SPECIAL ISSUE: NEW DIRECTIONS
FOR FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Contexto Internacional
vol. 45(2) May/Aug 2023
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-8529.20234502e20220034

Conspiracy Theory and the Foreign Policy of the Far Right: The Case of Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil (2019-2021)

Felipe Pereira Loureiro*

Abstract: This paper analyses the conspiratorial worldview that surrounded the foreign policy of Jair Bolsonaro's government in Brazil during the tenure of Ernesto Araújo as Brazilian Foreign Minister (2019-2021), discussing the potential roles that conspiracy theory played for Bolsonaro's political movement and administration. We focus on Ernesto Araújo's so-called globalist conspiracy theory, employing his speeches, publications, and interviews as main sources. We conclude that Araújo's globalist conspiracy theory constitutes what Michael Barkun calls a 'systemic conspiracy theory', presenting significant potential functions for the energization and cohesion of Bolsonaro's political movement. The paper also concludes that, given its focus on the intrinsic unit of the 'nation' and the 'people', Araújo's globalist conspiracy theory has opened potential avenues for the use of symbolic and material violence against Brazilians who do not fit into this unit, consolidating ideological foundations for the fasciticization of Bolsonaro's followers, with significant and grave potential consequences for Brazilian democracy.

Keywords: conspiracy theory; globalism; Jair Bolsonaro; Ernesto Araújo; Brazilian foreign policy.

Introduction

Jair Bolsonaro's election to Brazil's presidency in 2018 brought a major shift to the Brazilian foreign policy. Paradigms such as the centrality ascribed to regional integration; defence of a universal and non-selective human rights approach; support for international rules, norms, and multilateral organizations; and efforts towards building broad international coalitions among developing countries were abandoned or severely weakened. In its place, the Bolsonaro government established an automatic alignment, tilting towards submission to Donald Trump's United States; promoted regime change in Venezuela, including the support for unilateral sanctions banned outright military intervention; presented strong

* Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo - SP, Brazil; felipeloureiro@usp.br. ORCiD 0000-0001-8159-2543.

critiques against global multilateral institutions, particularly the UN system; backed the reform or the deconstruction of projects of regional integration; and worked for the abandonment or the undermining of links with the Global South. The last two of these changes had already been put in place by the previous Brazilian administration – that of president Michel Temer (2016-2019) –, but they reached new and, to some extent, unprecedented heights after Bolsonaro took power in January 2019 (Saraiva 2020; Gonçalves and Teixeira 2020; Paiva, Mendes and Vieira 2020; Silva 2020).

Far right ideology played a key role in Bolsonaro's foreign policy. In spite of other significant intervenient factors – spawning from material interests of fractions of local entrepreneurs to Bolsonaro's political opportunism in using foreign policy as a platform for strengthening and energizing his political base (Loureiro 2022) – scholars argue that ideological motivations are key to explaining the shift in the Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro (Guimarães and Silva 2021; Casarões and Farias 2021). Specifically, conspiratorial beliefs and conspiratorial politics – a crucial component of how far right groups tend to operate politically, at least taking into consideration the history of the far right in the West during 19th and 20th centuries (Saull et al. 2015: 5-6) –, were intrinsic to Bolsonaro's worldview and to many of his advisors, ministers, and political allies.

One of the most important representatives of these conspiratorial beliefs in the Brazilian government was Bolsonaro's first Minister of Foreign Relations, Ernesto Araújo, who resigned in March 2021 after being criticized over delays in vaccine imports during the second wave of COVID-19 in Brazil (Colleta, Uribe and Carvalho 2021). Araújo was a disciple of Olavo de Carvalho (1947-2022), a self-proclaimed Brazilian philosopher and long-time conspiracy entrepreneur of the far right, who held large sway over government appointments during the beginning of the Bolsonaro administration – including the case of Araújo himself and that of the President's Foreign Policy Advisor, Filipe Martins (Teitelbaum 2020; Duarte 2019). Araújo employed his strategic post as Brazil's chancellor for spreading and legitimizing conspiracy theories, particularly the so-called 'globalist conspiracy', which informed and shaped several areas of the Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro.

IR scholars have been recognizing the strong connection between far right populism and conspiracy theories (Bergmann 2018; Bergmann and Butter 2020). In spite of that, few works provide an in-depth analysis of the nature of conspiracy theories propagated by leaders of the far right once they reach power. This gap is particularly manifested in societies of the Global South, as most works focus on far right populism in Western Europe and in the US (Stoica 2017; Ylä-Anttila 2018). When scholars do examine conspiracy theories in developing countries, such as in India and Brazil, their focus tends to be primarily on theories related to domestic issues (Demuru 2020). This kind of analysis is crucial if we were to understand what the potential roles conspiracy theories play within far-right governments and political movements. A key methodological step is to appreciate how the so-called 'conspiracy entrepreneurs' (Harambam 2020) – especially those who hold institutional positions and have material resources and symbolic power to propagate their ideas – articulate and express conspiracy theories in the first place. This is the case of Bolsonaro's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo.

This article looks into several of Araújo's speeches and articles delivered during his period in office (2019-2021). We employ a collection of 120 pieces selected by the cultural arm of Brazil's Foreign Ministry, the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (*Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão*, FUNAG), and published in book format in 2019 and 2021. Employing the categorisations on conspiracy theory put forward by Michael Barkun (2003), and drawing on Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) perspective on the 'history of concepts' (*Begriffsgeschichte*), we focus on Araújo's theory of 'globalism', looking into three of its elements: the characteristics and the goals of the so-called 'globalist' villains; the main instruments employed by conspirators for advancing conspiratorial targets; and what Brazil could do – according to Araújo – to arrest the globalist march and overcome this alarming threat.

We present three main conclusions: first, Araújo's conspiracy theory can be characterized by what Barkun (2003) calls a 'systemic conspiracy', for there is a complex and hidden chain linking different kinds of smaller conspiracies all the way up to the main villain ('communists'), even though communists are sometimes portrayed as dominated by an ideological (and almost supernatural) evil force. This latter characteristic provided potential rhetorical flexibility for Bolsonaro and his allies, allowing them to change targets strategically according to political necessities, as well as tapping into the strong religious beliefs of many of Bolsonaro's followers (Demuru 2021). Second, in spite of its strong Manichean worldview and its semantic similarity with religious narratives, Araújo's globalist ideology does not present characteristics of millenarianism, given that the victory of good over evil depends on an earthly struggle – e.g. the defence of liberty through nationalism. We argue that Araújo's claim that preservation and strengthening of the 'nation' is key to confronting globalism potentially functioned as a mobilizing and cohesive force for Bolsonaro's political movement. And, finally, third, the emphasis Araújo puts on unity and the sacred and indisputable commitment of the 'people' to the 'nation' ended up not only obscuring material interests and class cleavages inside and outside the nation state (Saull 2015), but also linking Araújo's ideological design with that of the ultranationalist mark characteristic of historic fascism.

Before we start, it is important to make two clarifications. First, our focus on Ernesto Araújo's thought does not mean his ideas were original - in reality, they were not –, nor that he was necessarily the most influential official in the Bolsonaro administration promoting the 'globalist' narrative. However, the fact that Araújo held for more than two years the highest post in the country's foreign affairs (only below the president himself) matters tremendously, making what he said and what he wrote during that period extremely significant. And, second, the study of Araújo's conspiratorial narrative and the theoretical debate regarding its potential functions for the Bolsonaro administration and political movement does not mean that these latent functions were or ever will be materialized. Even when they did materialize, as it became clear after the violent attack against the country's highest political institutions carried out by Bolsonaro followers in Brasília on January 8, 2023 – in reaction to what many believed was a rigged presidential election, and clearly motivated by several conspiratorial narratives[1] – it does not necessarily follow that these attitudes had been activated by particular conspiratorial entrepreneurs, such as Ernesto Araújo or by any other official of the Bolsonaro administration, including the

President himself. Of course the higher the symbolic and material power that conspiratorial entrepreneurs have, the greater the potential for a given conspiracy theory that they promote to influence followers. This is why a systematic comprehension of the logics and potential functions of far-right conspiratorial beliefs promoted by powerful conspiracy entrepreneurs is key if one wants to understand the way by which these conspiracy theories trickle down in society through other (lower rank) conspiracy entrepreneurs and how capillary these narratives tend to be within far-right movements.

Theoretical considerations on conspiracy theories and the Far Right

To understand how Bolsonaro's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo's worldview fits the pattern of conspiracy theories, it is crucial to define what conspiracy theory is. Let's begin by the word 'conspiracy'. According to Joseph Uscinski (2020: 22), conspiracy can be understood as 'a small group of powerful individuals acting in secret for their own benefit and against the common good.' As Uscinski's definition shows, conspiracies have happened (and still happen) all the time and in different places. While many of them fail, others are successful, even if some end up leading to unpredictable outcomes (Pigden 1995). Conspiracies also take place in diverse settings, with various configurations in terms of spatiality (local, national, regional, global); institutional design (government, corporations, political parties, civil society associations); and social context (family, neighbourhood, workplace).

Conspiracy theory is another matter though. Uscinski defines conspiracy theory as an 'an explanation of past, present, of future events or circumstances that cites, as the primary cause, a conspiracy' (Uscinski 2020: 24). What we have here is not only the claim that conspiracies happen, but that conspiracies have been primarily (but not solely) responsible for the occurrence of specific 'events or circumstances'. Even though the term 'conspiracy theory' has acquired a strong pejorative connotation nowadays, particularly due to the information revolution made possible by the rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) – and, of course, by the wave of fake news, disinformation and misinformation that have accompanied it (Uscinski 2020: 26) –, it is crucial not to be carried away by these trends and dismiss conspiracy theories altogether (Hagen 2022).

If successful conspiracies which are not the primary cause of events tend to take place more often that those that occupy a centre stage in explaining social reality, the latter has also happened quite a lot throughout History. In the case of Brazil, for instance, the US involvement in the country's 1964 military coup was definitely part of a conspiracy whose successful outcome depended, in a large extent, on US support (Pereira 2018; Loureiro 2023). In fact, the US involvement in Latin America, particularly during the Cold War, is full of examples of conspiracy theories that later have been proved to be true, such were the cases of the pro-US coups in Guatemala in 1954 and in Chile in 1973; the several secret subversion attempts against Cuba after the 1959 Revolution; the support for the anti-Sandinistas in Nicaragua after the 1979 Revolution; and the more recent underground

destabilizing attempts against Hugo Chavez's and Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela (Rabe 2015; Smilde 2020). This is one of the key reasons why I believe conspiracy theories that put 'imperialism', or even 'capitalism', as the main 'Conspiratorial Other' – frequent in far-left movements and regimes – have to be dealt differently when compared to the most common conspiracy theories of the far right, whose empirical backing is far less compelling, not to say inexistent. This does not mean that the far left is immune to baseless conspiracy theories; the large quantity of conspiracy theories with no empirical backing in Josef Stalin's Soviet Union, for example, proves that this was not the case (Shinar 2018).

Therefore, even though conspiracy theories cannot be considered *a priori* as fake or imaginary things, the bigger the power one ascribes to conspiracies in terms of explaining social outcomes – particularly when one is dealing with many and complex processes –, the smaller the possibility that one can reasonably claim that conspiracies were the primary, much less the only cause, behind them. As Michael Barkun (2003: 3) properly puts it, 'a conspiracist worldview implies a universe governed by design rather than by randomness'. In other words, in its largest expression – e.g. involving complex and multi-layered social phenomena (wars, economic depressions, revolutions, pandemics) – and/or intricate and multifaceted institutions in permanent interaction with each other (international organizations, national governments, transnational corporations), conspiracy theories tend to constitute not only an over deterministic, but also an extremely implausible explanation of social reality. This is to say that these types of conspiracy theories end up ascribing almost omnipotent powers to human agency, relegating structures to a subsidiary or even to a non-existent role, especially those that are of long-term nature (Koselleck 2004, chap. 7; Sewell 2006, chap. 4).

Given that there is a subtype of conspiracy theories that overwhelmingly presents false explanations, it is important to distinguish different kinds of them. Michael Barkun proposes a tripartite classification: event, systemic, and super conspiracies. For our purposes here, the key distinction refers to the first two types, for the third seems to be just a subset of systemic conspiracies. Event conspiracies, as the title indicates, point to particular and delimited events – the Watergate break-in; or President Kennedy's assassination, for instance –, whose primary cause was considered to be a conspiracy. Due to its limited focus, this type of conspiracy theory presents the greatest chance of becoming social accepted knowledge by epistemic authorities in the field. To become accepted knowledge means not only a specific conspiracy is proved real (such as in the case of the Watergate scandal), but also it was considered a key cause behind the event to be explained. In these cases, conspiracy theories change their status from stigmatized knowledge – e.g. an explanation that is not considered valid by the vast majority of members of a given epistemic community (Barkun 2003: 15-38) – to socially accepted knowledge (Levy 2007).

If event conspiracy theories have the largest potential of becoming socially accepted knowledge, systemic and super conspiracies rarely cross these borders. According to Barkun, systemic conspiracies comprise a whole range of social phenomena, from single events to short and long-term social processes, taking place inside a given territory (a country, a region, or even the whole world), and whose primary cause is ascribed to a

variety of conspiracies connected to a grand conspiracy – the latter organized and implemented by a definable and concrete actor (the super conspiracy, in contrast, is carried out by an amorphous evil force) (Barkun 2003: 5-13). The best examples of systemic conspiracies are those that flourished among fascist regimes and movements during the interwar period in Europe, particularly in Nazi Germany, which ascribed to Jews (among other scapegoats, depending on particularities of fascist ideologies) the responsibility for a whole range of events and processes, many of them strongly contradictory with each other – from World War I and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution to the 1929 world economic depression. According to this conspiratorial narrative, the omnipotent agency of the Jews was made possible, besides other things, by the Jewish control of a multitude of institutions, including transnational banks and corporations, national and international trade unions, leftist parties, and international organizations (Bergmann 2018: 28-30).

Besides sharing the implausibility as a common feature, systemic conspiracies also present the world in strict dualistic terms, even though the nature of the conspiratorial narrative and the characteristics of conspirators tend to have important variances. In this sense, the way conspiratorial entrepreneurs define the two poles of the plot – e.g. the grand conspirator and those morally responsible for standing up against them – is key for understanding the nature of the conspiracy theory and the potential roles that it can play in mobilizing social agents for political action. As Reinhart Koselleck argues, concepts

> 'articulate the identity of a person and of that person's relation to others'; it is through them that 'political or social agency is first constituted', allowing for the opening of specific spaces of experience and horizons of expectations in people's lives (Koselleck 2004: 155).

Koselleck's reflections on 'asymmetrical concepts' are of particular interest to us. Asymmetrical concepts are pairs of concepts recognized as legitimate by just one of the poles in the plot; the other pole, in spite of felling addressed by it, does not recognize the counter concept as a legitimate designation. Koselleck argues that are different historical structures by which asymmetric concepts can be constituted, each of which with different potential implications for the way social agents potentially mobilize themselves. There are, for example, asymmetrical concepts marked by naturalized relations, e.g. concepts that tend to present the same fixed membership and relationship in the past (experience) and in the future (expectation), no matter what members of the poles do. This is the case, for example, of the pair 'Hellenes' and 'Barbarians' – Hellenes as naturally superior to Barbarians; yesterday, today, and tomorrow. There are, on the other hand, asymmetrical concepts that allow members to change positions from one pole to the other during a certain time period, but that present a fixed membership and stable relationship after a given point in the future. An example is the pair 'Christians' and 'Heathens' – Heathens can become Christians during a certain lapse of time, but those that remain Heathens after a key future juncture (Final Judgement) cannot change their doomed status anymore.

The pattern of historical time presented in the relationship of asymmetric concepts is crucial for the space of experience and horizon of expectation that actors whose identities

are constituted by these concepts tend to develop for themselves. Members of a superior pole whose membership can be altered over time are prone to cultivate more empathy and compassion before those seen as only temporarily placed in an inferior pole (Christians' relations with Heathens, for example); while those who are members of poles whose relationship and membership are fixed over time – Hellenes and Barbarians, for instance; or Christians and heretics (e.g. Christians who betrayed and abandoned Christianity for good) – tend to project only negatives traits before the 'Other', building a stronger polarized, and more potentially aggressive relationship against the opposing pole. The same can be said about other substantive characteristics of the relation between asymmetrical concepts, such as whether concepts are mutually exclusive or present overlaps; whether the opposing pole is considered a threat to the mode of existence of the superior pole or not; and how much inferior the opposing pole is regarded in contrast to the dominant pole – a 'backward creature' (but still human); or, in the worst case scenario, someone relegated to a non-human condition. All these traits are relevant when considering the potential levels of political mobilization, sense of mission, and symbolic and physical violence latent in relations between pairs of asymmetric concepts (Koselleck 2004: 187, 190).

In contrast with event conspiracies, systemic conspiracy theories tend to develop asymmetrical concepts that are mutually exclusive; that have a fixed membership and relationship over time; that portray the opposing pole as existential threat to the mode of existence of the dominant pole; and that argue for an open-ended – and not preordained – struggle between asymmetrical poles. The combination of these features frequently creates the perception of the world as a stage for a life-or-death battle between opposing poles, instilling a sense of constant panic, life purpose, and need for immediate mobilization and action among followers. As Barkun argues, this type of narrative contrasts with millenarian beliefs – here understood as secular and religious prophecies that point to the necessary victory of good over evil at the end of times, bringing about an earthly paradise –, as systemic conspiracies point to a struggle in which both sides can win, depending on whether the good side is up to the fight (Barkun 2003: 8-10).

In order to better understand how conspiracy theories contributed to the constitution of identities and forms of potential political mobilization among members of the Brazilian far right, we now turn to Bolsonaro's first Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo's worldview focusing on his 'globalist' theory – the most common conspiracy theory embraced by Araújo and by several of Bolsonaro's officials when it comes to shaping and justifying Brazil's foreign policy under Bolsonaro. Rather than asking whether Araújo sincerely believed in the conspiratorial narrative laid out below – something that is empirically difficult (or even impossible) to assess –, what matters to us is the latent functions that this sort of narrative potentially triggers in terms of identity formation and political mobilization for Bolsonaro's followers.

Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo's conspiracy theory: the globalist narrative

Brazilians were not used to listening to the word 'globalism' until Jair Bolsonaro took office in January 2019. The concept gained widespread currency after Bolsonaro decided to appoint Ernesto Araújo, a diplomat and a disciple of the former US-based Brazilian self-proclaimed philosopher Olavo de Carvalho (1947-2022) as Foreign Minister. Carvalho had already written extensively on the subject, following others US and European conspiracionists who began pushing the thesis of a 'globalist' or a 'New World Order' conspiracy in the post-Cold War period (Carvalho 2013: 159-70; Bergmann 2018: chap. 2). If one can argue that, in an ideological sense, Bolsonaro's and Araújo's defence of a 'globalist threat' was anything but new or unprecedented, politically it was the first time since the country's democratization in 1988 that a Ministry of Foreign Relations openly advocated – at least rhetorically – a conspiracy theory as the key parameter to justify and to conduct the country's international affairs. One can even claim that the conspiratorial narratives articulated by Brazil's staunchest Cold Warriors – such as those that populated the minds of several officials of the country's military regime (1964-1985) (Cowan 2016) – did not get close to the intensity of the conspiratorial thinking articulated by Araújo during his period in power.

Scholarly research on the process of formulation and implementation of Bolsonaro's foreign policy during the Araújo years (January 2019 to March 2021) is still incipient. But academics tend to agree that the ideological positions of members of the Bolsonaro administration, including Araújo himself and in particular the so-called 'globalist' theory, played an important role in shaping concrete foreign policy decisions. This includes how Brazil aligned itself with far-right leaders – Donald Trump's United States, Viktor Orbán's Hungary and Andrzej Duda's Poland – in a fight to preserve the so-called 'Christian values', the 'Western civilization', and the 'nation' in world affairs (Gonçalves and Teixeira 2020); Brasília's passionate defence of sanctions against leftist countries in Latin America, especially Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela (Hernández and Mesquita 2020); Brazil's critique against what Araújo and other Bolsonaro officials have called as 'alarmist' attitudes regarding climate change, especially involving foreign interference as to how societies should manage its own natural resources (Casarões and Flemes 2019); and the country's opposition to the way international organizations function, particularly in the case of the UN system, and in matters concerning human rights, the environment, and the Covid-19 pandemic.[2] Bolsonaro and Araújo were specifically critical about how the World Health Organization (WHO) has dealt with the pandemic, supposedly recommending homogeneous responses – social distancing, the use of masks and lockdowns – to containing the virus, but without respecting national sovereignty and local particularities (Zilla 2020).

In all of these cases, Foreign Minister Araújo justified Brazil's foreign policy based on a perspective that interpreted the world as facing an extreme danger and in need of immediate help. To understand the nature of his narrative as well as the potential functions that it played for Bolsonaro's political movement and administration, we first need to understand Araújo's globalist rhetoric's internal logic, pinpointing two crucial elements: the

characteristics of the threat, including the goals of the conspirators; and the instruments that conspirators have been using to advance their goals.

First, what is 'globalism' after all? What kind of threat is this and what are its main goals? Are we talking about a United Nations-led conspiracy to conquer the nations of the world, as the US far-right politician and pastor, Pat Robertson (1991), argued in his best seller book? Intriguingly, this is only part of the matter. Araújo saw globalism as something that involves much more than international institutions and organizations. In Araújo's collection of speeches and articles published by Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations' FUNAG, there were five times when Araújo specifically attempted to conceptualize globalism. The clearest definition showed up in an interview he offered in March 2019 to *Brasil Paralelo* - a Brazilian alternative media outlet whose revisionist and highly conservative editorial approach claims to "unmask the truth" about Brazil's social reality, similar to Alex Jones' *Infowars* in the United States. When asked about his notion of globalism and to what extent globalism has to do with the encroachment of international organizations upon national sovereignties, Araújo claimed that 'this way of seeing globalism is somewhat limited', as 'it makes us see globalism just as an attempt to create global institutions, or to use global institutions for influencing countries.' The key element regarding globalism, argued Araújo, is that it goes well beyond international organizations; globalism, in fact, constitutes an 'anti-thought system'. According to Araújo's own words:

> Globalism is dangerous because it is mainly a system of thought and anti-thought. I see globalism as the process by which the Marxist ideology, from the early 1990s on, and mainly roughly from the year 2000 on, penetrated in the economic globalization and made it its vehicle of propagation. Therefore, through [economic globalization], [globalism] begins to implement its agenda, such as gender ideology, distorted environmentalism, and other issues (Araújo 2019: 12-25).

As the except above makes clear, Araújo anthropomorphizes and instils agency to Marxist ideology. Instead of locating globalism only in concrete institutions and specific actors and groups, Araújo pinpoints globalism in the realm of culture, language and thought, even though communists frequently appear as agents behind this so-called 'anti-thought system'. In a December 2019 article published by *Revista Terça Livre* – another Infowars-like Brazilian alternative media outlet –, Araújo argued that globalism was, in fact, the new intermediate stage for communism in the post-Cold War world. While socialism had been such intermediate stage during the Cold War, communists had supposedly understood, after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, that communism could not be reached through socialism anymore, e.g. through the implementation of a social system of collective ownership of means of production managed by the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, according to Araújo, communists changed tactics since then, and have been using the realm of language, culture, and thought as the main bridge for building a communist society in today's world (Araújo 2019: 563-68).

It is crucial to highlight here the semantics of the word 'communism' for Araújo. Communism for him has nothing to do with economic egalitarianism and the social well-being of peoples, as the concept has been widely understood by several left-wing movements, parties, and intellectuals throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, in spite of its specific historical meanings articulated by different groups in different places (Breslauer 2021: chaps 1-2). In fact, Araújo links communism with another signified – not egalitarianism and social justice, but with total control and the absolute loss of liberty. Therefore, globalism constitutes the bridge for building a perfectly totalitarian society; it functions as the contemporary 'road to serfdom' – employing the title of Friedrich Hayek's famous 1944 book –; a bridge to a world in which human liberty ceases completely to exist; where there would be 'the mechanization of the human being' and the 'abolition of men' as we know it (Araújo 2019: 281). This understanding overlaps with the semantics of communism spread by US propaganda in Latin America during the height of the Cold War (Cull 2008; Iber 2015); with the way many of Brazil's Cold Warriors, especially during the country's military regime (1964-1985), understood what communism meant (Cowan 2016; Sá Motta 2020: ch. 8); and also with the scholarly tradition of totalitarianism, which understands historical fascism and real communism as fundamentally akin, characterized by a project of establishing total control over men (Landa 2015).

If Araújo portrays globalism as an anti-thought system that functions as an intermediate stage for communism in today's world, this indicates, in Michael Barkun's perspective, the construction of a systemic conspiratorial narrative which contains a clear and concrete villain – of course, communists themselves. As we have already indicated though, this is not always the case. It is true that in some moments Araújo depicts communists – according to his semantics of communism – as the key conspirators behind globalism, manifested in political regimes (Nicolas Maduro's Venezuela); intellectuals (Slavoj Zizek); political parties (Brazil's Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT)); and social movements (environmental NGOs) (Araújo 2019: 457). However, other times Araújo argues that there is no concrete villain behind globalism, as if the villains themselves – intellectuals, leaders of social movements, government officials, and members of the mainstream media – had been captured, brainwashed, and dominated by communist ideology.

In his March 2019 interview to *Brasil Paralelo*, for example, Araújo explicitly argued that globalism does not have a specific *locus* in the world – there is no 'World Globalist Centre', or a Globalist International – because globalism is 'an anti-thought system […] that started to replicate by itself in people's minds […] like a computer virus.' (Araújo 2019: 126). At the end of the day, thus, the battle against globalism has to be fought not only within nations, but also inside each individual, similar to the way a virtuous religious human being struggles to keep a righteous path in life, supressing evil thoughts and sinful desires (Araújo 2021: 322). Therefore, following Koselleck's perspective on asymmetrical concepts, Araújo's idea of communism indicates not a fixed relationship and membership between the main opposing poles ('communists' and 'liberal-conservatives', as he calls it), given that everyone, at any time, can be ideologically contaminated by the so-called communist 'virus' (Araújo 2021: 631–34). As Araújo does not touch upon the possibility of

someone being freed after 'contamination', it seems to indicate that the fluidity between these asymmetrical concepts is made available only in one direction - from the good to the evil side of the world.

But how does this treacherous and insidious ideological contamination take place? In other words, what are the instruments employed by 'communists' to allow the dissemination of their 'anti-thought virus' into people's minds, paving the way for communism in today's world? Since Araújo portrays globalism as an anti-thought system, and not something necessarily materialized by international organizations – or by even specific nation states (even though he frequently assigned to Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela the role of a sinister enemy) – for him, the main globalist instrument resides in language; specifically, in the fact that language has been supposedly stripped of its capacity to convey symbolic meaning. This transformation of language is what Araújo denominates 'nominalism', e.g. the process of resignifying words, 'isolating them from reality and transforming words into instruments of domination' (Araújo 2019: 128). To Araújo, nominalism is a kind of 'linguistic deconstructionism', which implies the elevation of 'certain concepts, certain words, to an absolute character, in which there is no dialogue [between these concepts] with reality anymore' (Araújo 2019: 279).

According to Araújo, nominalism, or the so-called process of linguistic deconstructionism, has several branches, all of them directing their forces towards the same end: the destruction of human liberty through the annihilation of the capacity of language to convey symbolic meaning.[3] Among the most important of these nominalist branches, stand out 'gender ideology' (an ideology that claims that "men" and "women" are only words, and that they are interchangeable' (Araújo 2019: 399)); 'racialism' ('the program to organize society according to the principles of race' (Araújo 2021: 701), denying the universal nature of human beings); 'multilateralism' (the 'doctrine that everything has to be solved by higher tribunals, superior to countries' (Araújo 2021, 701–2)); 'climatism' ('the ideology of climate change', or the 'alarmism' regarding global warming (Araújo 2019: 386)); and, after the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, there emerged, according to Araújo, the most powerful of all nominalist tools, 'covidism', or the 'sanitarily correct' – 'a set of dogmas' that aims at controlling 'the truth about [COVID] treatment, the truth about social distancing, and [the truth about] other aspects related to the pandemic' (Araújo 2021: 470). In all these examples, Araújo claims, one sees two important characteristics: on the one hand, the control of language through the instrumentalization of principles of morality and science, establishing 'what can be said and what cannot be said, what can be discussed and what cannot be discussed'; and, on the other, particularly in the last two cases ('climatism' and 'covidism'), the elevation of natural phenomena to catastrophic occurrences, creating 'a "moral equivalent of war", in order to impose policies and restrictions that run counter to fundamental liberties' (Araújo 2019: 386).

Araújo's so-called nominalist branches – gender ideology, racialism, climatism, covidism – are somewhat autonomous from each another, presenting distinct concrete actors and institutions responsible for their specific movements and actions. At the same time though, they are connected to the same globalist project – building a bridge

to communism and, therefore, opening the path for the destruction of human liberty. According to Araújo, the nominalist branches constitute a 'system of connected vessels; when one is fed, all eat; when one advances, all progresses; when one wins, all win. Like a chess game, [each piece] […], albeit independent from one another, plays a role for the whole' (Araújo 2021: 700). Chess pieces are mysteriously connected to this 'anti-thought system' which is globalism – something like an ideological force, an 'instinct' that pulls them together to the same direction, without them necessarily knowing that they are playing as one ('as if the system played by itself', he says (Araújo 2021: 700)). Clearly, we have here what Barkun calls a systemic conspiracy: an intricate web of event conspiracies (with concrete actors and institutions behind all them), mixed up with a complex array of multi-layered social processes and multifaceted institutions, all of them connected to a major conspiracy, and whose grand conspirator is an evil ideological force.

The combination between specific and concrete conspirators (communists in general, or 'communists' as manifested in the leadership of environmental and human rights NGOs, for instance) with the immateriality of the globalist main conspirator (an anti-thought evil force that drives all pieces of the chess game without them knowing) provided, on the one hand, several concrete conspiratorial others for Bolsonaro's followers to canalize their anger and social hate against; while granting, at the same time, rhetorical flexibility for conspiracy entrepreneurs like Ernesto Araújo to change scapegoats according to Bolsonaro's political necessities. In other words, Araújo's systemic conspiracy theory offered a potential mobilization function for Bolsonaro's political movement, while presenting it with the possibility of constant evolving targets. Besides, Araújo's conspiracy theory strengthened its mobilization function for Bolsonaro given the answer that it provides as to what can be done to save Brazil – and the world – from globalism, as we will see in the next section.

The nation as the main weapon against globalism

The asymmetrical concepts presented in Araújo's globalist conspiracy theory, particularly the mutually exclusive nature of good (liberal-conservatives) and evil (communists); the non-human character of communists (whose humanity had been stripped away by the ideological domination to which they had been subjugated); and the acute threat that globalism represents for human freedom (and, thus, for humanity itself) all point to a strong potential for mobilizing followers against conspiratorial others – what Giry and Gürpnar (2020) calls the 'mobilization function of conspiracy theories.' The globalist theory promoted by Araújo is also remarkable, particularly when it comes to potentially providing a strong in-group identity and offering a sense of mission and life purpose to followers, due to how he lays out the solution for terminating the mortal threat that globalism represents. To save Brazil and the world from globalism, Araújo claims, the solution basically lies in the 'nation' and in promoting an intense form of nationalism – or nativism, following Cas Mudde (2007)'s famous conceptualization. Below I explain how, in his articles and speeches, Araújo goes from the globalist threat we looked into in the previous section (anti-thought system and its nominalist branches) to the 'nation' as the only possible saviour from globalism.

The first step in Araújo's conspiratorial thought is a logical one. The semantic meaning of salvation in his narrative is structurally connected to how he understands globalism and communism. In other words, given that globalism is the new intermediate stage for communism, and as Araújo likens communism to absolute totalitarianism, salvation basically means keeping humans free - or, as Araújo puts it, keeping humans as humans, given that without freedom there is no humanity at all (communists are no longer human; they became machine-like automatons) (Araújo 2019: 281). The bottom line though is how one preserves liberty in a world where the globalist anti-thought system and its several nominalist branches are supposedly getting stronger day by day – a world, in sum, in which globalists disconnect words from reality, pushing words to concrete (and, thus, unreal) forms, supposedly stripping away the possibility of symbols in human communication and human relations. The answer lies, Araújo argues, in keeping the symbolic realm alive. Nominalism 'restricts itself to the [concrete] thing', and cannot stand for what 'goes beyond the supersensible reality'; that's why it 'attempts to create a symbolic desert, a discourse without symbol', as 'the symbol […] is what has the transformative power, the power to evoke [elements] which are beyond the immediate reality' (Araújo 2021: 323). Therefore, Araújo sees in the preservation of what he calls the symbolic realm – understood as essential for human liberty and for human freedom – the key element for saving Brazil and humanity from the globalist conspiracy.

It is exactly here that the 'nation' – alongside extreme forms of nationalism – comes in. If symbols are so important for human freedom, as Araújo claims, and given that the globalist nominalist branches (gender ideology, climatism, racialism, covidism) supposedly destroy any possibility of symbols as a part of a totalitarian project to terminate human freedom, where does one find the main *locus* of resistance of the symbolic realm in today's world? Religion could play this role, Araújo says, but religion has been badly battered by two centuries of Western materialist thought, and thus, even though it is extremely important for many religious people to resist the globalist project, religion can no longer function as a common denominator of resistance for all peoples of the world against globalism (Araújo 2021: 385-90). Given that religion is out as a common denominator, the only possible realm for the symbolic camp in the contemporary world lies in the 'nation'. As Araújo claims, even if 'battered and attacked' – like religion –, the 'nation […] is still one of the very few symbols that we have left, a symbol that makes sense, and that sends signals from above to help us organize reality in a more complex way' (Araújo 2019: 385). In essence, nations and national sovereignty 'are the very residence […] of human liberty' in the contemporary world (Araújo 2021: 199).

And what about the signifier 'people'? Does it play any role at all in Araújo's conspiratorial narrative? These are important questions, especially because president Bolsonaro is commonly characterized by many scholars – based on Cas Mudde's (2017) conceptualization of the so-called 'populist radical right' – as a 'far-right populist' leader (Guimarães and Silva 2021; Casarões and Farias 2021). In fact, the signifier 'people' is very much present in several of Araújo's (and Bolsonaro's) speeches and articles. At least in Araújo's case though, 'people' always comes associated with another signifier, that of the 'nation'. They are basically seen as one. Araújo goes as far as to say that 'people [and] nation […] does

not constitute exact synonyms, but they make up the same semantic alliance' (Araújo 2019: 179). In spite of the differences and heterogeneities that exist within each 'nation' (and within every 'people'), Araújo claims, the 'nation' should be considered as constituting just one organism. Araújo even commonly employs the metaphor of the body to refer to the Brazilian nation; and, consequently, to the Brazilian people. This is a potent metaphor indeed: while it acknowledges differences and even conflicts within the nation (metaphorically, these differences are represented by the members of the body, such as hands, arms and feet), it also argues that differences and conflicts should be subjugated to the unity of the nation (represented by the trunk of the body). According to Araújo's own words: 'there is a whole diversity, a whole richness, and, sometimes, a conflict, among different hands [of the body]. But there is a body, there is a central body, and this is what gives concreteness to the idea of people' (Araújo 2021, 139).

In fact, Araújo goes even further. Bolsonaro's Foreign Minister has claimed several times that the interests, principles, and attitudes of this unity called the 'nation' (and the 'people') should be sensitively interpreted by the 'leader' – in the case of Brazil, Bolsonaro and his officials, of course –, but not in a democratic, liberal sense, adding up votes of individual citizens and respecting the will of the majority. A liberal democratic perspective, Araújo implicitly argues, would end up offering a fractured – and, thus, totally erroneous – idea of the whole, of the 'nation'. As a matter of fact, the 'leader' should interpret the 'nation' and its 'people' in a holistic and emotional fashion, almost in a mystical way. When formulating and implementing Brazil's foreign policy, says Araújo, the same mystical process of 'listening to' the unit that is the Brazilian nation and the Brazilian people should also apply, even though

> 'we have to have […] the humility to know that in a way we will never get there, and we will never be able to cover the whole reality of this entity, this extraordinary being that is the Brazilian nation' (Araújo 2019: 179).

But the 'leader' and its designated officials – like Araújo, acting as Bolsonaro's foreign minister – should never stop trying to interpret and to listen to the whole, to the body of the 'nation' and to the 'people' (the chunk of the body), not matter how difficult it is (Araújo 2019: 496).

There is a strong similarity between the way Ernesto Araújo sees the nation as functioning almost like the hero against the so-called globalist threat and the way historic fascism has employed nationalism as a bulwark against the conspiratorial other – from communism to Judaism, depending on the specific historical fascist movement or regime in analysis (Passmore 2002; Kallis 2000). The manner by which fascist ideologies in Brazil's history have also interpreted the connection between the 'nation' and the 'leader' – in a spiritual, and not liberal democratic, way – also jumps to the eye as another striking similarly between the two narratives when one reads Araújo's articles and speeches (Caldeira Neto 2020). If the limits between historical fascism and contemporary nationalist populism, as Bergmann (2018: 88) claims, is that the latter 'do not denounce democracy', then Bolsonaro's foreign minister presents a conspiratorial narrative whose solution to

the dangerous threat (globalism) lies in a concept of politics which was definitely not a liberal-democratic one, being much more close, in fact, to the mystical and undemocratic fascist connection between the ruled and the 'Leader'.

Conclusion

The ascension of president Jair Bolsonaro to the Brazilian presidency in January 2019 brought several and important changes to the country's foreign policy, particularly when it comes to issues related to regional integration, human rights, the role of international organizations in the country's foreign relations, and the interaction between Brazil and the so-called underdeveloped world and the BRICS group. This paper showed that these changes were justified to a domestic and foreign audience by Bolsonaro's first foreign minister Ernesto Araújo (2019-2021) through the employment of a systemic conspiracy theory named 'globalism'.

The analysis of Ernesto Araújo's main public speeches, interviews and articles published in mainstream and also in highly conservative alternative media confirmed that Araújo's globalist theory fits what Michael Barkun calls a 'systemic conspiracy theory', e.g. a complex web of different conspiracies (the defence of minority rights, the protection of the environment, or the role played by international organizations during the pandemic, for instance), connected to a single grand conspiracy (what Araújo calls globalism's linguistic deconstruction), whose main villains ('communists' and 'Marxists') are dominated by an ideological evil force capable of irreparably brainwashing people's minds. This narrative strategy is relevant for it ends up linking distinct aspects of social reality – from cultural issues related to family, abortion and gender, crucial to Brazil's social conservatives, especially but not exclusively to followers of neo-Pentecostalism, to different material interests, including those of landowners and entrepreneurs that are against environmental and labour regulation, as well as a diffuse middle and upper class hatred against leftist welfare agenda in general. Of course, the connection of so many different agendas to the same conspiratorial umbrella can also contribute to what Saull et al (2015) have analysed as the tendency of far-right movements to conceal or obscure capitalist-produced social cleavages, seeking to unify heterogeneous socioeconomic groups into a broad mass movement.

Araújo's systemic conspiracy theory also presented other potential social functions for Bolsonaro political movement. In contrast with millenarian beliefs, salvation in Araújo's narrative is not preordained. In fact, salvation – which essentially means the preservation of human liberty against the globalist path towards communism – hinges on the organization by the 'good' side of the plot against evil. In other words, it depends not only on the good people putting up a fight to keep the symbolic realm alive against linguistic deconstructionism (or what Araújo designates as 'nominalism'), but also on the recognition that this symbolic realm in today's world is basically located – as a common denominator for all peoples – in nations and nationalism. The defence of the 'nation' becomes, then, the basic element of the struggle for the preservation of liberty and humankind as we know it.

But the centrality Araújo ascribes to the signifiers 'nation' and 'people' – employed in his speeches and articles many times interchangeably – points to grave consequences for

Brazilian social fabric and particularly for the process of de-democratization that Brazil has been going through at least since 2016 (Bianchi et al. 2021). Araújo's conceptualization of the 'nation' and the 'people' is strongly connected to historical fascist formulations – European as well as Brazil's historical fascism –, as he sees both signifiers pointing to a necessary cohesive unit, whose differences, albeit recognized, have to be unified around a common mystical bloc, and whose interests, feelings, and principles have to be emotionally felt and heard by the people's political leadership, particularly its 'leader' – former president Bolsonaro. The dangerous political mobilization that Bolsonaro led against democratic institutions in the lead-up to Brazil's 2022 presidential elections, for example, culminating in the brutal January 8 attack on the presidential palace, the National Congress and the Supreme Court, bringing utter destruction to the highest symbols of the Brazilian democracy', provided a clear expression of the power that this and several other types of conspiratorial thinking can do to destabilize the country. This conspiratorial narrative has also penetrated in segments of Brazil's entrepreneurs, particularly from the agribusiness sector (Aprosoja 2021). Once such form of discourse becomes legitimate, as it had during the Bolsonaro administration when Araújo was the head of the country's Foreign Ministry, it is difficult to predict the middle and long-term ripple effects that such beliefs can produce in society, as it happened on January 8, 2023, in Brasília.

In this sense, not only has the globalist conspiracy theory – at least the way it was articulated by Ernesto Araújo during his period as Brazil's foreign minister – provided potential ideological opportunities for the cohesion and energization of Bolsonaro's political movement, as well as for the ideological articulation of different socioeconomic groups under a similar polarizing banner; but also, given its focus on the intrinsic unit of the 'nation' and the 'people', it has opened avenues for the use of symbolic and material violence against those who do not fit into this mystical unit, contributing for the consolidation of an ideological fasciticization of Bolsonaro's followers.

Notes

1 Jair Bolsonaro lost by a small margin the October 2022 presidential election to Luis Inácio 'Lula' da Silva of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT), but did not concede defeat. His followers promoted several anti-democratic acts throughout the country after the announcement of the election results, demanding the intervention of the Armed Forces against Lula's ascension to power. These acts culminated in the January 8 attack in Brasilia, just one week after Lula's inauguration. Bolsonaro's followers invaded and physically depredated Brazil's Presidential Palace, as well as the installations of the National Congress and the Supreme Court. For more information, see Atencio and Sanglard (2023).

2 For the use of the 'globalist' theory by the president himself in public speeches, see Bolsonaro's address to the UN General Assembly in 2019. Verdélio (2019).

3 Araújo does not define what he understands by 'symbol'. He seems to follow Goethe's traditional definition, according to which 'symbolism transforms the experience into an idea and an idea into an image, so that the idea expressed through the image remains always active and unattainable and, even though expressed in all languages, remains inexpressible' (*cited in* Eco 1990: 8). For a throughout discussion on symbols and symbolism, see Eco (1990: 8-23).

References

Aprosoja. 2021. 'Opinião do produtor: A sustentabilidade agroambiental brasileira e o comunoambientalismo mundial'. 26 May. Available at: https://aprosojabrasil.com.br/comunicacao/blog/2021/05/24/opiniao-do-produtor-sustentabilidade-agroambiental-brasileira-e-o-comuno-ambientalismo-mundial/ [Accessed on 19 August 2022].

Araújo, E. 2019. *A nova política externa brasileira. Seleção de discursos, artigos e entrevistas do Ministro das Relações Exteriores*. Brasília: FUNAG.

Araújo, E. 2021. *Política externa: Soberania, democracia e liberdade. Coletânea de discursos, artigos e entrevistas do Ministro das Relações Exteriores*. Brasília: FUNAG.

Atencio, R and F Sanglard. 2023. 'A Victory for Democracy in Brazil?' *Current History* 112 (841): 75-77. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2023.122.841.75.

Barkun, M. 2003. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Bergmann, E. 2018. *Conspiracy and Populism. The Politics of Misinformation*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bergmann, E and M Butter. 2020. 'Conspiracy Theory and Populism.' In M Butter and P Knight (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 330–43.

Bianchi, B, J Chaloub, P Rangel and F O Wolf (eds). 2021. *Democracy and Brazil. Collapse and Regression*. New York: Routledge.

Breslauer, G W. 2021. *The Rise and Demise of World Communism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carvalho, O. 2013. *O mínimo que você precisa saber para não ser um idiota*. Rio de Janeiro: Record.

Casarões, G and D Farias. 2021. 'Brazilian Foreign Policy under Jair Bolsonaro: Far-Right Populism and the Rejection of the Liberal International Order.' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*: 1-12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2021.1981248.

Casarões, G, and D Flemes. 2019. 'Brazil First, Climate Last: Bolsonaro's Foreign Policy.' *GIGA Focus* September (5): 1-13. Available at https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-64011-4 [Accessed on 19 August 2022].

Colleta, R, G Uribe and D Carvalho. 2021. 'Pressão do Congresso derruba Ernesto Araújo, o chanceler de Bolsonaro.' *Folha de São Paulo*, 29 March. Available at https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2021/03/ernesto-araujo-deixa-comando-do-itamaraty-apos-pressao-do-congresso.shtml [Accessed on 19 August 2022].

Cowan, B. 2016. *Securing Sex. Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Cull, N. 2008. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency. American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*. New York and London: Cambridge University Press.

Demuru, P. 2020. 'Conspiracy Theories, Messianic Populism and Everyday Social Media Use in Contemporary Brazil: A Glocal Semiotic Perspective.' *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation* 3: 1–42. DOI: https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2020.3.12

Demuru, P. 2021. 'Teorias da conspiração e populismo messiânico no Brasil contemporâneo: Uma perspectiva semiótico-cultural.' *Estudos Semióticos* 17 (2): 265–91. DOI: https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1980-4016.esse.2021.180942.

Duarte, L. 2019. 'Meet the Intellectual Founder of Brazil's Far Right.' *The Atlantic*, 28 December. Available at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/brazil-olavo-de-carvalho-jair-bolsonaro/604117/ [Accessed on 19 August 2022].

Giry, J and D Gürpınar. 2020. 'Functions and Uses of Conspiracy Theories in Authoritarian Regimes.' In M Butter and P Knight (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 317–29.

Eco, H. 1990. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gonçalves, W and T Teixeira. 2020. 'Considerações sobre a política externa brasileira no governo Bolsonaro e as relações Brasil-EUA." *Sul Global* 1 (1): 192–211.

Guimarães, F and I Silva. 2021. 'Far-Right Populism and Foreign Policy Identity: Jair Bolsonaro's Ultra-Conservatism and the New Politics of Alignment.' *International Affairs* 97 (2): 345–63.

Hagen, K. 2022. 'Are "Conspiracy Theories" So Unlikely to Be True? A Critique of Quassim Cassam's Concept of "Conspiracy Theories"'. *Social Epistemology. A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*: 1–16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2021.2009930.

Harambam, J. 2020. 'Conspiracy Theory Entrepreneurs, Movements and Individuals.' In M Butter and P Knight (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 278–91.

Hernández, L and B Mesquita. 2020. 'Da Unasul ao Prosul: Dinâmicas das convergências ideológicas regionais.' *Monções. Revista de Relações Internacionais da UFGD* 9 (18): 538–63.

Iber, P. 2015. *Neither Peace nor Freedom. The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*. Cambridge, MS and London: Harvard University Press.

Kallis, A. 2000. *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945*. London and New York: Routledge.

Koselleck, R. 2004. *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Landa, I. 2015. 'Mass Hysteria or a Class Act? Premonitions of Fascism between Marxism and Liberalism.' In R Saull, A Anievas, N Davidson and A Fabry (eds), *The Longue Durée of the Far-Right: An International Historical Sociology*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, pp. 44–63.

Levy, N. 2007. 'Radically Socialized Knowledge and Conspiracy Theories.' *Episteme* 4 (2): 181–92. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3366/epi.2007.4.2.181.

Loureiro, F. 2022. 'Playing with fire? Entrepreneurs and the Foreign Policy of Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil, 2019–2021.' *Latin American Policy* 13 (2): 498-518. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12276.

Loureiro, F. 2023. 'Making the Alliance for Progress Serve the Few: U.S. Economic Aid to Cold War Brazil.' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 25 (1): 168-207. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_01125.

Mudde, C. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C. (*ed.*). 2017. *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Caldeira Neto, O. 2020. *O fascismo em camisas verdes: Do Integralismo ao Neointegralismo*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora.

Paiva, A, C Mendes and V Vieira. 2020. 'Brazilian New Foreign Policy and Implications within BRICS: A Discourse Analysis.' *Journal of China and International Relations*, 133–52. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5278/jcir.v8iSE.4242.

Passmore, K. 2002. *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Pereira, A. 2018. 'The US Role in the 1964 Coup in Brazil: A Reassessment.' *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37 (1): 5-17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.12518.

Pigden, C. 1995. 'Popper Revisited, or What Is Wrong with Conspiracy Theories?' *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 25 (1): 3–34.

Rabe, S. 2015. *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*. 2nd ed. New York and Oxford: Cambridge University Press.

Robertson, P. 1991. *The New World Order*. Dallas: Word Inc.

Sá Motta, R. 2020. *Em guarda contra o perigo vermelho: o anticomunismo no Brasil (1917-1964)*. 2nd ed. Niterói: Eduff.

Saraiva, M. 2020. 'The Democratic Regime and the Changes in Brazilian Foreign Policy towards South America.' *Brazilian Political Science Review* 14 (3): 1–39. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-3821202000030001.

Saull, R. 2015. 'The Origins and Persistence of the Far-Right: Capital, Class and the Pathologies of Liberal Politics.' In R Saull, A Anievas, N Davidson and A Fabry (eds), *The Longue Durée of the Far-Right: An International Historical Sociology*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, pp. 21–43.

R Saull, A Anievas, N Davidson and A Fabry (eds). 2015. *The Longue Durée of the Far-Right: An International Historical Sociology*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Sewell, W. 2006. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Shinar, C. 2018. 'Conspiracy Narratives in Russian Politics: From Stalin to Putin.' *European Review* 26 (4): 648–60. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798718000376.

Silva, M. 2020. 'Once upon a Time, a Human Rights Ally: The State and Its Bureaucracy in Right-Wing Populist Brazil.' *Human Rights Quarterly* 42 (3): 646–66. DOI: 10.1353/hrq.2020.0036.

Smilde, D. 2020. 'Trump and Venezuela. Return to the Monroe Doctrine.' In T Gill (ed.), *The Future of the U.S. Empire in the Americas*. New York: Routledge, pp. 37–58.

Stoica, M. 2017. 'Political Myths of the Populist Discourse.' *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16 (46): 63–76.

Teitelbaum, B. 2020. *War for Eternity. Inside Bannon's Far-Right Circle of Global Power Brokers*. New York: Dey Street Books.

Uscinski, J. 2020. *Conspiracy Theories. A Primer*. London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Verdélio, A. 2019. 'Veja a íntegra do discurso de Bolsonaro na Assembleia Geral da ONU', *Agência Brasil*, 24/09. Available at https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2019-09/presidente-jair-bolsonaro-discursa-na-assembleia-geral-da-onu [Accessed on 19 August 2022].

Ylä-Anttila, T. 2018. 'Populist Knowledge: "Post-Truth" Repertoires of Contesting Epistemic Authorities.' *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5 (4): 356-88. DOI: 10.1080/23254823.2017.1414620.

Zilla, C. 2020. 'Corona Crisis and Political Confrontation in Brazil: The President, the People, and Democracy under Pressure.' *SWP Comment* July (36): 1-8. DOI: 10.18449/2020C36.

About the author

Felipe Loureiro is an Associate Professor in History of International Relations at the Institute of International Relations of the University of São Paulo (IRI-USP), Brazil. He is a researcher at USP's Brazil and the World System Studies Laboratory (Labmundi) and at the National Institute of Science and Technology for the Studies on the United States (INCT-INEU). He has published extensively on US-Brazilian relations and the history of Brazil's foreign policy, especially during the Cold War. His latest book is *Aliança para o Progresso e o governo João Goulart* (UNESP University Press, 2020). Currently he coordinates a research project supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) on the United States and the Brazilian military dictatorship.

A teoria da conspiração e a política externa da Extrema Direita: o Caso do Brasil de Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2021)

Resumo: Este documento analisa a visão conspiratória do mundo que envolveu a política externa do governo de Jair Bolsonaro no Brasil durante o mandato de Ernesto Araújo como Ministro das Relações Exteriores do Brasil (2019-2021), discutindo os papéis potenciais que a teoria da conspiração desempenha para o movimento político e a administração de Bolsonaro. Focalizamos a chamada teoria da conspiração globalista de Ernesto Araújo, empregando seus discursos, publicações e entrevistas como fontes principais. Concluímos que a teoria da conspiração globalista de Araújo constitui o que Michael Barkun chama de "teoria da conspiração sistêmica", apresentando funções potenciais significativas para a energização e coesão do movimento político de Bolsonaro. O documento também conclui que, dado seu foco na unidade intrínseca da "nação" e do "povo", a teoria da conspiração globalista de Araújo abriu vias potenciais para o uso da violência simbólica e material contra os brasileiros que não se encaixam nesta unidade, consolidando fundamentos ideológicos para a fascização dos seguidores de Bolsonaro, com significativas e graves consequências potenciais para a democracia brasileira.

Palavras-chave: teoria da conspiração; globalismo; Jair Bolsonaro; Ernesto Araújo; Política externa brasileira.

Received on 11 April 2022 and approved for publication on 24 October 2022.