the Brazilian political class as a whole, especially the Workers' Party since 2005, and which produced criminal investigation operations never before seen in Brazil. The corruption scandals that occurred in the Lula Era radically haunted the presidency of Dilma Rousseff, leading to popular protests of a wide scope in 2013/2014, deepening an institutional crisis that would lead to her fall two years later.

With "great surprise" is show observers actually described their own reaction to the unexpected intensity and resilience of street protests. Framed as unpredictable, uncontrollable and spontaneous, the popular outcry was generally averse to formal encroachment from the organized left or right. Although a historical inability of conservative parties – now in the

opposition – to mobilize the youth probably contributed to their leader lessness, popular protests were directed at federal, state, and municipal governments of all ideological hues.³

Bolsonaro would come to power in 2019 after Michel Temer's buffer presidency, which led the formal political transition between 2016 and the 2018 presidential elections. Scorned by leftist forces, stunned by Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, Michel Temer was tolerated by the forces of the conservative right-wing bloc that currently govern Brazil.

Bolsonaro's Administration: From 2019 to the outbreak of COVID-19 global pandemics in 2020

2019 marks the beginning of Jair Bolsonaro's administration. Brazil was deeply divided between the broad base that had elected the president, and those who tried to prevent his election by seeking a compromise solution between the left that proved impossible to be held. While the different Brazilian political right-wing forces have formed a consensus around Bolsonaro's candidacy, the left has not been able to come together. The cohesion of the first around a single candidacy was due to a number of factors of sociological, behavioral but also economic nature.⁴

Bolsonaro initiated his tenure after having been elected by a wide base of evangelicals, who had been organizing and expanding their areas of influence in Brazil since the 1990s. Additional support came from a deeply displeased and resentful traditional middle class (different from other middle strata recently produced in the Lula Era) not only with the loss of economic power due to past crises, but also refractory to the progressive and inclusive agenda of the Lula and Dilma years. In addition, other sectors that are less

³ See D'ANDREA. 2013 Protests in Brazil: The Kite and the Byte in New Forms of Popular Mobilization. *Anthropological Quarterly*. Social Thought and Commentary Collection, Volume 87, #3, Summer 2014, p.937.

⁴ See SILVA. "Bolsonaro's New Chapter of Neoliberalism in Brazil." <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/12/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-neoliberalism-guedes-carvalho> (Accessed 7 July 2020)

important but still very active in the pro-Bolsonaro mobilization were decisive in his election, such as the emergence of an unprecedented popular and urban mobilization of groups identified with conservative and neoliberal ideas at the same time.⁵ The regional vote of the poorest states in the northeastern region of the country has not been able to prevent the election of a right-wing government for Brazil.

The country was assumed by Bolsonaro with the hazy promise of economic recovery, especially about resuming growth from job creation. The neoliberal perspective assumed in the electoral campaign became clearer from the decisions made by the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, an ultraliberal primer, who promised the business community minimum regulations that haunted the working class with the suspension of several of their labor rights with the intention to “flexibilize” the relationship between capital and labor.

To satisfy his diverse and multifaceted conservative electoral base, Bolsonaro permanently fired the Minister of Culture, and demoted him to secretary of state. Accused of being a space of wide circulation of ideas and policies associated with the left, Marxism and several other ideological fantasies that permeated the imagination of Bolsonaro's voters, the dismantling of the Ministry of Culture was the perfect symbol of the new political era that emerged in the country. Feminism, the fight against racism and the LGBTQ+ community's agenda were seen as an attempt by previous governments to reshape the country and eradicate its traditional social and cultural landscape. Homophobia, misogyny, and racism naturally came to be relativized and, in some cases, even tolerated under the aegis of “freedom of expression”.⁶

Internationally, Bolsonaro openly declared his alignment with two countries and their presidents: Donald Trump's United States and

of Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel. In a profound reformulation of the central framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the figure of a new Brazilian chancellor, Ernesto Araújo appeared, with the function of making the agenda of a *Bolsonarist* foreign policy, and the search for equally conservative allies in Europe, such as Hungary and Poland. Naturally, this Brazilian alignment strained relations with countries or blocs considered natural rivals of the United States, mainly the People's Republic of China, and Brazil's ally, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The new configuration, both domestically and internationally, will have a profound influence on the decision making and the performance of the Bolsonaro government when in early 2020 the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, this brief Brazilian historical-political report was considered necessary for the reader to better comprehend, in later sections of this paper, the main features of the current Brazilian government in relation to the internal and external scenario with regard to the pandemic problem.

March-June 2020: an odd and impressionist reaction to a global pandemic

Brazil has a serious epidemiological history. In its recent history, tropical scourges of a viral nature such as Dengue, Zika Virus and Chikungunya have been devastating in the main Brazilian metropolises. Especially in the summer, these epidemics can cause the death of a significant number of people, caused by outbreaks of hemorrhagic dengue, or will permanently disable a considerable number of citizens. The Zika Virus infected a large population of babies with microcephaly a decade ago, mainly in the northeastern region of the country.

This history of viral diseases of an epidemiological nature probably helped to forge a relatively skeptical social and collective attitude towards the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The general response of the Brazilian social fabric in February did not correspond to the alarm that was seen in other urban communities around the globe. This factor was probably decisive in reinforcing and legitimizing the Bolsonaro government's relative disregard for the problem at the beginning of the pandemic.

⁵ See LIMA. “Bolsonaro and the rise of the Far-Right Neoliberalism in Brazil.” <https://alusta.uta.fi/2018/12/03/bolsonaro-and-the-rise-of-far-right-neoliberalism-in-brazil> (Accessed 8 July 2020)

⁶ See ROCHA. “Brazilian Culture: in the Survival Mode.” <https://cmds.ceu.edu/article/2020-03-26/brazilian-culture-survival-mode> (Accessed 14 July 2020)

Although legislation regarding measures with which to tackle COVID-19 has been in place in the country since February 7, 2020, i.e. before the epidemic was officially recognized in the country, President Jair Bolsonaro has given little importance to it. In fact, he is one of the few world leaders who refuse to recognize the threat constituted by the virus. There are numerous articles in the media repeating his public statements against the measures implemented in the states and municipalities and encouraging his followers on social media sites to disobey the social distancing recommendations.⁷

Without a clear statement from the Ministry of Health in mid-January, it was up to the executive branch to address the reactions that preceded the statement released by the WHO on March 11, 2020 confirming the existence of a global pandemic crisis. In one of his most serious proclamations the day before, Jair Bolsonaro said that the phenomenon constituted only a small crisis, claiming that it could also be a fantasy manufactured by the media. The president stated that "We have at the moment a crisis, a small crisis. In my opinion this issue (of coronavirus) is much more a fantasy. It is not all that serious as the mainstream media propagates", disregarding any opinion originated from the medical community. Brazilian or international. This statement actually accompanies a logic of denial and indifference in relation to the problem of COVID-19, which had already been made public by the president in previous speeches, especially between February 27 and March 9, where at different times Bolsonaro publicly said that the severity of the virus was being overestimated, with no reason to panic, while diluting the potential scourge in Brazil by claiming that "the whole world would be suffering".⁸

⁷ See AQUINO EML et al. Social distancing measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic: potential impact and challenges in Brazil. *Ciênc. saúde coletiva* vol.25 supl.1, Rio de Janeiro, June 2020 p. 2430

⁸ See VANNUCHI. "A pandemia de COVID-19 segundo Bolsonaro: da "gripezinha" ao "e daí?" (The pandemics

It is not possible to disregard these statements as they have concretely contributed to two referrals in Brazil: a tacit acceptance of a great deal of the Brazilian population of Bolsonaro's arguments and at the same time a certain immobility of the Ministry of Health in the face of the first developments of the pandemic in the country, when the death toll in China already exceeded 5,000 people. This acquiescence relation between the discourse of political authorities and population behavior in Brazil has its origins in the episodes of populism and authoritarianism that profoundly marked Brazilian republican political history. The "voice of the leader" has a deep weight in the national conscience, marked by a *caudillist* heritage that contributed in the beginning of the 20th century to the construction of the Brazilian republican national project.

Although showing the main elements of populism, Bolsonaro's discourse does not score high on the populism scale, mainly because his speech also contains patriotic and nationalist traits inconsistent with his populism. These elements are not necessarily incompatible with populism; it is possible to identify subtypes of populism that derive from interactions between these discourses.⁹

The President's continued denial of the dangers a global pandemic posed to Brazil, had a toxic effect on public. Between the statement by the WHO on March 11 until the end of April, there will be no change in the government's tone regarding the perception of the pandemic problem. On 28 April, Bolsonaro said to the Brazilian press: "There is a pandemic. So what? I'm sorry. What do you want me to do? I am a Messiah [referring to his middle name], but I do not perform miracles".¹⁰

according to Bolsonaro: from "the little flu" to the "so what?")
<https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/camilovannuchi/2020/04/30/a-pandemia-de-covid-19-segundo-bolsonaro-da-gripezinha-ao-e-dai.htm> (Access 15 July 2020)

⁹ See TAMAKI&FUKS. Populism in Brazil's 2018 General Elections: an Analysis of Bolsonaro's Campaign Speeches. *Lua Nova* no.109, São Paulo, Jan./Apr. 2020, p.117

¹⁰ See VANNUCHI. "A pandemia de COVID-19 segundo Bolsonaro: da "gripezinha" ao "e daí?". (The pandemics

The Bolsonaro government's neoliberal economic policy was decisive in transforming these statements into concrete guidelines in the conduct of the pandemic in Brazil.¹¹ Having as a guiding economic principle of government the reduction of the role of the State in the economy, the valorization of free trade and the free market as a regulatory force in economic relations and as a vector of prosperity, the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes hinted that a reaction effectively serious in the face of the pandemic would cause an unprecedented economic catastrophe in the country and postpone the positive economic results promised by the government since Bolsonaro's inauguration.

While the political side of Bolsonaro's administration has been marked by staggering confusion, the economic side has been dominated by Finance Minister Paulo Guedes, a minor "Chicago Boy" in General Pinochet's Chile and a banker and occasional academic in Brazil. His main priority is to dismantle Brazil's progressive pension system in order to introduce another one based on individual accounts, minimal redistribution between generations or classes, and tough restrictions upon drawing on pension income. His proposal is so restrictive that most low earners with unstable jobs will never achieve the contributions threshold required to claim benefits while the rich will tend to choose private pensions offering more flexible conditions and uncapped returns. At a further remove are the privatization "of everything" (starting with the country's airports and parts of Petrobras) and, finally, tax reform introducing a less progressive system. Under authoritarian neoliberalism, Brazil's economy, society, and political

system are in a perilous state; the democratic 1988 Constitution is frayed if not mortally wounded, and there is no clear path back to economic growth and political stability.¹²

One of the first targets of the Minister of Economy was the recommendation made by the WHO on the need to practice social distancing. At the end of March 2020, Paulo Guedes publicly declared that social "isolation" would lead to a natural disorganization of the Brazilian productive system and would be the main cause of freezing the entire national economy. Admitting that he was not sure about the health issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the minister's argument posed a dilemma to the Brazilian society, presented as a false debate: it will be necessary to choose between economic prosperity or public health.¹³

President Bolsonaro immediately backed his minister's arguments, consolidating the image of a government that understood that the market was preceded the dangers of a global pandemic; the resources to support a country that had been in an economic downturn since previous governments were too scarce, and the paralysis of trade, companies and services could lead the country into a recession. This neoliberal interpretation proposed by the government perfectly matched Bolsonaro's initial message that the pandemic could be a simple fantasy, or an exaggeration from the international community.

As a complement to these fallacious arguments from the government, a sinister political rhetoric began to appear in early April 2020 that questioned data from the international scientific community and the WHO itself.¹⁴ Despite the exponential growth of confirmed cases between March and May, in a curve that

according to Bolsonaro: from "the little flu" to the "so what?") <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/camilovannuchi/2020/04/30/a-pandemia-de-covid-19-segundo-bolsonaro-da-gripezinha-ao-e-dai.htm> (Access 15 July 2020)

¹¹ See EDWARDS. "Bolsonaro's radical neo-liberal offensive in Brazil." <https://eyesonlatinamerica.com/2019/04/24/bolsonaro-s-radical-neo-liberal-offensive-in-brazil/> (Access July 16 2020)

¹² See SAAD-FILHO. *Varieties of Neoliberalism in Brazil (2003–2019)*. Sage Journals. *Latin American Perspectives*. Volume: 47, issue: 1, November-January, 2019-2020, p.22.

¹³ RFI. "Brazil risks 'economic collapse' over virus lockdown: minister Paulo Guedes." <https://www.rfi.fr/en/wires/20200508-brazil-risks-economic-collapse-over-virus-lockdown-minister> (Access 15 July 2020)

¹⁴ FRASER. "How Anti-Science Attitudes Have Impacted the Coronavirus Pandemic in Brazil" <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-anti-science-attitudes-have-impacted-the-coronavirus-pandemic-in-brazil/> (Access 18 July 2020)

rose from 1.200 to 80.000¹⁵ people in about two months, Bolsonaro insisted on the idea that a coronavirus infection would be nothing more than a mild flu, putting himself personally in the media as a kind of personal proof of his arguments. The president of the republic affirmed that because he had a biological historic of athletic physique, he would hardly be affected by the virus, confusing public opinion, in an attitude of open scorn before the population.¹⁶

The government's attempt to disqualify international data and institutions began to intensify in April 2020 in two perspectives: initially the recommendations of the WHO were questioned by Bolsonaro, bringing embarrassment to the government's Minister of Health, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, who would later be fired by the president. In addition to its critics on the WHO recommendations on social distance, the government now perceived the closing of schools and the need for quarantine practices and the permanence of people in their homes as an exaggeration. The president personally challenged these international guidelines by making countless public appearances, calling on his supporters to go to the streets, shaking hands with his sympathizers and allowing himself to be photographed in public alongside groups of people; a clear attitude of questioning the directives of the WHO and those from his own government's timid health ministry.

Secondly, the very essence of the WHO as an international organization came under scrutiny by President Bolsonaro. Between April and May 2020 the government used social networks like Twitter to publicize rumors of an alleged WHO subservience to international powers, particularly the People's Republic of China. Accusing the organization of working according to an "ideological basis," In June,

Bolsonaro threatened to leave the organization if it did not back down on social distance policies. One of the government's tactics to continue its criticism of WHO consisted of the argument that the international organization posed a threat to Brazilian sovereignty, insofar as its guidelines could translate into a kind of intervention in the domestic conduct of Brazilian politics and economy. "If the WHO does not withdraw from being a political and partisan organization, we will consider leaving it", declared Bolsonaro on June 5, 2020. This behavior by the Brazilian government would be further aggravated by statements of a frankly conspiratorial tone from the country's foreign relations chancellor Ernesto Araujo. The minister would declare that an intrinsic relationship between the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the foreign policy of "Communist China" existed.

Bolsonaro government's anti-communist paranoia: the Chinese issue

Trade and economic relations between Brazil and China have been growing exponentially since the late 1970s, with the Asian power entry into the World Trade Organization. The predictions made by the government of President Itamar Franco that China would be one of the main Brazilian trading partners in the 21st century was already confirmed in its first decades, especially during the years when the Brazil was ruled by the Workers' Party. Based on a commercially pragmatic logic, the commercial approach between the two countries was stimulated in the context of an economic diplomacy that sought partners beyond the United States and the European Union. The *South-South Diplomacy*, implemented in the Lula era, also sought to strengthen ties with the African continent, South America, the Caribbean and other peripheral actors in the international system.

Lula's national and international program represented a turn to the left in terms of the political models of the 1990s. Until then, it had been required policy to promote alignment of the country's policies with the neoliberal program of the Washington Consensus (do Carmo and Pecequilo 2012). By contrast, Lula's government looked to strengthen the country's role in

¹⁵ See Corona Virus Resource Center. John Hopkins University Medicine. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (Access 16 July 2020)

¹⁶ See PHILLIPS. "Bolsonaro says he 'wouldn't feel anything' if infected with Covid-19 and attacks state lockdowns." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/bolsonaro-brazil-wouldnt-feel-anything-covid-19-attack-state-lockdowns>. (Access 16 July 2020)

international arenas, effecting a transition from a model based on economic credibility toward one of “autonomy through diversification” (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007) and a greater role in the setting of international norms. Although the Ministry of External Relations (MRE, also known as *Itamaraty*) tried to strengthen Brazil’s soft power, Lula simultaneously called in his speeches for the democratization of global decision-making bodies.¹⁷

The emergence of Brazil in to the international arena was based on the conception of a *logistic State* aimed to forge a global Brazilian leadership, which consisted of a priority of the Lula administration. This necessary strategy involved multilateralism and the expansion of relations between the State and the Third Sector at domestic and international levels, as well as the search for new models of regional integration.

The regional integration becomes, in the 21st century, an instrument of support to Brazilian globalist call. This is accomplished through the influence on the international scene in order to transform the rules of order and through more robust links of global interdependence, particularly through the outward expansion of Brazilian companies. The integration preserves, however, as perennial, the function to maintain and cultivate the climate of political understanding in South America, perhaps in Latin America, since its neighbors constitute a strategic reserve needed for the global goal to be achieved.¹⁸

All these years (2003-2016) of building a foreign policy based on what some Brazilian experts called *autonomy for participation*,

¹⁷ See CASTRO. Brazil’s South-South Foreign Policy Post-Lula. Where Does Africa Fit In? *Afrique Contemporaine*. Volume 248, Issue 4, 2013, p. 248

¹⁸ See CERVO. “The Foreign Policy of Brazil.” *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*. v.1, n.2, Jul-Dec 2012, pp. 12-13.

diversification and development have been superficially and even grossly misrepresented by the Bolsonaro government. The efforts of decades undertaken by Brazilian commercial diplomacy and by formulators of the country’s foreign policy were interpreted as being at the service of an obscure project of power by the international left, a foreign policy of ideological alignment and a markedly socialist slant, resurrecting a caricature buzzword of the most nebulous years of the Cold War.

With the arrival of the global pandemic, the People’s Republic of China would be the main target of the government and its conspiratorial delusions. The Brazilian Chancellor Ernesto Araújo, endeavored to formulate a narrative that accused China of being responsible for the pandemic in an effort to destabilize the world’s economy.

In a ministerial meeting convened by President Bolsonaro on April 22, 2020, the Brazilian chancellor referred to the coronavirus as the “Commievirus”¹⁹, setting a markedly anti-communist and inaccurate tone in future government tours of the pandemic and pointing to China’s dual role in the issue: firstly, the production of the pandemic itself, and secondly, in the collaboration between China and the WHO, working to support Chinese hegemonic interests around the Globe. The suspicion propagated by Bolsonaro campaign speeches in 2018, criticizing Brazilian foreign policy towards countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Iran, now assumed the character of an official government discourse concerning the pandemic of COVID-19, electing China as the enemy of the moment. Donald Trump’s statements about the Chinese origin of the virus²⁰ served as a legitimate support for the Brazilian chancellery’s arguments.

Publicly denouncing China, one of Brazil’s most important international trading partners, as

¹⁹ See KALOUT. “Bolsonaro’s Failed Diplomacy Leaves Brazil Isolated as Pandemic Rages. Ideological fixation has been a diplomatic and public health disaster.” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/07/bolsonaro-failed-diplomacy-brazil-isolated-coronavirus> (Access 18 July 2020)

²⁰ See CHIU. “Trump has no qualms about calling coronavirus the ‘Chinese Virus.’ That’s a dangerous attitude, experts say.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/03/20/coronavirus-trump-chinese-virus> (Access 18 July 2020)

the country that devised a communist plan for world domination, Ernesto Araújo sent the country's public opinion a message of distrust about the actual existence of the pandemic, which to some extent contributed to authorize a certain social behavior of a significant part of the Brazilian urban population in relation to the problem;²¹ it also started a noisy questioning of popular sectors that support the government about the need for measures recommended by the WHO, such as social distance and the real necessity of quarantine procedures.

In his personal blog, *Metapolítica 17*, the Brazilian foreign minister commenting on the book *Virus*, written by Slavoj Žižek, makes his point regarding the role of WHO as a Chinese instrument and mere puppet, in the disorganization of national sovereignties and in favor of Chinese economic and political interests.

It does not escape Žižek, of course, the value that the WHO has at this moment for the cause of denationalization, one of the assumptions of communism. Transferring national powers to WHO, under the pretext (never proven!) That a centralized international body is more efficient in dealing with problems than countries acting individually, is only the first step in building planetary communist solidarity. Following the same model, power must also be transferred to other organizations, each in its own domain. Žižek does not specify it, but he probably has in mind a global industrial policy being dictated by UNIDO, a global educational program controlled by UNESCO and so on.²²

²¹ See NEWSWISE. *Bolsonaro's Attitude to Coronavirus Increases 'Risky Behaviour' in Brazil.*

https://www.newswise.com/coronavirus/bolsonaro-s-attitude-to-coronavirus-increases-risky-behaviour-in-brazil-study/?article_id=731070 (Access 18 July 2020)

²² See ARAUJO. "Chegou o Comunavírus. O corona vírus nos faz despertar novamente para o pesadelo comunista." (The commie virus is here. Corona virus makes us once again alert against the communist nightmare). <https://www.metapoliticabrasil.com/post/chegou-o-comunav%C3%ADrus> (Access 18 July 2020)

In addition to causing growing discomfort among the Chinese diplomatic staff installed in Brasilia and causing tensions between Brazilian companies that are partners with Chinese industrial corporations, the Bolsonaro government's statements via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs disguised a permanent government inaction in terms of public health in the fight against the scourge of COVID-19. The government's authoritarian neoliberal perception that the economy cannot be stopped by the pandemic, the president's personal attitudes when appearing at public events and calling on his supporters to appear in the streets, plus the government's interactive anti-communist paranoia would have as a complement the tacit alignment of the Bolsonaro's administration to that of the Donald Trump administration.

The issue of American alignment: Bolsonaro and Trump

The election of Donald Trump had a very important impact on the then presidential candidate Jair Messias Bolsonaro. A neo-conservative turn in the United States, in response to years of progressive liberal politics in the Obama era, was the perfect electoral road map for the same phenomenon - with its local peculiarities - to reproduce the phenomenon in Brazil. Bolsonaro was an enthusiast of the Trump administration from the very first moment, and his political entourage made it very clear that an alignment with the United States was the first step in deconstructing the Brazilian foreign policy of Presidents Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff.

The main justification for this alignment was based on economic reasons. A more robust approach to the United States could strengthen the Brazilian trade balance on the international stage.²³ The opposite happened; the consequences of the rapprochement with the Trump administration have been at least

²³ See NETO et al. "US-Brazil trade and FDI: Enhancing the bilateral economic relationship. A new chapter for US-Brazil relations."

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/us-brazil-trade-and-fdi-enhancing-the-bilateral-economic-relationship/#intro> (Access 19 July 2020)

economically reversed: a 37% reduction in exports compared to 2019. The president of the Brazilian Foreign Trade Association (AEB) José Augusto de Castro warned in July 2020 that an approach to the United States by Donald Trump and his protectionist economic policy could never replace Brazil's trade relations with China, especially in commodity exports to the Asian country.²⁴

Thus only arguments of a political nature were left to justify the necessary alignment of Bolsonaro's government with the Trump administration. The anti-communist rhetoric of the Brazilian government emerges at that moment as the main justification for this approach, insofar as the *Bolsonarist* diplomacy announced a Brazilian foreign policy "without ideological bias", and in line with international powers that were in tune with the national values of the "new Brazil".

There are no doubts that the ideological context of Bolsonaro's rise facilitates his policy of diplomatic alignment with the United States. From the very outset, Bolsonaro has made a big deal of his admiration for the United States. During a campaign rally for the Brazilian diaspora in Miami, he saluted the American flag while his supporters chanted "USA! USA!". Furthermore, he has on many occasions professed his fascination with Donald Trump. "I look to Trump as a role model". The US president has responded in kind. Upon learning of Bolsonaro's win, Trump called to congratulate his new colleague effusively, while John Bolton, the National Security Advisor, hailed Bolsonaro as good news, going on to praise him as a "like-minded" leader. Steve Bannon endorsed the new president of Brazil as a leading figure in

the current right-wing, transnational populist wave.²⁵

With the COVID-19 pandemic declared in March 2020, the Brazilian government immediately sought to reproduce Donald Trump's performance in several aspects. The critical stance towards China gained strength with Trump's statements about the Chinese origin of the virus; the criticisms that the Brazilian government made to WHO at the beginning of the pandemic sought resonance in Trump's own position regarding the organization. However, the dynamics of the US government in relation to COVID-19 moved at its own pace, with changing positions in relation to treatments, therapies and social practices, such as isolation or the use of masks. The American's own dynamics on all these matters proved to be difficult for the Brazilian government to follow.

The United States' position on hydroxychloroquine is a striking example of this issue. At first, Trump recommended hydroxychloroquine as a therapeutic measure, then later denounced it, but not without having sent 2,000,000 samples of the medicine to Brazil, without any scientific proof of its effectiveness.²⁶

While the government wasted time and energy taking a stand against international communism, China's hegemonic claims, and seeking alignment with the United States without any critical filter, the numbers of COVID-19 cases and death rates in the country increased from May 2020 in a geometric progression that took the country from 1,300 cases notified in April to the astronomical number of 3,000,000 people with the virus in late July of the same year.²⁷

²⁴ See HESSEL. "Alinhamento do Brasil aos EUA não favoreceu balança comercial brasileira." (Brazil's alignment with the USA did not favor Brazilian trade balance).

https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/economia/2020/07/20/internas_economia,873532/alinhamento-do-brasil-aos-eua-nao-favoreceu-balanca-brasileira.shtml (Access 19 July 2020)

²⁵ See SPEKTOR&FASOLIN. "Brazil and the United States: Will President Bolsonaro Bandwagon?" <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/11/15/brazil-and-the-united-states-will-president-bolsonaro-bandwagon/> (Access 19 July 2020)

²⁶ See SPETALNIK. "U.S. sends Brazil 2.000.000 doses of hydroxychloroquine, drug touted by Trump." <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-brazil/u-s-sends-brazil-2-million-doses-of-hydroxychloroquine-drug-touted-by-trump-idUSKBN2370RU> (Access 19 July 2020)

²⁷ See Corona Virus Resource Center. John Hopkins University Medicine. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (Access 22 July 2020)

With government ministers insisting on treatment with hydroxychloroquine, as was the case for the Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights Damara Alves, the government produced an increasingly tense relationship between the Executive, the government's allies and the Ministry of Health increasingly intimidated by the President of the Republic public declarations. Two health ministers were dismissed in just one semester. After a whole month of conflicts with Jair Bolsonaro, Health Minister Carlos Mandetta left office in April 2020, due to disagreements with the president over the need for social distancing practices and the use of hydroxychloroquine.

The same would happen with his successor, Nelson Teich, who would resign in less than a month in office.²⁸ This time the divergences with the President revolved around a decree signed by Bolsonaro authorizing the opening of gyms and beauty salons in the country, and an immediate flexibility to open schools and commercial establishments. The instability of the Ministry of Health, together with the confusing messages by the Brazilian government regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership to control the virus was relegated to state governors. Governors of important states like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have become fierce strongholds of opposition to the federal government regarding the response to COVID-19.

Denounced in The Hague: genocide and crimes against humanity

The international image of Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, has been under scrutiny since the election of 2018 presidential election. His reputation as a candidate of the extreme right, his authoritarian, homophobic and truculent personal style were elements that became the regular image of the new government. On January 1, 2019 Bolsonaro stated that the country was considering its withdrawal from important international agreements such as the Paris Agreements. Furthermore, the

²⁸ See PHILLIPS. "Brazil loses second health minister less than a month as COVID-19 deaths rise." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/15/brazil-health-minister-nelson-teich-resigns> (Access 22 July 2020)

exponential increase in fires in the Amazon rainforest, the inability to manage the problem with Venezuelan refugees in the country and indispositions of all sorts with the European Union, deteriorated the country's image on the international stage.

The COVID-19 Pandemic made the Brazilian international situation even more serious due to the Bolsonaro government's inability to respond to the urgency and seriousness of the problem. Increasing numbers of contagion and fatalities, which at the beginning of August, according to forecasts, will exceed 100,000 dead; the inability to create a unified response to the scourge, producing a deep dissent between the federal government and state governors and Bolsonaro's ministers' paranoid insistence on Pandemic as a Chinese problem and the World Health Organization as an ideologically subordinated international institution, were factors that led the president of the republic to be reported to the International Criminal Court in The Hague in late July, under the charge of genocide and crime against humanity.

The complaint was filed by a union coalition of more than one million health workers in Brazil, with the support of several international entities.²⁹ This attitude adds to a repertoire of at least 35 other complaints formally made against the Brazilian government to the United Nations in 2019. In the case of the complaint to the Court of The Hague, Bolsonaro is accused of negligence and omission in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in a detailed 64 pages report submitted to the attorney general of the Court Fatou Bensouda.³⁰

This is the fourth complaint against Bolonaro in The Hague. The complaint made on July 26, 2020 should be upheld by the International Criminal Court and submitted to a preliminary assessment for Bolsonaro to be effectively prosecuted. The terms of the petition denounce

²⁹ See UNI GLOBAL UNION. "International Criminal Court case claims Brazilian government's COVID-19 response is a crime against humanity." <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/international-criminal-court-case-claims-brazilian-governments-covid-19-response-a-crime> (Access 31 July 2020)

³⁰ See MARQUES et al. https://uniglobalunion.org/sites/default/files/imce/english_denuncia_presidente_icc_final.pdf (Access 31 July 2020)

elements such as denialism in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, incitement to public agglomerations by the President of the Republic, inefficiency in public health policies, inaction in combating the pandemic in Brazil, and the exposure to COVID-19 of ethnically vulnerable populations, such as traditional indigenous communities. It is definitely a severe blow to a government, whose international image was already severely damaged in 2019.

Conclusions

Since the first moment of the outbreak of the COVID-19 in Brazil, the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro has shown negligence in the preparations and effective actions to combat the epidemic and to flatten a possible upward curve in the country. The statement by the WHO in March 2020 declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic, was viewed by the Bolsonaro's government with skepticism and distrust, confirmed by the several public and official statements made by the president of the republic himself.

The recommendations by the WHO were disqualified by the government, which knee-capped the efforts of the Ministry of Health to promote any popular awareness campaigns that would lead people to practice social distancing and take other preventive measures. Contradicting WHO and the stance of several government officials from other countries, Bolsonaro insisted on public appearances, without the use of a mask and with intense physical interaction with his supporters between the months of March and June 2020, leading to a relativization of the need for isolation and inducing the public to reproduce the president's behavior.

Taking effective action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic implied the objective recognition of the seriousness of the problem, which did not occur in the government, nor with the expressive increase in cases of contagion and deaths that in August 2020 will reach more than 100,000 victims. The government preferred to spread a relativistic and conspiratorial discourse holding China responsible for the problem and placing international organizations like the WHO

under suspicion. Internally, in addition to the federal government's clear inaction in combating the pandemic, Jair Bolsonaro dismissed between April and May 2020 two ministers of health for trying to follow WHO recommendations and opposing the immediate opening of commercial and educational establishments in the country.

With the exponential increase of victims of COVID-19 between the months of May and June 2020, a significant part of the Brazilian medical community, health professionals and civil society entities such as unions denounced President Jair Bolsonaro to the International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity. In effect, the inefficiency and neglect of the Brazilian government has contributed greatly not only to leading Brazil to a humanitarian public health drama unprecedented in its history, but also to further weakening its image before the international community.

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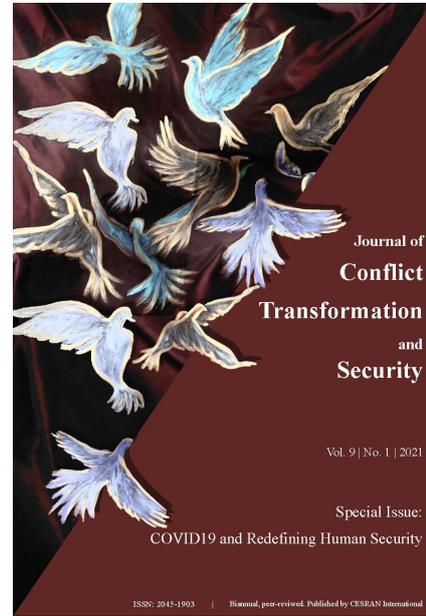
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