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Dangerous Dice: Playing with Artificial Intelligence and Populism during Brazil's 2018 Election

Glen Salazar

Dangerous Dice: Playing with Artificial Intelligence and Populism during Brazil's 2018 Election

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by **Glen Salazar**
November 27, 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Abstract

With the advent of artificial intelligence and the resurgence of populism, in particular right-wing populism, we see nationalist parties that were once on the fringes of mainstream politics gain power around the world. Putting under the limelight the recent electoral victories of world leaders riding this new wave of populism, we recognize a troubling new reality: the confluence of artificial intelligence and populism allows for election interference through the spread of disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric on social media. This tectonic shift in election tactics used by extreme nationalists presents an existential threat to democracy, with the potential to lead to a dystopian society where the will of the people is replaced by the will of algorithms. The victory of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro during the 2018 election and his subsequent presidency brought into focus this new dynamism of political forces: emotionally charged populist rhetoric and AI-manipulated social media. In order to combat this new danger posed by digital populists, such as the danger posed by Bolsonaro to Brazil's democracy, new policies on artificial intelligence (AI) must be implemented to protect elections. To shape policy on this new emerging technology, it is imperative that governments understand the nature of AI and in particular, the different ways it can be weaponized during election campaigns. However, it is even more critical to inform society as a whole about the consequences AI can cause as despots can use its power to keep the people under draconian control.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI, populism, Brazil, Bolsonaro, Jair Bolsonaro

Preface

Before you lies the master's thesis "Dangerous Dice: Playing with Artificial Intelligence and Populism during Brazil's 2018 Election." It was written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Master of Arts in International Studies Program at the University of San Francisco. I was engaged in researching and writing this thesis from Fall 2018 through Spring 2020 and beyond due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My research question was formulated during my Global Critical Social Theory class with Professor Cantero as we were discussing the ramifications of Brazil's 2018 election playing out through the course of the semester during the month of October. The research and writing were hard and required the audacity to persevere under the pressure of immense personal and social adversity. I underwent a retinal detachment surgery caused by a genetic disease common in people with Asian or Amerindian ancestry at the start of my research, followed by a cataract surgery towards the end of my research and writing. Moreover, 2020 was a year that won't be forgotten in the American collective memory with the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, street protests against systemic racism, and a melodramatic American 2020 election. Nevertheless, I was able to conduct a deep dive into the research that allowed me to answer the tantalizing question that kept my mind lit with the spark of curiosity: how was President Bolsonaro able to emerge victorious from Brazil's 2018 election in a country deemed a racial democracy, despite his divisive populist rhetoric? Fortunately, the International Studies Department staff, faculty, and administrative personnel were available and willing to help me along the entire journey.

As the vast majority of sources needed for my research are in Portuguese, I endeavored to learn the language for proficiency. I began to self-study Portuguese when I was in high school, learning the grammar basics and immersing myself with Brazilian music and Brazilian TV series. My Brazilian friends also helped me with learning conversational Portuguese. Nevertheless, I realized that to conduct scholarly research on the country, it was imperative that I formally learn the language. Therefore, I took a year of Portuguese at Saddleback College from August 2018 to May 2019 with Professor Valeria Barragan from Rio de Janeiro. As a native Spanish-speaker, fluent in French and Italian, and having studied Romanian and Catalan at UC Berkeley, it wasn't difficult for me to learn this other Romance language. By doing so, I gained proficiency and was able to tap into the social media or archival data from the Lusophone world, in particular Brazil.

Acknowledgements

This master's thesis could not have been completed without the support of my family, friends, and the MAIS program at the University of San Francisco. I would like to thank Professors Kathleen Klaus, Lindsay Gifford, Lucia Cantero, Olivier Bercault, and Nora Fisher Onar. I would also like to thank Professor Rachel Thomas from USF's Data Institute. Additionally, I would like to emphasize my gratitude to Professor Cantero, who helped me with the challenge of writing my thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would also like to eternally thank Professor Fisher Onar, who helped me in the last stretch to the finish line.

I would also like to thank all my classmates that come from all over the world, especially Yajaira Chavez, Scott Cooper, and Juliana Petani with who I connected the most and made my experience more pleasurable at University of San Francisco.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my Brazilian friends Daiane Hentz and Andre Pinto who enriched my knowledge about their country. Muito obrigado minha garota de Porto Alegre e meu garoto de São Paulo. In addition, I would like to thank Valeria Barragan who taught me Portuguese at Saddleback College. Muito obrigado professora, gostei muito aprender o sotaque carioca com você.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this master's thesis and research to my mother, Maria Delia Moya Rea, and to Jose Nevardo Castañeda Castrillon. ¡Les agradezco estar conmigo e iluminar mi vida con chispas de felicidad!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Alea iacta est,” Latin for *“the die is cast.”* – Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, thus becoming the dictator of Rome.¹

On April 20, 2020, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro told a group of followers and reporters that had gathered, “Eu sou, realmente, a constituição,” Portuguese for “I am, really, the constitution.”² Bolsonaro’s declaration echoed France’s Louis XIV’s audacious words, *“L’État c’est moi,”*³ French for “I am the state.” While Louis XIV’s words captured the spirit of the age of absolutism in France, which under him came to its climax, Bolsonaro’s words conjured up flashbacks to the 1964 coup d’état in Brazil that inaugurated a military dictatorship. Elections have consequences and for many who voted against him, Bolsonaro’s electoral victory on October 28, 2018, was a step backwards in time to the days of the dictatorship that lasted over two decades and ended in 1985. During Brazil’s military regime, political opponents disappeared from the streets and were put into prisons to be tortured or killed, without due process of law. Bolsonaro’s attempt to rewrite Brazil’s history by depicting the military dictatorship era as necessary to avoid a communist takeover and his attempt to minimize the human rights violations committed by the regime has only exacerbated the opposition’s angst. His glorification of this bloody chapter in Brazil’s past and his expressed desire to install a new military

¹ Rosengren, “Iacta Alea Est”; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 16-7; Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, 278-9.

² Carvalho, “Eu sou a Constituição”; UOL, “EU SOU A CONSTITUIÇÃO.”

³ Rowen, “L’État c’est à moi,” 83.

dictatorship if necessary has brought the South American country to the tipping point.⁴ With its social fabric unraveling and its institutions under siege, Brazilian democracy is at risk of collapsing back into dictatorship. Nevertheless, Brazilians from all segments of society have taken to the streets in protest, sparking hope for the future. Although their resistance is spearheaded against Bolsonaro, who they see as a danger to Brazil's democracy, behind his meteoric rise to power was the confluence of forces at play that together pose the real danger: artificial intelligence (AI) and populism.

AI-infiltrated social media was instrumental in helping Bolsonaro come out victorious in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. Prior to running for president, Bolsonaro wasn't well known nationwide and was portrayed as a radical politician on the extreme fringes of the right of the political spectrum. Flashback decades earlier, towards the end of Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship, he enlisted as a parachute infantryman and rose through the ranks, but was jailed for 15 days due to an article he wrote in 1986 for the Brazilian magazine *Veja*, ranting against low military salaries.⁵ Fast-forward later, he was elected to Rio's city council and then to Brazil's Congress in 1991, championing his military values during the hyperinflationary chaos unleashed by Brazil's transition back to civilian rule.⁶ So, AI-powered social media helped with making Bolsonaro's personal political brand go viral online. Eventually, his increase in popularity in the digital space would radiate into the physical space as well. WhatsApp in particular was wormed into by AI software that mined users' data to tap into their psyche

⁴ Kühlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 23.

⁵ Winter, "System Failure."

⁶ Ibid.

and find out what fears they have, what inspires them, what repulses them, and what attracts them. Through the insights gained from data mining, politicians, political campaigns or parties, and followers are able to target unsuspecting users on social media sites or apps, and even more concerning automate the process with AI. Based on the targeted individual's or targeted group's collective harvested data, the political messaging was customized by people and AI software to increase the chance of influencing the voting behavior of each individual and eventually translated this into victory for Bolsonaro on election day. He masterfully used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp to communicate directly with the Brazilian people, circumventing the filter of traditional media. In doing so, he was able to send out disinformation and propaganda without being fact-checked or called out for the spread of falsehoods. Although Bolsonaro did use social media to amplify his reach to the electorate, it is unclear whether he or his election campaign directly used AI to harvest data from and micro-target voters. However, what is apparent is that his campaign did benefit from such tactics during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. In violation of electoral laws, companies supporting Bolsonaro spent millions of dollars in a coordinated plan to rapid-fire targeted disinformation messages on WhatsApp against his opponent Haddad, a week before the run-off election.⁷ Moreover, the disinformation and propaganda that mushroomed from Bolsonaro's official social media accounts and the pro-Bolsonaro private sector financed campaign on WhatsApp spread via AI software and pro-Bolsonaro WhatsApp groups to sway the electorate to vote for him.⁸ Given that he won

⁷ Nalon, "Did WhatsApp help Bolsonaro?"; Isaac and Roose, "Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp."

⁸ Nemer, "The three types of"; Reid, "Q&A."

the October 28 runoff, the concerted criminal outside interference on WhatsApp paid off. Hence, it becomes imperative to research the role AI technology played in his victory, in order to untangle the precise ways this occurred and mitigate against this in the future.

Riding high on the new wave of populism that submerged the world, ushering in an era of new leaders such as Donald Trump in America, Bolsonaro emerged victorious in Brazil from the 2018 elections because of his emotionally charged populist rhetoric.⁹ By appealing to the disenchantment with the Workers' Party following the *Operação Lava Jato* ("Operation Car Wash") corruption scandal and the backlash against the progressive liberal agenda implemented under Presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro was able to convince voters that his opponent Fernando Haddad was a communist criminal masquerading as a virtuous politician.¹⁰ To create an electoral playing field more favorable to his victory, Bolsonaro divided society with his radioactive populism based on various forms of hate: racism, sexism, misogyny, xenophobia and homophobia.¹¹ With calls to extreme nationalism and repackaging an inglorious anti-democratic past as existential to the survival of the Brazilian nation, Bolsonaro was able to convince enough Brazilians to vote for him at the ballot box and put him across the presidential race finish line. When challenged about his divisive populist discourse, Bolsonaro would either minimize it, deflect, or play the victim card and attack the media as "fake news."¹² At other times, he would backtrack and change his

⁹ Winter, "System Failure"; Hrynshyn, "The Outrage of Networks," 30.

¹⁰ Kühlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 26; Whitaker, "Comprendre la victoire?"

¹¹ Angyalossy Alfonso, "Bolsonaro's take," 34; Kühlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 23.

¹² Milz, "Brazil's Bolsonaro stages."

messaging to appear less radical and more appealing to the electorate. So, Bolsonaro was clever in championing democratic values during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, in order not jeopardize his chances of winning. However, when juxtaposed to his statements made earlier in his political career, it becomes apparent that Bolsonaro is autocratic at heart, but masquerades as a champion of democracy. Ergo, it is also imperative to research the new wave of populism and the various ways populists gain power through the art of deception, in order to understand Bolsonaro's blitz to the Brazilian presidency.

The precision in using AI and populism in synchrony during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race was key to Bolsonaro's victory. While the convergence between the forces of AI and populism has been put under the scholarly spotlight, it hasn't been explored enough for a deeper analysis. Attention has been placed on each force and the central role they play during elections, but not on how the synchronicity of the two works and how it played out leading to Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency. Analyzing this dynamic relationship between AI and populism is critical to understanding how politicians with anti-democratic inclinations are catapulted to power in seemingly long-established multicultural democracies such as Brazil and how these same politicians once in power then threaten to turn these democracies into autocracies.¹³ This dynamism can lead to insights into what can be done to further strengthen democratic institutions against the lurking autocratic danger. Beyond Latin America or the Lusophone world, and even in Brazil itself, the scholarly research on AI and populism only recently started to analyze Bolsonaro's meteoric rise to power, due to the recent raw developments. Thus, there is a lack of research on this important new chapter in Brazilian politics. More critically

¹³ Ibid.

important, this scholarly research is currently inadequate in exploring in depth the symbiotic relationship between AI and populism and the decisive role it played during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. This thesis will seek to bridge this gap by presenting the findings uncovered by a deep analysis of the symbiosis between AI and populism, plus the intersection of this symbiosis with Bolsonaro's victorious rise.

The chosen title of this thesis, *Dangerous Dice*, alludes to the quote by Julius Caesar that began this chapter, when he gambled everything by crossing the Rubicon, in defiance of the senate, even risking classical Rome's survival as he emerged as dictator from the ashes of the Roman Republic. The legendary words Caesar was recorded as saying, "the die is cast," the Greek historian Plutarch alleged were said in Greek, while the Roman historian Suetonius wrote it in Latin as "alea iacta est."¹⁴ The notion of Caesarism derives from the crossing of the Rubicon and the domino effect it had on toppling Roman democracy.¹⁵ Here we see an early form of authoritarianism in the Western tradition. In *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher Plato warned about how tyranny arises naturally from the shattering of democracy, which in essence is fragile.¹⁶ This mirrors the current situation in Brazil, whose embryonic *Nova República* (New Republic) democracy, that emerged from the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, is in danger of collapsing back into dictatorship.¹⁷ This danger is posed by Bolsonaro, a populist that harbors nostalgia for the days of the military dictatorship and other anti-democratic views, who won the 2018 presidential elections by the casting of the

¹⁴ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 16-7; Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, 278-9.

¹⁵ Gandesha, "Introduction," 5.

¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 579, 584.

¹⁷ Neves, "Eleição de Bolsonaro."

dangerous dice composed of AI and populism, which tipped the winning odds in his favor as explored here in this master's thesis.

This thesis will emphasize how dangerous it is to use AI and populism together to interfere in elections, by focusing on the risks associated with this gamble. With Bolsonaro's victory, not only did Haddad lose the elections, but Brazil lost as well through the attacks on its democratic institutions, as did the planet through the incineration of the Amazon. Haddad's defeat resulted in the end of the Workers' Party's control of the presidency, making way for the victorious and antiliberal Bolsonaro who at the time was a member of the conservative Social Liberal Party. Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic) has been set back and attacked voraciously under Bolsonaro's presidency and its racial democracy is under siege by his extreme nationalist agenda.¹⁸ The planet has suffered the consequences as well with the Amazon lit ablaze in 2019 due to the anti-environmental policies enacted by the new Brazilian president. While not predicting an inevitable breakdown of civilization, my research will give much to think about for future research on AI and populism with the hope that there will be further insights gained to help mitigate these dangerous risks posed to democracy and humanity.

The wider significance and importance of my study lies ideally in its ability to be used as a resource when shaping policy on AI by legislatures around the world, especially as it relates to and is used in politics, while at the minimum it is hoped that society uses it to better understand the dangers posed by unregulated AI especially as it is combined with populism to interfere in elections. AI is the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence,

¹⁸ Ibid.

such as reasoning, understanding language, navigating the visual world, and manipulating objects.¹⁹ Charina Chou, Google's Global Policy Lead for Emergent Technology, proposed another way of thinking of AI by saying, "At Google our definition for AI is quite simple. We define AI, as a whole, as the science of making things smart."²⁰ Chou went on to give illustrative examples of AI by adding, "You can imagine doing that by programming a dictionary into a computer, or an encyclopedia, or giving a whole bunch of knowledge to a computer program."²¹ Given that AI is an emerging technology, many legal loopholes allow for unethical use, posing risks to democracy by manipulating the electorate to vote for certain political candidates with authoritarian tendencies via disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric. In the realm of social media, AI algorithms penetrate the psyche of users to know their fears, hopes, likes and dislikes.²² By data harvesting this information through social media platform analytics, visible or hidden entities can micro-target users with precision to sway them to vote a certain way.²³ Moreover in the realm of social media, troll farms, which are groups of internet trolls (online agitators), can use AI software to interfere in national politics by eroding trust in democratic institutions and sparking distrust, hate, and violence among citizens. Bot farms, powered by AI algorithms, deploy bots (also known as internet bots, web robots, or robots) that autonomously interact with human users and fool them into

¹⁹ Copeland, "Artificial intelligence"; Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 6.

²⁰ Chou 2019.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 53.

²³ Ibid, 35.

thinking that they're interacting with real people. Due to this duplicity, hidden entities can influence human users via troll farms and bot farms to vote for a particular candidate. Through this manipulation, AI algorithms (via data harvesting, micro-targeting, and troll farms, or bot farms) would be essentially deciding the winner of elections. In other words, the will of algorithms will be deciding elections, not the will of the people. Hence, it is imperative that governments enact legislation to curb the power AI has to sway the electorate. This is more critical, when the winners of elections turn out to have anti-democratic inclinations such as Bolsonaro in Brazil. If society doesn't become aware of the dangers posed by AI during elections and no action is taken, then the dystopian future of Orwell's *1984* would become reality inasmuch as the people would be stripped of their democratic power by a seemingly omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent Big Brother (AI).²⁴ Besides election interference, AI poses another danger in the form of other draconian uses by despotic leaders or democratically elected leaders who aspire for absolute power. On the one hand, despots can use AI to spy on, target, and neutralize any form of opposition, whether from real or perceived enemies. On the other hand, populists who won an election but harbor anti-democratic views, can use AI-manipulated social media and AI-powered surveillance to establish an AI dictatorship.²⁵ Along with gunpowder and nuclear weapons (which were called "Einstein's monsters"), AI is among the most powerful, monstrous technologies humanity has invented to date and it will profoundly influence and transform humanity well into the future.²⁶ Which is why the

²⁴ Orwell, *1984*, 11, 31, 38 75.

²⁵ Ibid, 67.

²⁶ Spence, "The birth of AI."

rolling of the dice of AI and populism poses an existential danger to not only Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic), but also democracy itself.

Thesis Blueprint

This thesis uses a blueprint designed to build on the discovered insights from my research. Chapter 1 presents the introduction and background to the problem posed by AI and populism. It includes the main argument that elucidates what the real danger to Brazil is via the synergy of AI and populism, rather than merely President Bolsonaro. This chapter also touches upon how the thesis contributes to the state and knowledge of the field by bridging the gap in the academic world that deals with the role AI and populism played in Brazil's 2018 presidential race. More importantly, it gives a lucid explanation of the broader impact and significance of the thesis, looking at the ripple effects this will have for Brazil's racial democracy and environment. The thesis blueprint follows, giving a summary of each of the chapters in the thesis that together build premises to support the architectural structure of the main argument. The methodology ends the chapter with a close look at the methods I used to conduct my research.

Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review. This chapter presents the scholarly sources used to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the existing research. The theoretical framework and methodology employed will position me on the map in relation to other researchers and theorists. More importantly, the literature review will reveal a gap in the existing literature that my thesis will cover in depth.

Chapter 3 explores one of the two main pillars of the thesis: artificial intelligence (AI). AI-manipulated social media was an instrumental tool that tipped the odds of

winning the 2018 Brazilian presidential race in Bolsonaro's favor. To analyze this dynamic, the chapter begins with a brief history of AI before moving on to probe its nature through philosophical and technological perspectives. Then, the chapter goes on to examine how AI is used in practice during elections. To be specific, the chapter will explore how this emerging technology was used to interfere in Brazil's 2018 election.

Chapter 4 inspects the second of the two main pillars of the thesis: populism. Emotionally charged populist rhetoric was used by Bolsonaro to torpedo Brazil's racial democracy with division and hate, and to fire up enough of his followers in the electorate to carry him across the finish line during the 2018 presidential race. The chapter digs into the tectonic political forces preceding and contributing to populism's dynamism by reflecting on prominent dictators and other absolute rulers in history, plus looking at nationalism, colonialism, and fascism. Afterwards, the chapter explores the current wave of populism that has propelled to power around the world new leaders from the extreme fringes of the political spectrum, specifically those from the right.

Chapter 5 shifts to the dangerous dynamic created by combining the two aforementioned forces: AI and populism. The previous two chapters introduced AI and populism, and explored how they each played a role in Bolsonaro's electoral win in 2018. This chapter zeros in on the main argument of the thesis by connecting the dots between AI-manipulated social media, emotionally charged populist rhetoric, and Bolsonaro's meteoric rise to power. Beyond this, the chapter reflects on the consequences the 2018 election and Bolsonaro's presidency pose for Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic) and the Amazon rainforest. More broadly, it investigates what risks Bolsonaro's victory poses to democracy itself and to the world at large via the destruction of the environment.

Chapter 6 pivots to conduct a close analysis of Bolsonaro's toxic-infused brand of populism that led to his electoral victory in 2018. Thus, a close look at the social media ecosystem created and manipulated by AI algorithms is essential. Bolsonaro's social media posts, specifically his Instagram posts, will be put under the microscope for exploration of this AI-centric social media ecosystem where corrosive populist rhetoric thrives. The digital ethnography will focus on twenty of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts to explore how the symbiosis between AI and populism works in practice in the digital world.

Chapter 7 veers to study the populist discourse spritzed by Bolsonaro through different communication platforms. Hence, a juxtaposition of Bolsonaro's political messaging through traditional media and social media will be critical to explore his bitterly divisive populist discourse. By juxtaposing his social media content to traditional media coverage of him, divergences in his messaging will emerge, pointing to his chameleon-like ability to adapt based on the audience and platform. Such a juxtaposition will shed light on why populists have changed their electoral strategy, giving preference to AI-powered social media over traditional media, due to the narrative hegemony this entails.

Chapter 8 closes with the conclusion. This chapter summarizes and reflects on the research conducted to answer the main research problem: the danger posed by the combination of AI and populism during elections. To be specific, how this dangerous combination led to election interference that played a decisive role in Bolsonaro's 2018 electoral victory. More importantly, the chapter presents the main findings that my research has uncovered and advanced to help mitigate the risks posed by AI and populism

during elections, including the dangerous ripple effects on democracy and the environment. After discussing research limitations, the chapter goes on to make recommendations for future scholarly work on the topic.

Methodology

For this thesis, my research spanned more than two years beginning October 2018. I spent most of that time in the San Francisco Bay Area, in Northern California, in the United States, conducting research that focused on a comparative discourse analysis due to the contextual nature of my thesis. I only left for a brief trip to Atlanta, Georgia, during February 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic started to spiral out of control. I began writing my research with the literature review and discourse analysis. I spent a good amount of time on this critical component. Then, I gradually proceeded to data collection and synthesis.

This research includes the following methods: a contextual analysis, a digital ethnography, and a comparison of social media to traditional media. First, a contextual analysis of the historical, philosophical, technological, political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces that illuminates the study of the synergy between AI and populism during Brazil's 2018 presidential elections. Second, a digital ethnography of twenty of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts, with a keen interest in pinpointing misinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric through content and discourse analysis. Third, a comparison between social media and traditional media, in particular print and broadcast news, underpinning changes in the political messaging landscape.

For the contextual analysis, I relied on secondary data collected by others, by navigating the archives of databases. I used Gleeson Library at University of San Francisco, the Sonoma County Library, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, UC Berkeley Library's Romance Languages Collection, Oxford University Research Archive, HathiTrust Digital Library, JSTOR, Fusion, ResearchGate, ProQuest, SciELO, Gale Literature Resource Center, HeinOnline, Google Scholar, among others. The archival data enabled me to perform a contextual analysis of the historical, philosophical, technological, political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces leading to Bolsonaro's meteoric rise to power in 2018, specifically the dangerous synergy of AI and populism propelling this rise.

For the digital ethnography, I began in December 2018 by following Bolsonaro's official Instagram account and data mining his entire posts in the social media app up to December 2020, which he started sharing since he first joined the platform on March 11, 2013. I analyzed the content of his Instagram posts. Then, I started to add to a saved collection folder on my Instagram account the ones that interested me the most and were relevant to my research topic. The twenty posts that I extracted from Bolsonaro's official Instagram account were tainted with disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric. I paid particular attention to Bolsonaro's Instagram posts that were aimed at his election rival Haddad, Lula, and the Workers' Party. Additionally, I was interested in his Instagram posts that attempted to glorify the 1964 military coup d'état, were infused with extreme nationalism, or used language that metaphorically militarized the election. The twenty Instagram posts I will focus on from Bolsonaro's account were in Portuguese and were translated into English by me.

Finally, for a comparative analysis between social media and traditional media, I also collected news articles and video clips from mainstream media in Brazil and from abroad that covered the same principal players and key issues put under the limelight by the digital ethnography. For the mainstream media in Brazil, I relied on sources such as *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo* (two of the media giants in the South American country), among other lesser-known ones. The video clips I analyzed from Brazilian TV broadcasters were obtained from YouTube. For the mainstream media from abroad, I relied on sources such as *The New York Times*, the BBC, and others. By juxtaposing the political messaging from Bolsonaro's official Instagram account to traditional media coverage of him in Brazil and abroad, I was able to gain new insights that strengthened my argument. The media sources obtained from Brazil were in Portuguese and required translation into English by me. Whereas, the media sources obtained from abroad were mostly from the English-speaking world and hence didn't require translation.

The research question that sparked my interest in this thesis topic was: how did President Bolsonaro emerge victorious from the 2018 Brazilian presidential race in a country lauded as a paragon of multiculturalism, indeed as the apotheosis of a racial democracy, in spite of his divisive populist rhetoric? To answer this question, it was imperative to investigate the research problem that it kindled. Ergo, the research problem I investigated was the danger posed to Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic) by Bolsonaro's electoral victory and subsequent presidency. Thus, my research was centered on deconstructing this danger into the two main forces of AI and populism, and proceeding to an examination of their dangerous synergy that propelled Bolsonaro to win the 2018 Brazilian presidential election. What I discovered right way was that this

research problem is an under-researched topic in the academic world at large, in Latin America, and surprisingly in Brazil as well. This lack of research arises from how recently raw the events are in Brazilian cotemporary political life.

I began to conduct research on the populism component of my thesis in December 2018, by checking out books from the Sonoma County Library, while recovering from a retinal detachment surgery I had in November of that year, caused by a genetic disease common in people with Asian or Amerindian ancestry. In order to start conducting research for the AI component of my thesis, I participated in “A European Vision of Artificial Intelligence meets Silicon Valley,” a conference set up by the European Union, the European Institute of Innovation & Technology, and Open Austria at Galvanize, in San Francisco, on Thursday, March 28, 2019.

During Spring 2020, I took a course on data ethics through the University of San Francisco’s Data Institute, where I analyzed the threat posed by AI against democracy during elections through the data harvesting and micro-targeting of the electorate with disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric on social media. Moreover, I learned about the role played by blitzscaled business models in the world of tech in perpetuating this danger. In addition to receiving a certificate, this course helped me further clarify these concepts to strengthen the premises of the main argument of my thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“AI is a fundamental risk to the existence of human civilization.” – Elon Musk²⁷

“I think we should be very careful about artificial intelligence. If I were to guess like what our biggest existential threat is, it’s probably that... With artificial intelligence we are summoning the demon.” – Elon Musk²⁸

Conceptual Framework

This thesis stands on the theoretical framework of evolving communication systems, laying the building blocks of the foundation for an empirical study of election interference, in the age of AI and populism, on social media. To understand communications in the digital world, it is essential to explore various theories of communication: Habermasian “public sphere,” Debordian “spectacle,” Hanian “psychopolitics,” and Tiburian “spectropolitics.” Jürgen Habermas conjured up the “public sphere” to depict a social sphere that arose from shifting socioeconomics and dealt with the political engagement of the newly emancipated class of the bourgeoisie. He goes on to lucidly lament how the bourgeois “public sphere” of social-political dialogue that arose in the cafés and art galleries of Europe had been transformed into manipulative publicity by the new media of radio, film, and television.²⁹ Guy Debord picks up the pieces left by Habermas to construct his notion of the “spectacle” that illustrates how

²⁷ Drum, “Why Elon Musk.”

²⁸ McFarland, “Elon Musk: ‘With artificial intelligence.’”

²⁹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 27, 29-30, 170-1.

reality has been distorted by the world of images blurring the lines between truth and lies. He goes on to show how the “spectacle” created by commodity fetishism has affected the relationships among people at the micro level and in turn society as a whole at the macro level.³⁰

While Habermas and Debord are analyzing the evolution of communication systems in society, they do so through a critique of mass media. Therefore, I will use the Habermasian “public sphere” and the Debordian “spectacle” frameworks to analyze the newspaper articles from Brazil’s print media giants and through the digital platform of YouTube, the video clips from their broadcast media counterparts. However, their theories are inadequate to investigate events in the digital world of today driven by AI-controlled social media. The reason for this is that the Internet, more so social media, didn’t exist when the two theorists respectively developed their notions of the “public sphere” and “spectacle.” This is where Byung-Chul Han and Marcia Tiburi enter the scene and provide the field with a fresh new framework from which to explore the digital, in particular the realm of social media.

Han introduces the concept of “psychopolitics,” taking Foucault’s “biopolitics” one-step further, to explore how power has moved away from controlling the body to controlling the psyche via digital media, especially social media. Han acknowledges that capitalism has undergone a metamorphosis from consumption of commodities to consumption of emotions. He goes on to argue that in the system of emotional capitalism, micro-targeting has become a common practice of AI-driven “psychopolitics.” Big Data, a branch of AI, and Big Brother have joined forces to use data harvesting on social media

³⁰ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1, 4, 12, 28, 36.

with the aim to invade the privacy of users and peek into their psyche in order to create personalized messages geared towards influencing their voting behavior.³¹

Arriving at the same destination as Han, Brazilian philosopher Marcia Tiburi formulates the concept of “spectropolitics,” by also updating Foucault’s “biopolitics” for the digital age. Tiburi acknowledges that the digital has become an addiction. Having replaced television in such a short time, the digital is the new communicational hegemon, as the producer of language, popular theories, common truths and lies. Moreover, “spectropolitics” focuses on questions of life and death on the Internet. She also refers to the element of “spectropolitics” that influences mindsets, affections, emotions and feelings much like “psychopolitics,” echoing Han.³²

Therefore, it seems natural for me to select Han’s theory of “psychopolitics” and Tiburi’s theory of “spectropolitics” to study the dangerous synergy between AI and populism in the social media realm, which was key to Bolsonaro’s 2018 electoral victory. In my analysis, I will use the Hanian and Tiburian theoretical frameworks of “psychopolitics” and “spectropolitics” to study the social media posts from Bolsonaro’s official Instagram account and juxtapose these Instagram posts to newspaper articles and video clips from Brazil’s media giants and from other media sources from abroad.

Due to the nature of my thesis, it is also imperative to deconstruct the two forces that together pose a danger to democracy: AI and populism. This danger manifests itself in the form of elected leaders with anti-democratic inclinations such as Bolsonaro, who harbors a deep nostalgia for the Brazilian military dictatorship days and who is ravenous

³¹ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 25, 27-28, 36, 46, 63.

³² Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 16, 138-9.

in his attacks against Brazil's racial democracy and *Nova República* (New Republic) institutions.³³ In essence, I will be conceptualizing AI and populism. AI is a technological tradition that seeks not only to develop human intelligence but also superhuman intelligence.³⁴ I will conduct a survey of AI to trace its evolution and understand its power. Nevertheless, the branch of AI that I will focus on is Big Data as data harvesting was crucial to micro-targeting the electorate with disinformation, propaganda and emotionally charged populist rhetoric. Populism is an imagination of politics that claims legitimate power rests with "the people" who are perceived as morally pure and united instead of with elites who are framed as corrupt and morally inferior.³⁵ Populism also has a chameleon-like quality that allows it to adapt to a variety of ideologies, conservative or socialist, authoritarian or progressive, etc.³⁶ In this thesis, I will be focusing on populism from the extreme right which tends to be conservative and authoritarian. I will take a tour of populism abroad before returning to Brazil to examine the particularities of its recent dose of populism. This populism is embodied in Bolsonaro's political DNA given that he was propelled to power by bitterly dividing Brazilians, risking tearing apart the social fabric that holds together Brazil's racial democracy.

The shock from the 2018 Brazilian presidential election sparks from the paradox of Bolsonaro's populist victory in a country that prides itself as a racial democracy. How was this divisive demagogue able to clinch victory in the apotheosis of multiculturalism

³³ Kuhlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 23; Milz, "Brazil's Bolsonaro stages."

³⁴ Boden, *AI*, 1, 11, 120-1, 147; Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 1, 100, 109-10, 206.

³⁵ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 3, 19-20, 23.

³⁶ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 4.

and multiracialism? Tropical romanticism removes the veil from Brazilian society, revealing a luscious land rapaciously exploited for its natural resources and a diverse racially, culturally and linguistically rainbow-like mix of people violently divided by their differences. Tropical romanticism portrayed an illusory image of Brazil as a land of racial harmony and mixture to the outside world.³⁷ Bolsonaro's victory shattered this illusion and revealed that the country's dark past still lurks in the present. Colonialism, slavery, and the dictatorship still live on through the collective memory of the people and through the oppressive pyramidal social hierarchy that continues to enrich the dominant elite on top, while exploiting the subjugated masses struggling to survive at the bottom.

Literature Review Overview

Since Bolsonaro's victory on October 28, 2018, the academic world and society (through the press, government institutions, and concerned citizens) in Brazil and abroad, have ruminated about the factors that catapulted a populist demagogue to the presidency in this country that is South America's giant. Bolsonaro is merely riding a new wave of populism that has brought new leaders with populist agendas to power across the world, in particular Trump in the United States, or helped leaders already in power solidify their grip, such as Erdoğan in Turkey.³⁸ Following the role played by social media in the 2016 American presidential election, in the July 2016 Turkish coup attempt, and in the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, the public sphere has been buzzing with dialogues and

³⁷ Araujo, *Brazil through French Eyes*, 36, 185.

³⁸ Winter, "System Failure"; Hrynyshyn, "The Outrage of Networks," 30.

debates about the role played by technology in each event.³⁹ At the international level, what the scholarly empirical findings show is a confluence of the forces of AI and populism through the social media sphere. Some researchers have focused on social media, others on populism, few have focused on AI, and even less have examined the confluence of AI and populism through the social media sphere, especially as it relates to Bolsonaro's 2018 electoral victory. I will use the conceptual frameworks put forth by Han, called "psychopolitics," and Tiburi, called "spectropolitics," in order to engage in an analytical study of the synergy of AI and populism in the social media realm. Then I will juxtapose my findings from this analytical study to traditional media (Brazilian newspapers and television shows, plus some foreign counterparts). "Psychopolitics" and "spectropolitics" will allow me to look at the digital sphere and mass media through an analysis of the psyche. Via data harvesting, micro-targeting, and bot farms, AI algorithms in the social media sphere play with the emotions of users to sway them politically. Additionally, the "public sphere" framework introduced by Habermas, and the "spectacle" framework, introduced by Debord, will facilitate my analysis of traditional media as it compares to digital media. Therefore, I will look for empirical evidence that zeroes in on content infused with emotional messaging aimed at infiltrating the psyche of social media users (specifically Instagram users) and compare this to the parallel emotional messaging aimed at mass media spectators (In Brazil and abroad).

My strategic aim in this thesis is to analyze the synergy between AI and populism in the digital sphere through the optics of a contemporary philosophical conceptual

³⁹ Frenkel, Conger, and Roose, "Russia's Playbook"; El-Erian, "How Social Media Helped"; Grenier, "Erdogan and social media."

framework and its intersection with a digital ethnography of selected social media posts, plus a comparison between these posts to traditional media. To be precise, my research will look into the social media and mass media ecosystems in Brazil, through a digital ethnography of twenty of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts and a comparison of the messaging of these posts to the narrative constructed by mass media (specifically Brazil's leading print and broadcast media giants, plus their counterparts from abroad).

New Wave of Populism

Jair Bolsonaro's meteoric rise to power in Brazil was part of a larger global phenomenon that took the world by storm.⁴⁰ A new wave of populism brought new leaders to power and strengthened the iron grip on power from leaders already firmly in control. The available research highlights many similarities between these leaders riding the new wave of populism that not only harbor anti-establishment inclinations, but more importantly anti-democratic desires. The differences between these populist leaders only accentuate their similarities: extreme nationalism, an intense cult of personality, anti-pluralism, and a Manichaeic worldview.⁴¹

A juxtaposition of Bolsonaro's social media playbook with that of American President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, reveals trends in the international arena that point to a global populist playbook being used in politics, particularly on social media.⁴² The rise of Bolsonaro and Trump was based on a backlash

⁴⁰ Winter, "System Failure"; Hrynyshyn, "The Outrage of Networks," 30.

⁴¹ Angyalossy Alfonso, "Bolsonaro's take," 34; Hrynyshyn, "The Outrage of Networks," 31; Swift, "Introducing Jair Bolsonaro"; Kuhlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 23-4.

⁴² Frenkel, Conger, and Roose, "Russia's Playbook."

against globalization, neo-liberalism, and progressive social advancements. The two leaders used social media to fan the flames of discord against the establishment and sway enough people in the electorate to vote for them. In Turkey, Erdoğan evaded censorship and being toppled from power by a foiled coup in July 2016 by using social media on his mobile phone and rallying Turkish citizens to come out into the streets in support of him.⁴³ Afterwards, Erdoğan solidified his power and continued in full force the country's shift from liberal democracy to anti-secular Islamic populism.⁴⁴

Bolsonaro, Trump, and Erdoğan took to social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to circumvent the narrative filter of traditional media and instead talk directly to the people. In doing so, they branded mass media giants as “fake news” and “enemies of the people.”⁴⁵ At the same time, the three leaders have complained of bias by the social media giants and have sought to either stir public outcry against them, or restrict their use and operation, while continuing to use social media strategically as part of their populist tactics.

In the realm of social media, these populist tactics center on infiltrating the psyche of users and swaying them with emotionally charged populist rhetoric. The principle aim of this is to strike with a dagger at the heart of each country's social cohesion, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism. Due to the Manichaeon vision promoted by their respective populist politics, the public sphere in Brazil, the United States, and Turkey has been divided into two opposing groups that confront each other in the realm of social media.

⁴³ El-Erian, “How Social Media Helped”; Grenier, “Erdogan and social media.”

⁴⁴ Duran, “Recep Tayyip Erdogan.”

⁴⁵ Milz, “Brazil's Bolsonaro stages.”

Bolsonaro, Trump, and Erdoğan have used incendiary language, such as intense emotional attacks on opponents based on not only cherry-picked facts, but also more concerning falsehoods and propaganda, in pursuit of their populist goal to divide and conquer. The political messaging emitted on social media portrays each of their respective societies in decadence, corrupt from the inside, with the need to restore them to former glory. The Operation Car Wash anti-corruption scandal in Brazil, the Hillary Clinton email scandal in the United States, and the failed coup d'état in Turkey, all provided the political catalyst from which arose the populist messianic leader. On the various social media platforms, political opponents are attacked and trolled with emotionally charged populist language, disinformation, and propaganda, by the populist messianic leader himself, or by his hypnotized followers.

The three populist leaders also masquerade as being champions of “law and order,” but scapegoat minorities, attack democratic institutions, taint the justice system as corrupt, and incite violence against opponents. Bolsonaro, Trump, and Erdoğan, have combined populism and AI in the social media sphere to emerge victorious in elections, or to consolidate their power. Once in power, they strive to transform the secular liberal democracies that led to their electoral victories into extreme nationalist populist states with hybrid democratic and authoritarian elements. This is what Adorno warned against when he considered the survival of National Socialism within democracy to be more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy in the post-war *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁶ This resonates in our digital age as well, where the authoritarian populist infiltration of the electorate’s psyche

⁴⁶ Gandesha, “Introduction,” 2.

via AI algorithms threatens the wobbly democratic institutions of republics around the world.

Brazilian Populism

A comparison between Bolsonaro, Trump, and Erdoğan, will uncover the similarities and differences populism has taken in each country, in order to further elucidate the global populist playbook and Brazil's place as a flashpoint on the populist chessboard. The three populist leaders have used social media for obtaining power or consolidating it through the mobilization of their social media followers. The similarities in the social media tactics used by the populist leaders indicate a strategic commonality on the global level. However, the differences in their specific populist messaging that targets their respective social media followers, signal an amalgam of historical, cultural, social, political and economic particularities unique to each country. Therefore, Bolsonaro's political messaging on social media reflects the idiosyncrasies of Brazil's history, culture, society, politics, and economics.

An examination of the nexus between Brazil's recent dose of populism and AI algorithms on social media, used to sway the electorate in the 2018 presidential elections, reveals Bolsonaro's victory as merely the continuation of Brazil's collective experience of systemic violence from which the country still struggles to come to terms with, specifically colonialism, slavery and the 1964-1985 military dictatorship. Moreover, Bolsonaro embodies Brazilian populism, having served in the military, harboring a

conservative nationalist worldview and a desire for the return of the military dictatorship days.⁴⁷

Brazil's recent jolt of populism has shattered the image of Brazil as a racial democracy, revealing a country with fragile democratic institutions and wounds still opened from its collective experience of institutional violence.⁴⁸ The mirage of Brazil as a racial democracy has its origins in tropical romanticism, a colonial European vision of Brazil as a luscious land whose inhabitants of various racial backgrounds live together in relative harmony. This vision has been invigorated with other elements to reinforce the idea of Brazil as a country of racial mixture and rainbow-like harmony.⁴⁹ Tropical romanticism was incorporated into Brazil's national ethos and was later transformed into the paradigm of Brazil as a racial democracy.⁵⁰ While tropical romanticism depicts this illusory vision of Brazil, it also reveals the colonial clash and amalgam of the European, Amerindian and African worlds in this South American country.⁵¹ The European explorers and settlers used derogatory stereotypes in describing the populations of color they interacted with in Brazil.⁵² Tropical romanticism outlasted colonialism, slavery and the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, surviving to the present. Brazilian governments use it as a carnival mask to hide the inequalities and dangers of Brazilian life, only removing

⁴⁷ Barkaskas, "Decolonizing the 'Contemporary Left'?" 197; Swift, "Introducing Jair Bolsonaro."

⁴⁸ Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 19-20.

⁴⁹ Araujo, *Brazil through French Eyes*, 36; George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 92; Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 8, 26.

⁵⁰ Araujo, *Brazil through French Eyes*, 185; George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 92; Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 8.

⁵¹ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 1, 10, 78, 86-7, 116, 124, 316-17; Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 6, 26, 49

⁵² Araujo, *Brazil through French Eyes*, 185.

the mask when needed, to expose the grotesque social reality of Brazilian life and use it as a political token during elections.⁵³ However, Brazilian society remained largely ignorant on the structural inequalities persisting from the country's colonial period, slavery, and the military dictatorship. Tropical romanticism persisted in the Brazilian national psyche until the election that catapulted Bolsonaro to power. Bolsonaro's election shattered the illusion of Brazil as a racial democracy by putting the national limelight on the polarization of Brazilian society arising from the racial, political, and socioeconomic structural inequalities, which Brazil's elite use to their advantage in order to perpetuate their hegemonic privilege over the masses beneath them.

Brazilian populism manifests itself not only in the physical world, but also in the digital world as well. In the physical world, the tangible manifestation of Brazilian populism includes mass rallies, violence, and tainted victories at the ballot box. In the digital world, the digital manifestation of Brazilian populism includes AI algorithms, social media communication infrastructures where these AI algorithms function, and troll and bot farms powered by these AI algorithms. This dichotomy of Brazilian populism between the physical and the digital worlds is what sets the new wave of populism apart from that of the past. The physical and digital manifestations of Brazilian populism feed off and amplify each other. For example, after Bolsonaro uploaded a video on YouTube to push back against claims by the Brazilian magazine *Veja* that alleged his campaign had benefited from the use of AI robots, a group of his followers reacted by recording a video of themselves mocking *Veja*'s claim against Bolsonaro.⁵⁴ In the video, they are seen

⁵³ Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 197.

⁵⁴ Bolsonaro, "REVISTA VEJA: Bolsonaro usa robôs."

moving like robots and saying in a robotic-sounding voice “I am a Bolsonaro robot,” while they march in a mechanical way.⁵⁵ They then uploaded the video online to share with others in the digital ecosystem, eventually going viral.

As the face of Brazilian populism, Bolsonaro’s populist rhetoric on social media primarily targets Brazilians who use these platforms. From a Manichean perspective, these targeted Brazilians are divided into followers of Bolsonaro and non-followers. The followers of Bolsonaro’s social media accounts are generally assumed to have pro-Bolsonaro political inclinations, while the non-followers are generally believed to have either anti-Bolsonaro, or neutral inclinations. Thus, the strategic aim of Bolsonaro’s political messaging on social media platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp is to amplify his cult of personality inside of this political base or expand his appeal to those outside of it.

Tribal Identities

An element shared between Brazilian populism and global populism is a Manichaeian worldview that divides people into two distinct opposing groups (the “us” versus the “other”) locked into battle for power in a zero-sum game. What differentiates the new wave of populism from the populism of the past is the spread of this social dichotomy from the physical world to the digital world as well. It is through tribal identities that the new wave of populism emotionally appeals to individuals on social media via biased AI algorithms and translates this to victories in political elections.

⁵⁵ BLOG DO PIVA CANTIZANI, “EU SOU ROBÔ.”

Tribal identities predate civilization, going back to the origins of the human species. Intertwined with the notion of identity is the concept of intolerance, which Voltaire calls more horrible than “the law of tigers,” as tigers tear and maul to stanch their voracious appetite, whereas humans wipe each other out over absurd and barbaric reasons.⁵⁶ History has shown us that fear of the “other” leads to hate and hate leads to eventual violence if left unchecked. Following Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps, with his war elephants, Rome’s fear of Carthage led to fear and hate. The Roman Senator Cato channeled this intolerance by ending each speech he made in the senate with the phrase “Carthage should cease to exist.”⁵⁷ *Carthago delenda est* eventually became a premonition for the Roman annihilation of the city during the climatic conclusion of the Third Punic War. This lucid example from the annals of Classical Rome pinpoints the intertwining of tribal identities with intolerance that has continued to the present day through different manifestations: nationalism, fascism, and populism.

The new wave of populism uses tribal identities to solidify the paranoia arising from the nation-state, in which the tribal “us” versus the “other” becomes the “*demos*” (the “people”) versus the “*xenos*” (the “foreigner”). In the previous example from antiquity, the “*demos*” versus the “*xenos*,” became “Rome” versus “Carthage.” In Erdoğan’s Turkey, the “*demos*” became pious Muslim Turks, while the “*xenos*” became secular Turks, Turkish minorities (Kurds, Greeks, and Armenians), and even Syrian refugees. In Trump’s America, conservative protestant white American citizens of European descent became the “*demos*,” while everyone else including Mexicans,

⁵⁶ Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, 13.

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, 34-5.

Muslims, Blacks, and refugees became the “*xenos*.” In Bolsonaro’s Brazil, the “*demos*” became conservative white Brazilians of European descent, while the “*xenos*” became Brazilian Amerindians, Afro-Brazilians, and Venezuelan refugees among others. This infusion of populism into tribal identities results in a discourse dealing with themes of borders, boundaries, and invasions.⁵⁸ In essence, populists use fear tactics to scare the electorate with fabricated threats posed by the “*xenos*,” in order to portray themselves as the defenders of the “*demos*” and as having the willpower to defend the motherland/fatherland from the invaders, ultimately coercing people to vote for them.

Brazilian populism takes the tribal identities framework and uses it in the context of Brazil’s national experience. Populism’s “*demos*” versus “*xenos*,” taken from tribalism’s “us” versus the “other,” in Brazil’s populist context becomes “Brazilian” versus “non-Brazilian.” As already posited, Brazilian populism is personified in the figure of Bolsonaro. Hence, it is assumed that in Bolsonaro’s Brazil the tribal label “Brazilian” demarcates conservative white Brazilians of European descent, while “non-Brazilian” demarcates Brazilian Amerindians, Afro-Brazilians, and recent arrivals such as Venezuelan refugees among others. Beyond this, since Brazil’s populism is personified in the figure of Bolsonaro, “non-Brazilian” also demarcates people who Bolsonaro deems traitors to the flag and the homeland, such as the Workers’ Party (who he labels as communists), liberals, feminists, the press, and everyone else that doesn’t fit into the tribal category of “Brazilian” (LGBTQ+ members of society, favela residents, intellectuals, and the rest of Bolsonaro’s opponents).

⁵⁸ Safatle, “Fascist Neoliberalism and Preventive,” 184.

In the digital sphere, Brazilian populism takes the tribal identities dichotomy to divide netizens into the “pro-Bolsonaro” versus “anti-Bolsonaro” camps. While those with neutral political inclinations towards Bolsonaro are considered to be in a liminal stage, while they eventually gravitate to either of the two opposing digital Brazilian populist tribes. Therefore, Bolsonaro’s political messaging on his social media accounts addresses the “pro-Bolsonaro” and anti-Bolsonaro” digital tribes with different strategic aims: to incite the former with emotionally charged populist rhetoric (hate and fear) and to silence the latter, by either coercing them to change their tribal allegiance, or intimidating them through trolling.

Thesis Intervention

Building on studies on artificial intelligence (AI) and populism that explain Bolsonaro’s meteoric rise to power, this thesis intervenes in a rapidly growing literature on the dangerous confluence of these two forces. The absence of a more detailed study of Bolsonaro’s electoral victory though a study of the synergy between the forces of AI and populism using mostly the frameworks of “psychopolitics” and “spectropolitics,” and their nexus with the concept of tribal identities, is a hiatus in the field that this thesis intends to mitigate. Therefore, I wish to situate the groundwork of my intervention in the recent scholarship by using the building blocks composed of a contextual analysis, a digital ethnography, and a juxtaposition of social media to traditional media.

Chapter 3: Artificial Intelligence

*“Whoever leads in AI will rule the world.” – Vladimir Putin*⁵⁹

Following the scientific and industrial revolutions, humanity developed an obsession to create life, in order to probe our origins as a species. Mary Shelley captured this obsession in her novel *Frankenstein*, wherein Victor Frankenstein bestows the spark of life on the creature, who has a mind of its own, but later regrets it and is haunted by his creation whom he now perceives as a monster.⁶⁰ Following Mary Shelley’s literary conception of Frankenstein’s monster, the idea of creating ‘mechanical men’ or robots (derived from the Czech word *robata*, or the Slovenian word *robota*, which translates roughly to “serfdom,” or “slavery,” plus ties together the words “robot,” “worker,” and “slave,” or “serf”)⁶¹ was incorporated in the classic science fiction of the early to mid-twentieth century. In the popular imagination, artificial intelligence (AI) came to be associated with robots with minds capable of the same mental capabilities as humans, or even outsmarting us. To start our exploration of AI, we will take a brief tour of its history, before pivoting to probe its philosophical, technological, and linguistic nature, lastly analyzing how it was strategically used in practice to spread emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda during Brazil’s 2018 presidential race that ultimately resulted in Bolsonaro’s stunning victory.

⁵⁹ RT, “Whoever leads in AI.”

⁶⁰ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 39, 74.

⁶¹ Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 1; Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 47.

History of AI

AI was first intuited by Lady Ada Lovelace, in the 1840's, who foresaw that a machine might one day compose elaborate pieces of music and express great facts of the natural world.⁶² Lovelace's ruminations indicated AI was conceptually possible but she didn't indicate how it could work mechanically.⁶³ In 1936, Alan Turing clarified the mystery of how AI was computationally possible through the universal Turing machine, using the binary numbers ("0s" and "1s").⁶⁴ After helping design the first modern computer, build in Manchester in 1948, Turing began pondering how this mechanical marvel could be induced to perform intelligently?⁶⁵ Turing's conviction that AI must be somehow possible was bolstered in the early 1940's by the combining of Turing's work with Bertrand Russell's propositional logic and Charles Sherrington's theory of neural synapses, as all three described binary systems.⁶⁶ The conclusion reached from this synthesis (the *true/false* values of logic, the *on/off* activity of brain cells, and the *0/1* individual states in Turing machines) posited that anything that could be stated in propositional logic could be computed by some neural network, and by some Turing machine.⁶⁷ The core implication was clear: Turing computation could be applied to

⁶² Boden, *AI*, 7-8.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 8-10.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 10.

human and machine intelligence, influencing in turn computer design as John von Neumann scrapped his plan to use decimal code in favor of binary code instead.⁶⁸

Symbolic AI research commenced on both sides of the Atlantic (in Europe and the United States), following broadly in the spirit of Turing's manifesto that posited AI was mechanically possible.⁶⁹ When Arthur Samuel's checkers (draughts) player beat Samuel himself in the late 1950s, the landmark event made newspaper headlines as it "was an intimation that computers might one day develop superhuman intelligence, outstripping the capacities of their programmers."⁷⁰ However, during the 1980's, an "AI winter" set in with government and industry funding for AI research plummeting since it appeared that it wasn't able to come up with practical applications in the real world.⁷¹ The arrival of an "AI spring" in the 1990's, was the result of *weak AI* (AI that aims to construct machines capable of performing particular functions indicating intelligence) sparking renewed interest and funding, especially when in 1997, IBM's computer Deep Blue, defeated Garry Kasparov, then the world's highest-rated chess player in recorded history, resulting in another milestone for AI in the human quest to approximate and even surpass human intelligence with machine intelligence.⁷²

Although robots were built by Leonardo da Vinci, among others, centuries ago, before the invention of the computer, AI versions of robots emerged in the 1950s.⁷³ AI

⁶⁸ Ibid 10-1.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 9-11.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁷¹ Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 89.

⁷² Harari, "Why Technology Favors Tyranny," 66; Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 90, 226.

⁷³ Boden, *AI*, 102.

robotics have advanced since the days of William Grey Walter's post war robotic tortoises that amazed observers by avoiding obstacles and moving towards light, indicating in appearance elements of human psychology such as free will and personality.⁷⁴ A strategic aim of MIT's recently opened AI Laboratory is the design and building of "the MIT robot," that will integrate computer vision, planning, language, and motor skills.⁷⁵ Due to increases in computer power and AI's convergence with robotics plus other emerging technology, the twenty-first century is seeing a revival of interest in AI.⁷⁶ In 2014, Google acquired DeepMind, a startup based in the United Kingdom specializing in AI research and neural networks, whose AlphaGo (an AI-based computer program), defeated Go's eighteen-time champion, Lee Sedol, in a five-game tournament, in March 2016.⁷⁷ Go, an ancient board game popular in Korea, Japan, and China, is similar to chess in that they both originate in Asia, chess in India and Go in China; they both consist of two players challenging each other with white and black pieces, so that the opponent's pieces are captured and defeated, making both games metaphors for battle and war. However, while the goal of chess is to capture the opponent's king, the goal of Go is to take and secure territory; moreover, chess pieces have different movement powers on the board, while Go's pieces don't. While it might appear that chess is much more difficult to play than Go, it is actually the opposite, with Go being vastly more hard to play and considered to be the most complex board game in existence.⁷⁸ So, AlphaGo's

⁷⁴ Ibid; Keating and Nourbakhsh, "Teaching Artificial Intelligence," 31.

⁷⁵ Boden, *AI*, 102.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 22, 101-2.

⁷⁷ Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 17, 103, 228; Livingston and Risse, "The Future Impact," 145.

⁷⁸ Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 102; Livingston and Risse, "The Future Impact," 145.

victory over Go's world champion Lee Sedol is another milestone for AI, since the AI program was based on machine learning, using algorithms that can adapt to new situations and reason their way through them.⁷⁹ Google's DeepMind and Google Brain, along with other AI endeavors at other major tech companies are advancing AI towards superintelligence.⁸⁰ AI's increasing power and influence in human affairs, only adds to the spark of interest in and strategic funding for it in the United States, China, and Russia, and more recently in Brazil. As examined in this thesis, elections are now being decided not by the will of the people, but rather by the will of AI algorithms, propelling populists to power.

Nature of AI

Now that we have swiftly covered the history of AI, we will shift our attention to its nature as viewed by the philosophical, technological, and linguistic traditions. The possibility of developing artificial intelligence in the physical world isn't just a question of advanced technology, but rather also a fundamentally philosophical question.⁸¹ Moving beyond Cartesian dualism's mind/body framework that relied on both tangible and intangible evidence, positivism sought a purely empirical explanation for consciousness, instead of speculative metaphysics and pseudoscience.⁸² By the end of the 1960s, psychology's behaviorism waned in popularity, while cognitive psychology was

⁷⁹ Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 91, 104.

⁸⁰ Livingston and Risse, "The Future Impact," 142.

⁸¹ Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 1.

⁸² Ibid, 5, 11, 19, 20.

in vogue, as research revealed that many cognitive functions didn't directly correlate to observable behavior.⁸³ While back in the field of philosophy, the emergence of Australian materialism (correlating mental states to neural states) allowed for a philosophical investigation of mentality while adhering to a scientific methodology (via neuroscience).⁸⁴ After research on brains that had suffered neural damage revealed neural plasticity, theories of consciousness moved beyond Australian materialism and embraced functionalism, which posited that mental states don't have anything intrinsic to them but merely act as functional states (mediating relationships between inputs, outputs, and other mental states).⁸⁵ The functionalist framework incorporates elements from psychology's behaviorism (that mentality involves stimuli and behavior) and Australian materialism (that mentality is accounted for in terms of neural activity), arguing that the mind relates to the brain much like software relates to hardware, since software can function in different types of hardware, so it is claimed that different physical beings can have minds, allowing for the possibility of artificial intelligence.⁸⁶ Since functionalism doesn't state the actual mechanism by which mental states carry out their functions (mediating relationships between inputs, outputs, and other mental states), computationalism posits this mechanism to be computations, in other words the mental operations from functionalism are taken to be computations in the computational framework.⁸⁷ Hence,

⁸³ Ibid, 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 35, 37-8.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 40-1, 45.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 47; Livingston and Risse, "The Future Impact," 150.

⁸⁷ Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 47, 95.

computationalism was embraced in the cognitive disciplines and sparked the AI technological revolution that continues to the present.⁸⁸

AI seeks to make computers do the skills that human minds are capable of doing, such as perception, association, prediction, planning, motor control, reasoning, language, creativity, and emotion.⁸⁹ From this point of departure, AI can be divided into weak and strong interpretations. While *weak AI* aims to construct machines capable of performing particular functions indicating intelligence (such as IBM's Watson, Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Google Translate), *strong AI* aims to create machines with minds that mimic human intelligence.⁹⁰

Since the competent and sophisticated use of language is considered to be indicative of intelligence, if a machine is able to use language as humans do, this would indicate rationality, and if it uses rationality, it would be assumed to be intelligent as a corollary.⁹¹ In 1950, Alan Turing published a paper in the philosophy journal *Mind*, asking: "Can machines think?" and proposed that if a computer passes a version of the imitation game known as the Turing test (wherein a computer uses human language to have a conversation with a human judge and fools him/her into thinking the computer is also human), this would be sufficient to recognize its intelligence.⁹² Thus, the Turing test established an ambitious milestone to measure the intelligence of machines. However, in

⁸⁸ Ibid, 100.

⁸⁹ Boden, *AI*, 1, 22.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 39, 121; Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 100.

⁹¹ Ibid, 109.

⁹² Boden, *AI*, 120; Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 109-10; Gendler and Smith, "The Turing test"; Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 84.

1980, John Searle challenged the *strong* AI implications of the Turing test by proposing the Chinese Room thought experiment.⁹³ In this thought experiment, Searle is locked in a room and receives questions on slips of paper written in Chinese from a native Chinese speaker outside, then he responds by matching the Chinese characters from the questions to those found in a book and writes the corresponding answers in Chinese on slips of paper that he sends back out to the native speaker.⁹⁴ While Searle was having a conversation in written Chinese, he still doesn't understand it. Therefore, while the Turing test proposes computers are capable of having intelligence if they are able to convince humans into thinking they're also humans through natural human dialogue, the Chinese Room counters by claiming that no matter how well a computer is programmed, it can't understand Chinese only simulate that it can, so it doesn't possess intelligence. In spite of this critique, the Turing test, formalized by annual competitions like the Loebner Prize, was arguably passed in 2014, by a chatbot named Eugene Goostman having the persona of a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy (whose non-sequiturs and awkward grammar were interpreted as linguistic and cultural barriers by judges).⁹⁵ AI appears to be getting closer to approaching human-level intelligence, but it arguably hasn't arrived there yet.

Since *strong AI* (capable of mimicking human intelligence) arguably hasn't been achieved yet, but *weak AI* (capable of performing certain functions associated with human intelligence) has been, AI is currently used merely as a tool by humans.

Technologically, the way AI works is through the execution of algorithms. Algorithms

⁹³ Boden, *AI*, 135; Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 176-7, 179; OpenLearn, "The Chinese Room."

⁹⁴ Boden, *AI*, 134-5; Carter, *Minds and Computers*, 176; PBS, "THE BRAIN."

⁹⁵ Boden, *AI*, 121; Gendler and Smith, "The Turing test."

are methods that solve problems or accomplish tasks, relying on the clear instructions of linked logical rules and on initial input data.”⁹⁶ Another way to think of algorithms is as a formula, or a series of steps precisely defined for solving problems, or performing tasks, written in human languages such as English (for human interpretation), or more commonly in computer languages such as Python (that machines can understand), and which are performed in a determined amount of time by computers.⁹⁷ Infrastructurally, social media runs on AI algorithms, which is the Achilles’ heel that populists target by using these AI algorithms to their advantage during election campaigns.

The nature of AI rests on the convergence of research done by various fields as diverse as philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, sociology, engineering, robotics, and computer science and technology. Despite having a synthetic nature, AI is currently capable of tasks that approximate, equal, or even exceed those undertaken by human intelligence, although this doesn’t mean it has reached human intelligence arguably, much less surpassed it. In this sense, AI is no longer a remote possibility as imagined in science fiction, but a tangible reality affecting the physical world around us with its ripple effects.

Applications of AI

Moving away from the nature of AI, as analyzed through the philosophical, technological, and linguistic optics, we will now focus on the applications of AI in the real world. Humans are using AI for a myriad of purposes, both altruistic and selfish. On

⁹⁶ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 12, 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 18; Jornal O Globo, “Fake news e robôs”; Hosanagar, *A Human’s Guide*, 5.

the one hand, some have used it as an elixir for society's ills such as combating the effects of climate change through conservation efforts. On the other hand, others have used AI recklessly in their thirst for power, regardless of the danger it poses not only to democracy, but more importantly to the human species as a whole. We will briefly look at the ways AI is being used for good, in conservation efforts, such as in Brazil's Amazon, before focusing on the draconian application of AI that lies at the nucleus of our analysis: its confluence with populism for achieving political power.

To help combat the negative effects of human-caused climate change, AI is being deployed across the world as part of audacious conservation efforts. AI sentinels, built by a small Portuguese company working with IBM, scan the Brazilian rainforest to help combat wildfires, given that they can differentiate between dust clouds, insect swarms, and plumes of smoke.⁹⁸ With the help of IBM's Watson supercomputer, the AI sentinels will also assist in predicting how the wildfires might spread.⁹⁹ Meanwhile in Borneo's rainforests, solar-powered recording devices are eavesdropping to identify the sounds of different species and track population changes overtime using AI algorithms, in order to monitor the effects of palm oil plantations on Borneo's rainforests.¹⁰⁰ Back in Brazil, AI kits installed across the Amazon, harness visual sensors and the latest bioacoustics technology to detect animals that live in the rainforest, under Project Providence, spearheaded by four scientists from Brazil, Australia and Spain.¹⁰¹ This scientific AI

⁹⁸ Sullivan, "AI and Bionic Eyes."

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Kemeny, "AI eavesdrops on Borneo's," 10.

¹⁰¹ Yeo, "Beneath the canopy," 36.

initiative uses deep learning (in which computers teach and optimize themselves by examining large data sets) in order to help diagnose the health of the Amazon rainforest, often dubbed the “lungs of the planet,” and provide insights into how climate change, deforestation, damming, mining, and hunting impact the tropical rainforest ecosystem.¹⁰² These lucid examples demonstrate some of the ways AI is being used as a tool for positive change in the world: helping combat wildfires ignited by human-generated climate change and protecting the Earth’s fragile ecosystems.

While AI is used in responding to the effects of the Anthropocene climate crisis, it poses an existential danger when coupled with populism. AI harnesses power that is unparalleled in history. For this reason, those with an unquenchable thirst for power use AI to obtain or to consolidate it. Bolsonaro and Trump are examples of the former, while Erdoğan is an example of the latter. The three presidents are populists with autocratic inclinations. So, the danger lies in AI and populism together rotting democracies from within, leading to an environmental apocalypse or war (whether kinetic or nuclear) over further diminished natural resources, as a result of the Anthropocene climate crisis, which is further exacerbated by populists in power who consider the climate crisis a hoax.

AI and Politics

On today’s geopolitical chessboard, AI is an imperative component for any country’s grand strategy. With the new arms race for AI being played out, if there’s a country that has advanced a little bit in this technology, it will be making huge leaps

¹⁰² Ibid.

ahead of other countries, comparable to the Soviet Union launching Sputnik and sparking the space race against the United States.¹⁰³ The revelation of China's national AI strategy has become a "Sputnik moment," against the backdrop of the current competition between the United States and China."¹⁰⁴ In the context of this new Cold War, Washington sees China as the "awakening technological dragon," having the advantage to access incredible amounts of private data, thanks to its large population and authoritarian government.¹⁰⁵ In this global AI arms race, Brazil risked becoming a pawn of the United States, since Bolsonaro's foreign policy closely aligned with Trump's own and Bolsonaro was also a strong critic of communist countries such as Cuba and Venezuela.

At the national level, AI has been used in various political ways such as tools for greater freedom and social change or as weapons for further polarization and weakening of democracies via election interference.¹⁰⁶ AI was injected into politics through social media's algorithms. Invigorated by the use of social media, the Arab Spring led to the toppling of authoritarian leaders in a domino effect across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011.¹⁰⁷ In a gambit to stop the Tahrir uprising, Egypt's autocrat, Hosni Mubarak cut off internet and cellular service, but ultimately failed and was removed from power, as dissidents used satellite smartphones to post on social media and fuel the fire of

¹⁰³ Foster, "AI and Diplomacy."

¹⁰⁴ Marijan, "The Cold War mindset," 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Tufekci, "How social media."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the rebellion.¹⁰⁸ The digital Rubicon was crossed when Egypt's military council, which removed Mubarak, opened a Facebook page as its exclusive outlet for communications, learning from Mubarak's mistakes and playing ball on the dissidents' turf.¹⁰⁹ "Power always learns, and powerful tools always fall into its hands," ruminates Zeynep Tufekci.¹¹⁰ Thus, it is no surprise that populism would learn to harness the power unleashed by AI algorithms on social media in order to gain political power, in the process metamorphosing into digital populism.

Just how does AI work on social media? Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, social media apps like Instagram, social messaging apps like WhatsApp, and also search engines like Google (and its subsidiary YouTube), run using algorithmic structures and systems, such as machine learning and deep learning algorithms, and also other types of artificial intelligence algorithms.¹¹¹ It is for this reason that, AI algorithms, via social media, have catapulted to power populist leaders around the world (Trump and Bolsonaro) or helped those already in power solidify their iron grip (Erdoğan). The former used social media as a tool in their election campaign playbook to clinch victory at the ballot box, by relying on those AI social media algorithms to spread emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation and propaganda. The latter used social media to stop a coup in the making, by relaying on those AI social media algorithms to spread emotionally charged populist rhetoric, only later also incorporating disinformation and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 12, 31.

propaganda to solidify his power. This dangerous synergy between AI and populism is therefore undermining democracy.

Given that people are generally oblivious to the fact that social media runs on AI algorithms and so use these digital platforms as a sort of public square, they can easily fall victim to the various ways AI influences their voting behavior via algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing. People think they are in control of technology as they have the power to turn digital devices on and off by hitting the power button. Nevertheless, when they are on the Internet, especially social media, they become open targets for AI, which most don't even know exists, much less know how it functions. If a majority of the people in an electorate who use social media don't know about and can't understand the process of algorithmic decision making, then there is doubt cast on the fairness of elections, since the new rules of the political game in the digital age are being determined by AI algorithms.¹¹²

One of the ways AI influences voting behavior via social media algorithms is through algorithmic filtering, a process that defines what millions of people see, and as a consequence creates filter bubbles connecting particular individuals with others showing the same patterns or characteristics.¹¹³ During Brazil's 2018 presidential race, sophisticated algorithmic systems were used in the country to track down people or groups on WhatsApp who might be susceptible to specific information, even if it was false or totally fabricated.¹¹⁴ Without transparency, society is unable to decipher the

¹¹² Ibid, 31.

¹¹³ Ibid, 20.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 35.

distribution criteria of algorithms. Countries where Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have shaped public opinion are unable of knowing if the algorithms have built-in bias and favor one candidate over another.¹¹⁵ However, what is clear is that these same companies sell the data mined from users who are then micro-targeted with political ads, which are infused with emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda. Micro-targeting (used by electoral marketing since the advent of big data), doesn't allow the targeted user of knowing what kind of propaganda other users are receiving, forming islands of opinion that block dialogue between individuals and blocking any union or negotiation that might result from that dialogue, weakening the base on which democracy stands.¹¹⁶ Thus, algorithmic filtering, whether organic or paid (through micro-targeting), influences the content users see, ultimately shaping public opinion.

Moreover, the collection of data from unaware social media users raises questions about privacy. Edward Snowden revealed in his National Security Agency (NSA) leaks, that Silicon Valley's tech giants, including Facebook (which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp), worked with state surveillance agencies in mining data from users and creating digital dossiers from those users labeled as "threats."¹¹⁷ Thus, the data mined from users is not only exploited to micro-target them with election marketing ads, but also as a tool of government surveillance. Because the laws in the United States frame privacy as an individual right, people don't have a choice on whether they want to live in a surveillance society or not.¹¹⁸ The Congress of the United States has remained silent on

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 57-8.

¹¹⁶ Toledo Borges, "Mercado, vigilancia e Facebook," 148.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 150.

¹¹⁸ Cegłowski, "The New Wilderness."

the issue of privacy, letting Silicon Valley make up its own rules.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the digital space, in particular the social media ecosystem, has become a Wild West for surveillance, where users' data is being mined by AI algorithms with practical impunity. The giant tech companies point to the people's willing use of their services as proof to their apathy about their privacy."¹²⁰ However, it seems unlikely the majority of the people are even aware that their activity online is being watched by the algorithmic eye and quantified. Consequently, the data mining and surveillance of people via AI algorithms continues without any laws to regulate it. As a result, there is worry of the threat caused by the secrecy of AI's algorithms, as companies that create them or government institutions that use them, aren't required to be transparent about the data mined from users.¹²¹ Outcries about the violation of privacy have been countered by claims from Facebook and Google that they are merely defenders of user privacy, with both of them spending more money than anybody else securing user data obtained by their algorithmic eyes.¹²² However, the problem isn't the safety of data itself, but why now there is so much data that needs protecting, after all a dragon can boast that it's good at protecting gold it has hoarded, despite the problem being its appetite.¹²³ AI technology has turned authoritarian states like China and Saudi Arabia into dragons hoarding more data than the Stasi (East Germany's intelligence agency and secret police) ever could, with one in seven East

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Toledo Borges, "Mercado, vigilancia e Facebook," 148-9.

¹²² Cegłowski, "The New Wilderness."

¹²³ Ibid.

German citizens acting as an informer.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, in the United States the same AI technology is being used for economic reasons, principally digital marketing. However, this can change since the infrastructure of total surveillance constructed by Silicon Valley's giants can be used for draconian purposes as well, specifically as a tool for social control. Although Washington and Silicon Valley might be willing to listen to the uproar concerning privacy online, especially on social media, economic and political factors will continue to dictate the AI agenda as it relates to privacy. While land was the most important asset in ancient times, then, machines and factories became the most important assets in the modern era, now in the 21st century, data will eclipse both land and machines as the most important asset.¹²⁵ For this reason, we are currently living in the era of surveillance capitalism, in which individual free will in market decisions is being eroded by the combining of Big Brother, Big Data, and Big Business.¹²⁶ Ergo, the tech giants of Silicon Valley threaten not only user privacy, but more importantly, free will.

Another equally important concern like privacy, is the transparency of AI algorithms. Algorithms are complex and not entirely neutral, as they perform, cause reactions, and make changes in both the digital and the physical worlds, in spite of people not always perceiving their presence and activity.¹²⁷ Billions of people use Google's search algorithm to find relevant and trustworthy information, distorting our notion of the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Harari, "Why Technology Favors Tyranny," 70.

¹²⁶ Livingston and Risse, "The Future Impact," 151.

¹²⁷ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 12.

“truth,” given that it has now come to mean the top Google search results in today’s post-truth world.¹²⁸ What the people using Google, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. might be ignorant or indifferent about is that the information they find on these platforms might be corrupted by underlying economic reasons that affect the AI algorithms running them. In terms of transparency, the companies that develop the algorithms claim that they can’t be open and transparent with them as they need to protect their business secrets and their intellectual property in the face of fierce competition in the tech sector.¹²⁹

Furthermore, the business model of the Big Tech companies that own the social media platforms is based on the data mining of users, the storage of the obtained data sets in data banks, and their usage by machine learning algorithms paid for by those who have the money to do so.¹³⁰ When a client pays for its service, Facebook’s AI engine can find an audience receptive to a given message or call to action according to identified targets selected by the client that enable Facebook’s algorithms to mine its users’ data and micro-target them.¹³¹ Therefore, Silicon Valley considers it imperative to secure the secrecy of AI algorithms that serve as lucrative intellectual property which bring in revenue and will deflect any calls to make them transparent. This imperative to secure the secrecy of AI algorithms is also fiercely followed by startups that follow a blitzscaling (derived from WWII’s blitzkrieg, meaning “lightning war”) business strategy, summed up by Mark Zuckerberg (who used it to blitzscale Facebook) as a “move fast and break

¹²⁸ Harari, “Why Technology Favors Tyranny,” 69.

¹²⁹ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 30.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 55.

¹³¹ Tufekci, “How social media.”

things” strategy.¹³² The ambition of these blitzscaling startups to scale up into giant valuable companies at an accelerated speed in order to beat competitors, especially in emerging tech industries, allows them to cut bureaucratic red tape, but in doing so raise doubts about the legality of the blitzscaling business model vis-à-vis regulations.¹³³ By attempting to change the rules of the game when blitzscaling, startups can use AI algorithms in more unethical ways than Big Tech, posing an even bigger threat to user data. Meta (the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), which blitzscaled from a startup into a Big Tech giant, engaged in unethical actions via its client Cambridge Analytica, a London-based political consulting and consumer research company paid by Trump’s election campaign to data mine the profiles of over 80 million Facebook users to then micro-target them based on that data that was mined.¹³⁴ These unethical actions by Cambridge Analytica on Meta’s Facebook platform, lead to Trump clinching the 2016 U.S. presidential election. At the time, Facebook was more concerned about its economic viability than ethical concerns, since it was still operating with a blitzscaling mindset.

Now that we have covered how AI has influenced elections through algorithmic filtering on social media, enabled by the business imperatives of tech companies and the complacency of governments to not act in protecting netizens’ privacy, we will focus on firehosing. Firehosing is a new political propaganda strategy that consists of spreading a constant stream of lies, transmitted through as many different communication platforms

¹³² O’Reilly, “Blitzscaling.”

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Toledo Borges, “Mercado, vigilancia e Facebook,” 165.

simultaneously possible, with the aim of creating confusion and either changing or affirming political beliefs.¹³⁵ Firehosing (derived from the phrase “firehose of falsehood”), predates Trump’s and Bolsonaro’s use of it during their election campaigns in 2016 and 2018 respectively, as its origins lie in Putin’s propaganda machine during the 2014 Russian hybrid war against Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea.¹³⁶ The strategy of firehosing to distort reality for political motives became another weapon in the digital arsenal of populist politicians in the post-truth era. In Brazil’s 2018 elections, candidates who carried out a clean campaign ended up losing, while the ones that used unfair and illegal tactics, such as using rapid-fire messages on WhatsApp, secretly financed by the elite, with the aim of spreading lies (firehosing), came out victorious.¹³⁷ WhatsApp’s then 120 million Brazilian users were firehosed with a deluge of targeted political messages.¹³⁸ It took just four years from its inception, for firehosing to become a decisive factor in Brazil’s elections. This has wide implications for Brazilian democracy in particular and the concept of democracy in general, since the growth of disinformation on social media can greatly influence elections, by manipulating the electorate, who end up believing the information they find on the Internet to be true, regardless if it’s actually false.¹³⁹ Disinformation isn’t just restricted to the digital world, in the physical world, it is also used together with print propaganda to amplify its effect.

¹³⁵ Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil, “Firehosing.”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 181.

¹³⁸ Isaac and Roose, “Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp.”

¹³⁹ Dias Silva and Duarte Oliveira, “O Monopólio da Verdade,” 120.

For example, during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, a disinformation flyer claimed that Haddad (Bolsonaro's election rival) planned to sign an executive order permitting men to have sex with 12-year-olds if he were elected president.¹⁴⁰ The difference though is that in the digital ecosystem, firehosing uses disinformation at an order of magnitude not possible in the physical world in terms of emission, visibility and spread. Before the second round of the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, firehosing wasn't just restricted to WhatsApp, a tsunami of memes, hashtags and disinformation flooded the entire Brazilian social media ecosystem.¹⁴¹ Among the most ludicrously false claims were that the Workers' Party (PT) were handing out "gay kits" to children in schools and that the election machines were rigged in the first round of voting.¹⁴² The aim of firehosing is to spread false information in order to distort society's collective sense of reality so that people respond in a desired way. In the 2018 Brazilian context, firehosing was used to change some voters' minds regarding Haddad, so that they instead voted for Bolsonaro during the second turn, or to cast doubt on the integrity of the election altogether, with the aim of convincing those still thinking about voting for Haddad not to vote at all and tune out of politics entirely. On October 28, just over 30 percent of the electorate casted "null" or "blank" votes, or abstained altogether, amounting to 42.5 million votes that didn't count, in an election runoff that was decided by 10.8 million ballots.¹⁴³ Since the desired

¹⁴⁰ Nemer, "The three types of."

¹⁴¹ Swift, "Introducing Jair Bolsonaro."

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Sims, "WhatsApp Groups and Misinformation."

outcome of the WhatsApp campaign was achieved during Brazil's 2018 presidential election, firehosing proved effective as a political propaganda strategy.

Besides algorithmic filtering and firehosing, AI social media algorithms also influence elections through astroturfing. Astroturfing refers to the practice of masking the sponsors of political messages or election marketing campaigns on social media, to make the messages or ads appear to sprout organically at the grassroots level.¹⁴⁴ The power of astroturfing is amplified when combined with disinformation, or the use of bot farms or troll farms.¹⁴⁵ Astroturfing was used in the 2016 American election and the 2018 Brazilian election.¹⁴⁶ The Russian government has used astroturfing as part of its cyberwarfare arsenal to meddle in elections abroad with the goal of undermining democracy. Since Putin assumed the Russian presidency in 2000, information control and manipulation have been used as asymmetrical weapons used by the Kremlin in its domestic and foreign policy, with the latter being militarized as “*informatsionaya voyna*,” Russian for “information warfare,” due to Moscow’s perception that the West (led by Washington) is engaged in an information war against it.¹⁴⁷ Advancements in AI have turbocharged Russia’s disinformation campaign and cyberattacks against the West.¹⁴⁸ According to the Mueller report, the Russian government troll and bot farm called the Internet Research Agency (IRA), began operations in the U.S., in the Spring of 2014,

¹⁴⁴ Jornal O Globo, “Fake news e robôs.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Polyakova, “Weapons of the weak.”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

with the aim of influencing the 2016 American presidential election.¹⁴⁹ IRA was engaged in a number of troll and bot operations across the social media ecosystem, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, followed later by its expansion into Instagram and Tumblr as well.¹⁵⁰ On Facebook, IRA bought 3,500 ads for \$100,000, a little less than \$30 per ad.¹⁵¹ Some of IRA's most successful groups had hundreds of thousands of followers, but Facebook shut down many of these operations on its platform in August 2017.¹⁵² IRA's content on Facebook reached 125 million Americans.¹⁵³ Between October and December 2018, Twitter found and removed 418 accounts linked to Russia.¹⁵⁴ Previously, the company had removed 3,843 accounts linked to IRA.¹⁵⁵ Twitter's rapid-fire messaging format and use of pseudonyms has become a magnet for trolls who attack women, dissidents, and minorities.¹⁵⁶ During the 2016 American presidential election, Russian trolls and bots dispatched to polarize American society were veiled by astroturfing. They started posting content on social media masquerading as not only American Muslims, Black Lives Matter activists, and immigrants, but also their counterparts on the political spectrum, white supremacists and angry Trump MAGA

¹⁴⁹ Hatmaker, "Mueller report."

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Polyakova, "Weapons of the weak."

¹⁵⁴ Frenkel, Conger, and Roose, "Russia's Playbook."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Tufekci, "How social media."

(Make America Great Again) supporters.¹⁵⁷ As part of this aggressive astroturfing infiltration, Russian troll and bot farms, like IRA, used Bitcoin (a cryptocurrency that gives people anonymity) to purchase virtual private networks (VPNs), which allow users to cover the traces of their online activity, using them to set up fake accounts on social media that pretended to be American citizens, to ultimately engage in firehosing.¹⁵⁸ Moscow's risky gamble to influence the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential race through astroturfing paid off with Trump's victory. This example lucidly demonstrates how astroturfing can lead to firehosing as well and ultimately influence elections.

In essence, the hegemony of AI in elections is evident through algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing, which have become part of the populist digital playbook for winning elections or maintaining power. Trump's and Bolsonaro's respective election victories, and Erdoğan's consolidation of power following the foiled coup point to the incorporation of algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing to the populist digital playbook. If this digital playbook which was used by Bolsonaro during the 2018 presidential campaign becomes entrenched, then countries like Brazil that are addicted to social media and have wobbly democratic institutions will see their democracies further threatened.¹⁵⁹ Hence, AI poses an existential danger to nation states, since it menaces the very concept of democracy itself. If AI is shaping public opinion, favoring one candidate over another, through algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing, then the level playing field for rival political forces is unevenly biased. This

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid; Polyakova, "Weapons of the weak."

¹⁵⁹ Sims, "WhatsApp Groups and Misinformation."

would intrinsically mean that democracy has been poisoned to its core, with the will of the people being replaced by the will of AI algorithms. Despite these concerns, AI algorithms are here to stay, since discarding them now would be like Stone Age humans rejecting the use of fire because it can be tricky to control.¹⁶⁰ Ergo, it becomes imperative to study how the synergy of AI and populism propels leaders such as Bolsonaro to power, in order to uncover the intricacies and mitigate against the dangers that arise.

¹⁶⁰ Hosanagar, *A Human's Guide*, 9.

Chapter 4: Populism

“When one with honeyed words but evil mind persuades the mob, great woes befall the state.” – Euripides, Ancient Greek tragedian.¹⁶¹

Populism is disruptive emotional politics in that it is an imagination of politics reacting against the status quo of emotional capitalism, a term coined by Han to refer to contemporary neoliberalism.¹⁶² Trump and Bolsonaro surfed this new wave of populism to electoral victory in 2016 and 2018 respectively. Meanwhile, Erdoğan surfed this new wave to solidify his iron grip on power following the foiled military coup that plotted to remove him from power in 2016. The new wave of populism didn’t arise out of the blue, but rather builds on past imaginations and manifestations of autocratic power. We will trace this evolution through the classical roots of populism, nationalism, colonialism, the modern spark of populism, and fascism. Afterwards we will focus on the current manifestation of populism, the new wave, which I call digital populism.

Historical Roots of Populism

Populism’s origins can be traced to the Classical World. In *The Republic*, Plato argues that the concept of democracy creates a paradox that becomes a catch-22. In a democracy, equality is given at the political level (“*polis*,” meaning “city-state” in Greek), but in practice inequality lingers at the socioeconomic level (“*agora*,” meaning

¹⁶¹ The Best Quotations, “Populism.”

¹⁶² Han, *Psychopolitics*, 46.

“public square,” or “marketplace” in Greek).¹⁶³ The paradox of democracy arising from the inconsistency of equality in both the “*polis*” and the “*agora*,” results in polarization. The people then seek a champion “whom they set over them and nurse into greatness... This and no other is the root from which a tyrant springs; when he first appears above ground he is a protector.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, the paradox of democracy becomes a catch-22 as the people who are uneasy with the illusion of equality in the “*polis*” and the reality of inequality at the “*agora*,” turn away from democracy and embrace a tyrant to safeguard their interests. We can see here the roots from which populism sprouted, with populist leaders undermining faith in democratic institutions with the goal of leading people towards supporting populism, even if the populist endgame would mean the end of democracy. The tyrant, just like the digital populist, is cunning in masquerading himself as protector of the people. Plato cautioned against the tyrant’s duplicity. “At first, in the early days of his power, he is full of smiles, and he salutes every one whom he meets,” warns Plato.¹⁶⁵ The tyrant conceals his true intentions until the time is right to strike at the heart of democracy. A digital populist example that elucidates this is Trump who in 2016 promised to “make America great again,” but then attempted to overturn the will of the people as expressed in the 2020 election through any means possible, including litigation at the courts, political blackmailing, and inciting a violent insurrection against Congress. In Brazil, Bolsonaro has been more open about his anti-democratic inclinations, stating that once in power he would veer the country back to a military

¹⁶³ Plato, *The Republic*, 569.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 589.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 592.

dictatorship. Now that he is in power, Bolsonaro has gone so far as to say in public that he is the constitution.¹⁶⁶

Moreover, duplicity isn't just used by tyrants but also by demagogues who stir the emotions of the people for their political machinations. Thucydides gave the lucid example of Pericles who "would say something to strike fear into their hearts; and when on the other hand he saw them fearful without good reason he restored their confidence again."¹⁶⁷ The power a demagogue holds over the emotions of people, essentially distorts their view of reality, and ultimately affects their freewill. Thus, Thucydides reflects, "what was in name a democracy was in practice government by the foremost man,"¹⁶⁸ Democracies run by demagogues are democracies just in name. However, what mitigates the effects of demagoguery in the present era are the checks and balances by the democratic institutions of the nation-state. This is why populists are attacking the integrity of the press, elected legislative bodies, independent courts, and even elections.

As already mentioned, Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon on January 10, 249 B.C. was one of the most pivotal moments in history.¹⁶⁹ His occupation of Rome signaled the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the reign of the Caesars, from which we derive the concept of Caesarism, one of populism's antecedents.¹⁷⁰ Although some Roman emperors were more benevolent or just than others, there were those whose notorious names can't be forgotten, Nero and Caligula for example. The transition from

¹⁶⁶ Carvalho, "Eu sou a Constituição"; UOL, "EU SOU A CONSTITUIÇÃO."

¹⁶⁷ Thucydides, *The War of the*, 130.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Gandesha, "Introduction," 5.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, points to the inherent self-destructive paradox of democracy that Plato warned about.

Like Caesarism, another antecedent of populism is Bonapartism. Against the backdrop of workers' violent "uprisings during the June days of 1848, Louis Bonaparte with the support of the Lumpenproletariat and the peasantry, and appealing in turn to the examples of the Roman Republic and Empire, managed to seize power under the aegis of the 'Party of Order.'"¹⁷¹ In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx (just like Plato and Thucydides before him) warned about the infiltration of democracy by those conspiring against it. Marx gives a lucid example of this in describing the inevitable "great and ruthless struggle... life-and-death struggle" between the French national assembly and then President Louis Bonaparte.¹⁷² Once the aspiring autocrat manages to gain power, he moves tactically to solidify it. Thus, a clash between an elected leader with autocratic aspirations and the democratic institutions standing in the way becomes inescapable. However, before the aspiring autocrat gets to this crossroads, he must hide his draconian intentions. While Plato warns against the duplicity of leaders who masquerade behind their smiles (their charisma), Marx does the same with leaders who masquerade as fools. To this effect, Marx derides Louis Bonaparte as the "serious buffoon" wearing a "Napoleonic mask" imagining himself to be the real Napoleon.¹⁷³ Thus, Louis Bonaparte entered French politics masquerading as a fool, making the different political factions believe he was their pawn, but in reality, it was the other way

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁷² Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 74.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 75-6.

around, since he was plotting against the French Republic and ultimately succeeded in obtaining his coronation as emperor. In Brazil, Bolsonaro masqueraded as a clown during the 2018 presidential race, mimicking firing machine guns with his hand gestures. However, Bolsonaro wasn't a mime from Paris, he was a candidate running for the Brazilian presidency who harbors nostalgia for the military dictatorship days. So, his theatrics were for mere deflection away from his weaknesses as a presidential candidate. Additionally, he was appealing "psychopolitically" and "spectropolitically" to his tribal followers, Brazilians who are part of the "pro-Bolsonaro" tribe on social media, by visually solidifying their tribal identity in his image and inciting them to act more violently in defense of their tribal demarcations. Meanwhile, the "non-Brazilian" and the "anti-Bolsonaro" tribes were just dazzled by the spectacle put on by Bolsonaro and considered him crazy rather than dangerous or perhaps more crazy than dangerous. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro's electoral victory jolted the "non-Brazilian" and the "anti-Bolsonaro" tribes, since it became apparent that he wasn't just a circus clown with his hand gesture gun theatrics, but rather a cunning and callous politician with a Machiavellian thirst for power.

Colonialism, Fascism and Populism

Fascism is a 20th century antecedent of the current wave of populism we see around the world. Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, and Hitler in Germany were all leaders who espoused fascist ideologies. Fascism was a political ideology that injected Europe with fear and hate at the nation-state level. Thus, in fascist states tribalism was visually institutionalized through propaganda to highlight the "*demos*" versus "*xenos*"

dichotomy of society. Adolf Hitler used Nazi political ideology, along with racial pseudoscience and eugenics, to divide Weimar Germany, which soon mutated into Nazi Germany, into the “Aryan/German master race” and “inferior races.” On the streets of Germany, Jews were singled out by being forced to wear yellow Star of David badges. We can observe fascism’s nation-state tribalism resurfacing as part of the new wave of populism. However, there are striking differences between fascism and the current populist wave that is currently in vogue in global politics (digital populism).

Tiburi uses psychoanalysis when probing fascism. In so doing, she describes fascism as the “delirium of all deliriums” that masquerades as something absolutely normal in the post-truth world.¹⁷⁴ In the Nazi context, Hitler’s delirium of grandeur captivated all of Germany through the fantasy created by the fabrication of the “Aryan race.”¹⁷⁵ Nationalist movements such as fascism or the new wave of populism revive or invent memories of past greatness in order to advance political aims.¹⁷⁶ Erdoğan’s delirium of grandeur presented itself in his 2014 presidential campaign slogan “*Türkiye’nin Gücüne Güç Kat,*” meaning in Turkish, “Bring Strength to Turkey”).¹⁷⁷ Erdoğan used the delirium of grandeur to play with the collective feeling among Turks that ever since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire their country emerged weak and has remained so, needing to be strengthened. Similarly, Trump’s delirium of grandeur presented itself in his 2016 presidential campaign slogan “Make America Great

¹⁷⁴ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 39.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 25.

¹⁷⁶ Hoffer, *The True Believer*, 90.

¹⁷⁷ Cagaptay, “Revealing Trends in Turkey’s.”

Again.”¹⁷⁸ Trump was playing with the illusory perception that America is in decadence, but can still regain lost glory only with him elected president. In Brazil, Bolsonaro’s delirium of grandeur manifests itself in his own campaign slogan from the 2018 presidential race, “Brasil Acima de Tudo, Deus Acima de Todos,” in Portuguese this means, “Brazil Above Everything, God Above Everyone.” Bolsonaro is expressing the general sentiment felt by Brazilians that under the rule of the Workers’ Party, Cuba and Venezuela were given priority over their own country Brazil. He also relies on the collective imagery of Operation Car Wash, which resulted in the incrimination of leaders from the Workers’ Party (including former Brazilian presidents Lula and Rousseff), implying that the “*demos*” should always come before the politician, the “*politikos*.” There is also an element of nostalgia in Bolsonaro’s delirium of grandeur, nostalgia for the 1964-1985 Brazilian military dictatorship. The delirium of grandeur in the future is combined with a sense of nostalgia for the grandeur of the past, creating the illusion that the receptive individual has the power to change the mundane present by voting for radical change. However, in reality the receptive individual has been a mere pawn on the grand chessboard of 20th century fascism and present-day digital populism, being played by the fascist or digital populist leader to gain power and then being disposed of once power is clinched.

Contemporary intellectuals argue that imperialism was a key stepping stone to fascism and in the interwar period (1920s and 1930s) the appeal of fascism’s siren song was amplified by capitalism, ultra-nationalism, and Europe’s “civilizing mission.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Gandesha, “Introduction,” 7-8.

Imperialism resulted in Europe's colonization of most of the world, creating a system in which the imperialist European nation-state (Spain, Portugal, France, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, or Italy) was the center around which the colonies orbited. Therefore, Europeans (continental "*demos*") developed a collective superiority complex vis-à-vis the colonized peoples (global "*xenos*") through the formation of the concept of race. Recent scholarship has confirmed the importance of the colonial imaginary for fascism itself.¹⁸⁰ Indeed since the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, the subjugation of the Amerindian (continental "*xenos*") to the European (continental "*demos*"), via the sword, disease, and the bible, resulted in the perception of European racial superiority over the Amerindian. Canada's residential schools were structures of fascism, given that their aim was "to kill the Indian in the child," as part of the Canadian colonial strategy to eliminate Indigenous peoples, communities and nations.¹⁸¹ Hence, colonialism's aims anticipate fascism's plans to eradicate the existence of the "*xenos*."¹⁸² Nazi German ideology would later adopt the concept of race from imperialism and the colonial imaginary, applying them to the German context and claiming that Germans of Aryan blood were the "master race," which lead inevitably to the Holocaust. Patricia Barkaskas reflects on colonialism's and fascism's endgame by concluding that their aim was merely to eliminate the existence of the other ("*xenos*"), based on a fantasy of white

¹⁸⁰ Barkaskas, "Decolonizing the 'Contemporary Left'?" 192.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 194.

¹⁸² Ibid, 198.

hegemony.¹⁸³ Tiburi arrived at the same conclusion as Barkaskas, but instead of calling the fascist endgame a fantasy, she called it a delirium.¹⁸⁴

In contemporary politics, the colonial imaginary and the concept of race still plague society. Populism has inherited these deliriums from fascism in dealing with the “*xenos*.” Erdoğan’s populism builds on the Ottoman legacy of eliminating the “*xenos*,” exemplified through the 1915 Armenian genocide, and by casting aside Kurds, Christian Turks, Syrian refugees, among others from the national political discourse. Trump’s and Bolsonaro’s respective doses of populism incorporate similar national historical experiences, the extermination of the Amerindians by European colonizers and the enslavement of Africans brought across the seas to work in plantations. A vivid example of Trump’s exclusion of the “*xenos*” comes from the time when he labelled Mexicans as drug dealers, criminals, and rapists, during a diatribe he gave at a 2016 campaign rally.¹⁸⁵ Bolsonaro, for his part, has referred to Brazil’s Amerindians living in reservations as animals in zoos.¹⁸⁶ When asked in an interview what he would do if his son fell in love with a Black woman, by Preta Gil (daughter of Afro-Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil), Bolsonaro responded with a dose of racism.¹⁸⁷ He told her that he wouldn’t talk about promiscuity with just anybody and that his sons wouldn’t run that risk because they were

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 25, 39, 61; Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 12, 19-20, 126.

¹⁸⁵ BBC, “Drug dealers, criminals, rapists.”

¹⁸⁶ Bolsonaro, “BOLSONARO E OS ÍNDIOS”; Bolsonaro, “Prefeito, de origem indígena”; Simões, “Brazil’s Bolsonaro.”

¹⁸⁷ Jornalismo TV Cultura, “Acusação de preconceito”; *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Veja 11 frases polêmicas.”

well educated and didn't live in the same environment in which she sadly did.¹⁸⁸ These two lucid examples reveal Bolsonaro's prejudice against the "*xenos*," specifically the racism spritzed against Brazilian Amerindians and Afro-Brazilians. This prejudice and racism can be traced back to Brazil's founding as a Portuguese colony.

Capitalism and Populism

Capitalism was a key factor to fascism's rise in the 20th century. Under its incarnation as neoliberalism, capitalism also contributed to the spread of the new wave of populism around the world at the start of the 21st century. Thus, a study of not only fascism but also contemporary populism should also analyze capitalism. Max Horkheimer famously captured this by expressing, "If you don't want to talk about capitalism, then you'd better keep quiet about fascism."¹⁸⁹ Erich Fromm traces the roots of authoritarian personalities back to the dawn of capitalism wherein economic insecurities, anxieties, and alienation arising from the end of serfdom and guild laws, pushed the "*demos*" toward desperately trading political freedom for economic stability.¹⁹⁰ Juxtaposing fascism with digital populism reveals parallels between the two, since both political forces arose out of deep economic crises and became magnets for segments of the population from not only the middle class, but also from the working class as well.¹⁹¹ For instance, 20th century fascism arose from the aftermath of World War

¹⁸⁸ Jornalismo TV Cultura, "Acusação de preconceito"; *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Veja 11 frases polêmicas."

¹⁸⁹ Gandesha, "Introduction," 10.

¹⁹⁰ Schmidt, "The Hope of the," 38-9.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 29.

I and the Great Depression, whereas digital populism arose from the political fallout of the 2008 financial crisis. Nevertheless, there are differences between 20th century fascism and the new wave of populism. Fascism was a response to the danger of a communist domino effect being set into motion by the crises of colonial capitalism.¹⁹² Populism in its latest manifestation, right-wing digital populism, promises the popular classes protections against their decline in power suffered under global capital.¹⁹³ In order to force the “*demos*” to accept populism, populists rely on fear tactics. Besides fear of the “*xenos*,” fears from neoliberalism’s “*agora*” (which are fears of losing one’s job, home or social status), turbocharged digital populism to electoral victories around the world. What Plato deduced in *The Republic*, the paradox of democracy pitting the “*polis*” versus the “*agora*” in an existential tug-of-war, continues to the present, albeit in more nuanced ways. The contradiction lying at the heart of liberal-democratic society becomes a zero-sum game pitting the principle of egalitarianism (*homo politicus*) versus the liberal conception of negative freedom (*homo economicus*).¹⁹⁴ Under neoliberalism, governments tend to favor *homo economicus* over *homo politicus*. Thus, in the political sphere, the preference for *homo economicus* over *homo politicus* manifests itself through global victories at the ballot box for digital populism.

The Frankfurt School put the root cause for fascism’s emergence and what they later argue was its resurgence on liberal democracy’s unfulfilled promises.¹⁹⁵ Right-wing

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Gandesha, “A Composite of King,” 129.

¹⁹⁵ Safatle, “Fascist Neoliberalism and Preventive,” 183.

digital populism, which some intellectuals label as the modern incarnation of fascism, emerged around the world, including in countries as diverse as Brazil and the United States, or based on secular principles such as Turkey, because of the legitimacy crisis inherent in the neoliberal order.¹⁹⁶ The crisis resulting from the contradiction between the autonomy of *homo politicus* and the heteronomy of *homo economicus* becomes unbearable, pushing the “*demos*” towards populism.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, neoliberalism is one of the main causes of neo- and post-fascist political movements (including the populist new wave).¹⁹⁸ While some of the direct causes of populism are economic, the effects are felt politically.

Essence of Populism

Populism is a style of rhetoric that claims legitimate power rests with the “*demos*” not the elites, having a chameleon-like quality that can make it camouflage itself to fit a variety of substantive ideological values and principles, such as socialist or conservative, progressive or authoritarian.¹⁹⁹ In this thesis, we are dealing with populism from the extreme right, because the new wave of populism is conservative and authoritarian in character. The concealment of authoritarian values under populist rhetoric that masquerades as democratic, poses the most dangerous threat to liberal democracy.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Gandesha, “A Composite of King,” 130.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 129.

¹⁹⁹ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 4.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 6.

Erdoğan, Trump, and Bolsonaro are populists with authoritarian inclinations. Thus, populism can become a Trojan horse for authoritarianism to infiltrate democracy and lead to its incineration from within.

Populism is a form of identity politics (though not all versions of identity politics are populist).²⁰¹ As a result of populism's innate identity politics characteristic, populism poses a danger to democracy, because democracy requires pluralism and recognition of the need of free, equal, but also diverse citizens to live together in relative harmony.²⁰² This is especially the case in countries as diverse as the United States and Brazil, who are multicultural, multiracial, and multi-faith. Even Turkey is to a degree diverse, albeit less than the aforementioned examples, with its big Kurdish population, and its small minorities of Greeks, Armenians, and other Christians, plus its growing number of Syrian refugees. Therefore, the idea of a single, homogeneous, authentic people isn't only a wild fantasy, but also a dangerous concept, because populists use conflict and polarization as a *divide et impera* (Latin for divide and conquer) strategy, to clear a pathway to victory during elections.²⁰³ Furthermore, populists scapegoat their opponents as "enemies of the people," or "traitors to the nation," in an attempt to silence them.²⁰⁴ Calls to solidify tribal identities become imperative for populists in order to divide society into dueling camps and ultimately establish their hegemony in politics.

²⁰¹ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 3-4.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Fear becomes an essential tool for populists to use in order to divide society into different opposing tribes, “us” versus the “other,” the “*demos*” versus the “*xenos*,” “Brazilian” versus “non-Brazilian,” “pro-Bolsonaro” versus “anti-Bolsonaro.” Fear causes societal suffering and is not only one of the most fundamental factors sparking the deliriums of fascism and its recent incarnation digital populism, but also it is perhaps their most essential fuel.²⁰⁵ Hence, this is why Tiburi calls neo-fascist and post-fascist (populist) movements as the delirium of deliriums. How does fear cause societal suffering? Fear, if left unchecked, leads to hate. Hate, if left to flare up, leads to violence. Thus, hate is also a source of fascism, as a liminal phase that leads to it.²⁰⁶ The politics of fear pushes members of the tribe to search for collective security against other tribes, to the point of sacrificing personal freedoms if necessary.²⁰⁷ The “tribe” is an imaginary community demarcated by signifiers of “us” versus “them” or the “other,” and the “*demos*” versus the “*xenos*.”²⁰⁸ Nationalism vibrantly defines the tribe in terms of nationality and citizenship bonds whether physical (with tribal members living in the same demarcated country on the geopolitical map) or symbolic (with tribal members sharing the same flag, national anthem, and passport design).²⁰⁹

The politics of fear is used as a token by populists during election races to secure victory at the ballot box on election day. Fears of modernization, globalization, and

²⁰⁵ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 61.

²⁰⁶ Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 126.

²⁰⁷ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 7.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

changing demographics are some of the social psychological factors that led people to accept populism's message and cast ballots for populist candidates.²¹⁰ However, once elected and harnessing political power, populists continue using the politics of fear to solidify their grip on power. When authoritarian values and emotionally charged populist rhetoric are injected into public policies, the urgency arises to defend our tribe, "us" (the "*demos*"), through restrictions on the other tribes, "them" or the "other" (the "*xenos*"), including restricting the entry of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, foreigners, etc., and the implementation of policies targeting pluralism (limiting LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality).²¹¹ Populists inject fear and hatred into society through emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda. Voltaire cautions against unleashing the forces of intolerance, "Once passions are aroused, they get out of control very easily."²¹² Indeed, the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide are persistent reminders from the annals of history of how fear and hate can balloon out of proportion into violence against the "other" (the "*xenos*"), especially if that violence is state-organized.

Populist propaganda uses the imagery of infection to portray the "other" (the "*xenos*") as a dangerous contagion threatening the existence of the nation that must be excluded by force if necessary.²¹³ As such, the danger posed by the "other" (the "*xenos*") can be neutralized through exclusion, containment, or in extreme cases through

²¹⁰ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 12.

²¹¹ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 8.

²¹² Voltaire. *Treatise on Toleration*, 5.

²¹³ Gandesha, "A Composite of King," 127.

liquidation.²¹⁴ By liquidating the “other” (the “*xenos*”), the identity and integrity of the ethnonational tribe, “us” (the “*demos*”), is confirmed and secured.²¹⁵ Hence, digital populism unleashes emotionally charged populist rhetoric on social media to ignite within demarcated tribes sparks of fear and hatred that reinforce their tribal identity, which are then used as tokens by digital populist candidates to emerge victorious from elections. The populist new wave continues to use tribal politics in order to consolidate power to the point of threatening the social cohesion of nation-states and even jeopardizing democracy itself.

Comparative Global Populism

Although populists have surfed the new wave of populism to electoral victories, there are parallels and divergences between populism’s manifestations around the world. To understand populism in Brazil, we will now submerge ourselves into a comparative analysis of Brazilian populism vis-à-vis American populism and Turkish populism. To commence this comparative global analysis of populism, we will start by defining each national populism. Using the cult of personality framework, national populism is defined in this thesis as the politics personified by the leader of the nation that expresses populist values and principles. Therefore, Brazil’s populism is personified in the figure of Jair Bolsonaro, likewise America’s populism is reflected in the image of Donald Trump, and Turkey’s populism is expressed in the character of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

Brazil's populism, along with that of America and Turkey, is built on the cult of personality. Bolsonaro's admiration for Trump is well known in the South American country, earning him the nickname "Trump of the Tropics."²¹⁶ Bolsonaro expressed his admiration in person to Trump, during a visit to the White House, on March 19, 2019, saying "I admire President Donald Trump," before the two populist leaders symbolically exchanged as gifts the national soccer jerseys of their respective countries (with the last name of Trump printed on the back of the Brazilian national soccer jersey and that of Bolsonaro printed on the back of the American one).²¹⁷ Trump's admiration for Putin came out in the limelight during the July 16, 2018 summit he had with his Russian counterpart in Helsinki, Finland. Trump's admiration was so intense that he sided with Putin (Russia's autocratic leader who was a former KGB spymaster) against America's intelligence agencies, who blaming the Kremlin for interference in the 2016 American presidential election that resulted in Trump's shocking victory over Hilary Clinton.²¹⁸ The comradery between the two was such that Putin gifted Trump a soccer ball from the 2018 World Cup (which was hosted by Russia that year) during the summit.²¹⁹ Erdoğan has expressed admiration for Trump, Putin, and Qatar's Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani as the global leaders who he most admires.²²⁰ It is no wonder then that Erdoğan appeared delighted when Putin bought him ice cream, symbolically showing to the world

²¹⁶ Kuhlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 23-4.

²¹⁷ Gearan, "Trump sees a lot."

²¹⁸ Mitchell, "Why Russian officials were."

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ ABC, "Erdogan names Trump, Putin."

the friendship they have developed, during the opening of the MAKS aviation show outside Moscow.²²¹ The cult of personality links populist leaders who harbor admiration for each other and who in their own way help each other attack the institutions of liberal democracy.

Infrastructure acquires special symbolism under populism. This is another area that Bolsonaro, Trump, and Erdoğan find commonality in their populist agendas, but with different aims. Trump's Border Wall was meant to keep out "bad hombres," which was a buzzword that in reality Trump used to signify anyone not deemed by him as "American."²²² The construction of the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border had special symbolism in both the physical and mental demarcation of the "*demos*" versus the "*xenos*," which in the American context became "American" versus "non-American." Therefore, Trump's building of the border wall not only had a physical and temporal reality, as a structure being erected to stop the flow of people coming into the United States, but it also became a symbolic reality in the American psyche. The border wall became a metaphor for protecting the "*demos*" against the "*xenos*," in this case the "American" against the "non-American." In Trump's America, the "American" tribe meant conservative white American citizens of European descent. Hence, American populism is infused with elements of nationalism and racism. Erdoğan's conversion of the Hagia Sophia from a museum back into a mosque, in July 2020, has explicit and hidden meanings.²²³ The conversion reasserts Turkey's Muslim identity and reflects

²²¹ *Guardian*, "Will you pay for."

²²² Zezima, "Trump on immigration."

²²³ BBC, "Recep Tayyip Erdogan."

Turkish populism, which separates “Turks” from “non-Turks,” since the Hagia Sophia was originally consecrated as a cathedral (during the Byzantine Empire), but was converted into a mosque (After the Ottoman Empire’s conquest of Constantinople), before being turned into a museum (once Atatürk led Istanbul and more broadly Turkey in the transition to a secular republic). In Erdoğan’s Turkey, the “non-Turk” tribe includes all the people who don’t fit into the “Turk” tribe, meaning the seclusion of Turks of ethnic Kurdish, Armenian, or Greek descent, Christian minorities, and Syrian refugees among others. Moreover, the conversion of the Hagia Sophia also signifies a shift rejecting Atatürk’s secular nationalism on which the Turkish Republic was founded.²²⁴ Thus, Turkish populism is Islamic and conservative in nature. Bolsonaro’s approval of the construction of a new Formula One racetrack over Rio de Janeiro’s Camboatá Forest highlights his government’s prioritization of economic development over the preservation of the environment. In Bolsonaro’s Brazil, the “*polis*” aligns its policies to favor the “*agora*,” emphasizing the economic needs of the “Brazilian” tribe over the concerns of the “non-Brazilian” tribe, the latter of which includes not only all those who aren’t conservative white Brazilians of European descent (in other words, Amerindians, Afro-Brazilians, feminists, liberals, members of the LGBTQ+ community, among other), but also all those who stand in opposition to Bolsonaro’s power. The construction of the Rio Formula One racetrack in the Camboatá Forest further demarcates the “Brazilian” from the “Non-Brazilian,” by associating those who favor economic development over protecting the environment as part of the former and those who are environmentally

²²⁴ Ghosh, “Erdogan Is Erasing Ataturk’s.”

conscious as part of the latter.²²⁵ Bolsonaro's keen focus on the economic development and resource exploitation of the Amazon, resulted in his government's inaction and indifference towards the deforestation and burning of the Amazon rainforest. The 1964-1985 military dictatorship, which Bolsonaro sees as a role model to follow, prioritized the economic development and resource exploitation of the Amazon to the detriment of the ecosystem. This evinces that there emerged a new crisis from the political agenda of liberal democracy dating back to before the advent of digital populism and which was inherited from capitalism: the clash between *homo economicus* and *homo climaticus*. This new crisis between competing business and environmental interests has been exacerbated under digital populism. Ergo, Brazilian digital populism isn't only conservative and nationalist in essence, but also pro-business and anti-environmental. Ultimately, an analysis of populist infrastructures reveals the essence of populism, whether through its American, Turkish, or Brazilian variants.

Land and maritime territory, like infrastructure, acquire special meaning from a populist worldview. As already mentioned, the geopolitical map is important in demarcating the "*demos*" from the "*xenos*" in the populist imagination. Moreover, populists in power attempt to not only secure the borders of the "*polis*," but also to expand them. Hence, attempts or reveries of land and maritime territorial expansion not only serve to secure and expand tribal identities, but also to amplify the populist delirium of grandeur. Trump's offer to purchase Greenland in 2019 ended with ridicule after he was told by Danish authorities that Greenland was merely open for business and wasn't

²²⁵ Phillips, "Rio F1 racetrack plans"; Franco, "O refúgio de pássaros."

for sale.²²⁶ However, while Trump's gamble to purchase Greenland might seem crazy, his motives lie in the economic incentives Greenland's natural resources (including minerals and renewable energy) provide and also for its geopolitical value arising from its strategic location in North America's Arctic region.²²⁷ Had Trump been successful with his diplomatic gamble, he would have made America great again through territorial expansion and the acquisition of the lucrative natural resources that would have come along with the purchase of Greenland.

Erdoğan's Turkey has engaged in territorial and maritime disputes with Greece and Cyprus, and in military adventures in northern Syria, northern Iraq, and Libya. Thus, Erdoğan's belligerent foreign policy has raised suspicions that he might become more daring in restoring the lost glory of the Ottoman Empire. One of Erdoğan's closest political allies, Metin Külünk, shared a map of a Greater Turkey in a tweet, showing an aggrandized Turkey that includes northern Greece, the eastern Aegean islands, southern Bulgaria, all of Cyprus and Armenia, and parts of Georgia, Iraq, and Syria.²²⁸ Furthermore, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar unveiled the "*Mavi Vatan*" (Turkish for "Blue Homeland") naval doctrine that seeks to impose Turkish hegemony over the seas it has shores on (the Eastern Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black seas).²²⁹ The "Blue Homeland" naval doctrine aims to expand Turkish hegemony beyond the Sea of Marmara, which it controls in its entirety through Eastern Thrace, Anatolia, and the

²²⁶ Selsoe Sorensen, "Greenland Is Not."

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Abdulrazek, "Seljuq Empire map reveals"; Halpern, "Erdoğan believes he is."

²²⁹ Gjevori, "Turkey's 'Blue Homeland'"; Abdulrazek, "Seljuq Empire map reveals."

Turkish Straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles), into the other seas, in a daring bid to turn Turkey into a great power. Erdoğan is increasingly strengthening Turkey's geopolitical clout and through ambitions of land and naval expansion, he looks ready to make power plays in an attempt to make Turkey great again, by expanding into the former Ottoman imperial domains.

Under Bolsonaro, Brazil is attempting to expand its maritime borders via its “*Amazônia Azul*,” Portuguese for “Blue Amazon.”²³⁰ Also under Bolsonaro, Brazil is reestablishing its presence in Antarctica through the reopening of a base.²³¹ In doing so, Brazil is enlarging its maritime territory with the Blue Amazon region and the land it occupies via Antarctica. Among the key reasons for Brazil's territorial ambitions is its national defense. Brazilian defense documents reveal that the South Atlantic has become as strategically vital to the country's security as the River Plate and the Amazon rainforest region, with the strategic vicinity redefined more broadly to include the South Atlantic, leading to the incorporation of the Blue Amazon and Antarctica into Brazil's new defense strategy.²³² This geostrategic shift wasn't initiated by Bolsonaro, but has rather been decades in the making. However, under Bolsonaro, Brazil's geostrategic policy vis-à-vis the Blue Amazon and Antarctica has been tinged with populist overtones since he used both of them on Instagram posts to stir patriotic feelings.²³³ In turn,

²³⁰ Pereira, “O que é a Amazônia Azul.”

²³¹ Escobar, “Brazil opens ‘spectacular’ Antarctic”; O Globo, “Nova base brasileira”; BBC, “Por que o Brasil.”

²³² Abdenur and Marcondes Neto, “Rising powers and Antarctica,” 14-5, 20-1.

²³³ Bolsonaro, “Nossa Base na Antártida”; Bolsonaro, “Dia Nacional da Amazônia Azul!”

Bolsonaro uses these patriotic feelings he aroused on social media to further increase his popularity.

By moving the maritime border further out (enlarging the Blue Amazon), Bolsonaro will not only have strengthened Brazil's security, but also allow the country to exploit the plentiful resources it contains under its waters. The maritime region is called the "Blue Amazon" due to its abundance of resources found underwater that recall the abundance of resources found on land, in the Amazon rainforest (*Amazônia*), which is often called the "Green Amazon."²³⁴ In 1963, Brazil and France were embroiled in a diplomatic dispute called the Lobster War, when the French fished in the maritime area now demarcated as the Blue Amazon, which the Brazilians argued was exclusively theirs.²³⁵ The Blue Amazon gives Brazil control over maritime trading routes, fishing, tourism, renewable energy, minerals (such as phosphorite, gold, and manganese), plus petroleum and natural gas.²³⁶ 95% of Brazil's foreign trade passes through the Blue Amazon and the adjacent coast concentrates 90% of the country's GDP and 80% of its population.²³⁷ Additionally, Brazil extracts 91% of its petroleum from the Blue Amazon.²³⁸ Since the discovery of new petroleum reserves in the Blue Amazon, Brazil's navy has intensified the militarization of the maritime region with constant naval operations to patrol the waters with its vessels and with its investment in projects such as

²³⁴ Pereira, "O que é a Amazônia Azul."

²³⁵ Assad, "Uma Amazônia pintada de azul," 49-50.

²³⁶ Pereira, "O que é a Amazônia Azul."; *El Comercio*, "La 'Amazonía Azul.'"

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

the construction of submarines.²³⁹ With a budget costing R\$35 billion (Brazilian reais), the Submarine Development Program, known in Portuguese as “*Programa de Desenvolvimento de Submarinos*” (Prosub), aimed for the construction of five submarines, one of which was designed to be the first nuclear powered submarine in the Southern Hemisphere.²⁴⁰ To highlight the importance of the submarines for the defense of Brazil’s Blue Amazon, Bolsonaro participated in a ceremony commemorating Sailor’s Day and the launch of one of the submarines.²⁴¹ Given that nuclear submarines aren’t detectable via satellite and aren’t visible to sonar, Brazil’s nuclear submarine will be used to repulse piracy in the Blue Amazon, or to neutralize any threats posed by any nation-state looking to attack continental Brazil via water.²⁴² Since 2014, Operation Blue Amazon is held yearly combining Naval units with other federal, state and municipal elements in order to intensify the patrolling of the Blue Amazon maritime region and neutralize any illegal activity in the area.²⁴³ Indeed, the Blue Amazon is of vital strategic importance that it has been included as part of Brazil’s national defense strategy and has been the topic of research documents published by the Brazilian Navy.²⁴⁴

As for Antarctica, Brazil reestablished its presence on the continent in order to project its power further out on the map and also to strengthen its geopolitical security.

²³⁹ Pereira, “O que é a Amazônia Azul.”

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Coelho, “Bolsonaro participa de cerimônia.”

²⁴² Pereira, “O que é a Amazônia Azul.”

²⁴³ *El Comercio*, “La ‘Amazônia Azul.’”

²⁴⁴ Assad, “Uma Amazônia pintada de azul,” 50.

Antarctica is so important for Brazil, that it has been placed within the strategic maritime zones considered to be security priorities for the country.²⁴⁵ In January 15, 2020, the country inaugurated a new base on the continent, eight years after a fire burned down its original base there, with Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão and ministers from Bolsonaro's cabinet in attendance at the ceremony, as were representatives from the Navy.²⁴⁶ The bigger and more modern base, which cost about US\$100 million, approximately R\$415 million (Brazilian reais) and whose construction started in 2015, will house 64 or 65 people, including scientists and military personnel.²⁴⁷ It is located at the site of the old base that burned down, at the Keller Peninsula of King George Island, and it will also keep the same name: Estação Antártica Comandante Ferraz (Translated from Portuguese into English: Comandante Ferraz Antarctic Station).²⁴⁸ The operation and logistics of the base will be the responsibility of the Navy, with help from the Air Force.²⁴⁹ Geopolitical, economic, environmental and scientific reasons are driving Brazil and other countries to claim a slice of Antarctica.²⁵⁰ The continent is coveted economically since it possesses 70% of the world's fresh water supply, over 170 types of minerals, and big natural gas reserves.²⁵¹ Furthermore, some specialists estimate that

²⁴⁵ Abdenur and Marcondes Neto, "Rising powers and Antarctica," 21.

²⁴⁶ Escobar, "Brazil opens 'spectacular' Antarctic"; O Globo, "Nova base brasileira"; Abdenur, Adriana Erthal,

²⁴⁷ Escobar, "Brazil opens 'spectacular' Antarctic"; BBC, "Por que o Brasil."

²⁴⁸ Escobar, "Brazil opens 'spectacular' Antarctic"; O Globo, "Nova base brasileira."

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ BBC, "Por que o Brasil."

²⁵¹ Ibid.

there are 200 billion barrels of petroleum, more than those of some countries in the Middle East, such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, which will turn Antarctica into a new “El Dorado” of petroleum.²⁵² However, the 1991 Madrid Protocol, imposed a 50-year moratorium on the commercial exploration of minerals in the continent.²⁵³ Therefore, at the moment, Brazil is more concerned about the geopolitics of Antarctica, since the principal oceanic travel route to the continent goes through the South Atlantic, where Brazil’s Blue Amazon extends (its maritime border, plus its maritime commercial, tourism and communications routes).²⁵⁴ Promoting a travel channel on April 28, 2021, Bolsonaro included Antarctica as part of the wonders of Brazil, even though the country only has one base on the continent.²⁵⁵ Thus, this travel video reveals the bold geopolitical ambitions Bolsonaro’s Brazil has beyond solidifying the country’s presence in Antarctica with the opening of a new base.

Therefore, Bolsonaro as a former military captain is seeking to expand the Blue Amazon’s maritime territory and Brazil’s claim to Antarctica through diplomatic and military means. In essence, Bolsonaro will be making Brazil great again through the Blue Amazon’s maritime expansion and Brazil’s Antarctic presence. Ergo, these lucid examples of land and maritime territorial expansion put under the magnifying glass populism’s obsession with grandeur, an obsession that Tiburi called the delirium of grandeur. Beyond hegemony in the physical space, the new wave of populism is also focused on establishing hegemony in the digital space.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Abdenur and Marcondes Neto, “Rising powers and Antarctica,” 17.

²⁵⁴ BBC, “Por que o Brasil.”

²⁵⁵ Novo Dia, “Bolsonaro diz que Antártica”; Brasil 247, “Ao citar belezas do país.”

Digital Populism

Populism in the 21st century differs from the populism and fascism from the previous century, in that present-day populism isn't just confined by physical spatiality like its antecedents, but has also spread to the digital space. Accordingly, populism has shifted its tactics from purely acting in the physical space to also targeting the digital. In fact, populism's spatiality has mutated into a hybrid amalgam of both the physical and the digital, albeit more digital than physical in composition. While in the past, physical spatiality determined populism's societal reach and appeal that ultimately translated to electoral victories, now, digital spatiality occupies the dominant role. By surveying digital spatiality, it can be deduced that the space provided by social media platforms has become a more determining factor than physical spatiality in terms of amplifying the voices of populist leaders, ultimately increasing their appeal during election races and potentially leading to their victory on election day. Ergo, it seems more fitting to call the populist new wave "digital populism."

Digital populism sets the rules of the current political game. The pulsing heart of contemporary political discussions has shifted to social media, although TV and other forms of traditional media continue to play an important role for political communication and campaigning.²⁵⁶ Thusly, the composition of populism's spatiality mutated into a hybrid form of digital and physical, albeit in an uneven formula that favors the hegemony of the digital space and in particular the space provided by social media. Today, no

²⁵⁶ Gerbaudo, "Fake-News and All-Too-Real Emotions," 1.

political candidate has a fighting chance of winning without using social media, since these platforms have become the digital equivalents of the rallies, canvassing, and televised appearances of the past, where various social and political forces battled it out for electoral victory.²⁵⁷ Bolsonaro's and Trump's victories in their respective 2018 Brazilian and 2016 American elections, plus Erdoğan's clinging to power following the 2016 Turkish coup attempt evince the key role played by social media in today's politics.

Trump's candidacy during the 2016 American presidential race was turbocharged by the realities of digital populism. As previously mentioned, Russian troll and bot farms, most infamously IRA, used astroturfing, firehosing and algorithmic filtering to tilt the election in Trump's favor. They did this by using the cryptocurrency Bitcoin, for anonymity, when buying VPNs (virtual private networks) that covered their online traces in order to create social media accounts that posed as American citizens with the aim to increase societal division in the United States via content (disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric) that reached millions of Americans online.²⁵⁸ While Trump and his campaign weren't directly involved in IRA's election interference, they did benefit from its actions, since IRA was founded and financed by Concord (a catering company owned by a Russian oligarch known as "Putin's chef," Yevgeny Prigozhin), and operated with the support of both the Kremlin and Russian intelligence services, who all favored Trump over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election.²⁵⁹ Besides this lucid example of indirect election interference by Trump's campaign via Russia's IRA,

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Tufekci, "How social media"; Polyakova, "Weapons of the weak"; Toledo Borges, "Mercado, vigilancia e Facebook," 165.

²⁵⁹ Polyakova, "Weapons of the weak"; Hatmaker, "Mueller report."

there's another example in which Trump's campaign was directly involved in election interference. Trump's election campaign paid Cambridge Analytica to find cracks in Facebook's security and obtain the personal data from more than 80 million Facebook users in order to micro-target them later with disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric (much like Russia's IRA).²⁶⁰ One of the commonalities that IRA and Cambridge Analytica had through their covert actions was that both were aiming to sow the seeds of division in American society with the aim of benefitting Trump on election day. The FBI also pointed to Putin's election meddling through cyber-hacking, Facebook bots, and Twitter trolls as the fuel that propelled Trump to power.²⁶¹ Once in power, Trump implemented his populist agenda which sought to weaken America's democratic institutions for his personal benefit.

In the wake of the developing July 15, 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt, Erdoğan quickly took to social media inciting his followers directly through various social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter), to come out onto the streets, head to the airports and public squares in order to resist and foil the coup plotters.²⁶² Thousands of Erdoğan's social media followers answered his call to action coming out onto the streets and using social media to post live stream videos (via Facebook Live and Twitter's Periscope app) showing the damage caused by the military coup attempt as it was happening, which in turn enticed more people to come out in droves in support of their president.²⁶³ One of the reasons why the 2016 Turkish coup attempt was foiled was

²⁶⁰ Toledo Borges, "Mercado, vigilancia e Facebook," 165.

²⁶¹ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 12.

²⁶² Grenier, "Erdogan and social media;" Srivastava, "How Erdogan turned to."

²⁶³ Grenier, "Erdogan and social media;" Srivastava, "How Erdogan turned to."

because the military acted primarily in the physical space and not also the digital. The military targeted TV stations (including state-run TV), the link of a communications satellite, major bridges in Istanbul, airports (including Istanbul's Ataturk airport), plus the Turkish parliament and presidential palace in Ankara.²⁶⁴ However, they didn't target digital infrastructures, primarily those of the social media platforms, focusing instead on traditional physical institutions and structures such as television broadcasters and transportation hubs. Therefore, the lack of taking digital spatiality into consideration, proved to be the coup plotters' Achilles heel. Erdoğan emerged from the foiled military coup in a stronger position, solidifying his grip on power and speeding Turkey's shift from secular nationalism to a blend of conservative Islamic nationalism and democracy, imbued with authoritarian elements, which was all made possible via the new reality of digital populism.

In Brazil, digital populism propelled Bolsonaro to emerge victorious from the 2018 presidential elections, advancing from the October 7 general election and winning the October 28 runoff election. Bolsonaro (the candidate from the far-right Social Liberal Party and former Army captain) was victorious in the October 28 runoff with 55.1 percent of the votes against Haddad (substitute candidate for the Workers' Party, since Lula was jailed on corruption charges).²⁶⁵ How exactly did digital populism propelled Bolsonaro to victory? AI algorithms (which run social media, data mining software, and bot farms) tipped the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections in Bolsonaro's favor. For example, YouTube's recommendation algorithms ballooned the amount of content

²⁶⁴ Ibid; Poole, "Turkey coup: How mobiles."

²⁶⁵ Sims, "WhatsApp Groups and Misinformation."

favoring Bolsonaro, including mentions of conspiracy theories he was floating around, in spite of his favorability being low according to the poll numbers.²⁶⁶ This suggests that the recommendation algorithms of YouTube (owned by Google) weren't reflective of the political temperature of the Brazilian public square, but rather turned up the heat by infusing the audience with negative emotions such as fear, doubt and anger.²⁶⁷ The aim of this was to keep YouTube's spectators hooked on the platform and in turn create an ecosystem of hate favoring Bolsonaro through disinformation, propaganda and emotionally charged populist rhetoric.²⁶⁸ Besides YouTube, digital populism tipped the odds in Bolsonaro's favor in WhatsApp as well. During the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, 120 million people out of Brazil's then population of 210 million actively used WhatsApp (about 96% of Brazilian smartphone owners) and were targeted with political messages, some of which were tainted with disinformation favoring Bolsonaro.²⁶⁹ The messages containing disinformation that were pollinating on WhatsApp reported for example that Venezuela hacked Brazil's electronic voting system and that Bolsonaro's rival Haddad was giving out baby bottles with penis-shaped tops at schools to combat homophobia.²⁷⁰ Behind the disinformation campaign on WhatsApp were 156 businessmen from various companies that spent millions of dollars in a coordinated plan to support Bolsonaro by rapid-firing messages (firehosing) on WhatsApp against his opponent Haddad, a week before the run-off election, in violation of Brazil's electoral

²⁶⁶ Fisher and Taub, "How YouTube Radicalized Brazil."

²⁶⁷ Ibid; Tufekci, "How social media."

²⁶⁸ Fisher and Taub, "How YouTube Radicalized Brazil"; Tufekci, "How social media."

²⁶⁹ Reid, "Q&A"; Isaac and Roose, "Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp."

²⁷⁰ Nalon, "Did WhatsApp help Bolsonaro?"

laws.²⁷¹ Brazilian political campaigns are forbidden by Brazil's electoral laws from receiving money from the private sector and from buying the contact information of voters.²⁷² However, it is believed that phone lists and foreign cell phone chips were illegally acquired in order to contact voters, hide the location of the criminals, and circumvent WhatsApp's spamming filters.²⁷³ Brazil's conservative elites, who owned the companies that engaged in the illegal electoral acts on WhatsApp, actively helped Bolsonaro's presidential campaign because his policies aligned not only with their political worldview but moreover with securing their economic hegemony in the digital age. Thus, due to the changing dynamics of power unleashed by digital populism, Bolsonaro (much like Trump) started to implement his populist agenda upon assuming the presidency, on January 1, 2019.

At its core, digital populism reflects not only the changing nature of populism, but also the changing nature of political power. Populist leaders such as Trump, Erdoğan, and Bolsonaro have been catapulted to power, or have solidified their iron grip on power, due to their use of the digital space, specifically the social media space, which has become an imperative arena for politics in the digital age. Social media gives populist leaders the platform necessary to circumvent traditional media and the ability to use algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing to spread disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric. The social media ecosystem runs on AI algorithms that allow for the data mining of users to later micro-target them with emotional content

²⁷¹ Ibid; Isaac and Roose, "Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp"; Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 14.

²⁷² Nalon, "Did WhatsApp help Bolsonaro?"

²⁷³ Ibid.

designed to elicit a specific desired reaction. Therefore, AI's algorithms become dangerous when used deceptively for political ends, especially digital populism's attack on democracy.

Chapter 5: AI & Populism

“It is not truth that matters, but victory.” – Adolf Hitler²⁷⁴

“Democracy is beautiful in theory; in practice it is a fallacy.” – Benito Mussolini²⁷⁵

AI is a disruptive technology that when combined with populism, a form of disruptive politics, creates an explosive mix. Populism is disruptive politics inasmuch as it not only attempts to disrupt the political status quo, but more importantly weaken democracy. The combination of AI and populism is dangerous since the two forces undermine democracy in their own way and when combined only amplify each other more dangerously. The former weakens democracy by shaping public opinion that is imperative for political discourse, especially during elections, or national emergencies, while the latter weakens democracy by attacking its institutions. So, AI propels populists to power, or helps them tighten their grip on power, while populism poisons democracy from within with doses of autocracy and may strive to deal the deathblow to democracy, in order to pave the way to dictatorship. This is why the dangerous dice of AI and populism pose an existential threat to democracy, and may even pose an existential threat to the human species as exemplified in Bolsonaro’s Brazil, where the Amazon is lit ablaze while Bolsonaro’s government deflects criticism and blames others.

The algorithmic structures erected by AI on social media seem to give populist candidates the winning edge in elections as evinced by Trump’s and Bolsonaro’s

²⁷⁴ Sinha, “Hitler’s personal copy.”

²⁷⁵ Bufacchi, “Can Super Mario save Italy?”

victories. Populism's polarizing, exclusivist discourse uses social media's AI algorithms to target individuals and envelop them in content that reinforces their worldview, insulating them from information that might question that very worldview.²⁷⁶ Netizens micro-targeted with disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric are pressured into reacting and declaring their tribal identity on social media. As we discussed earlier, this would mean to identify as either part of the "*demos*" or the "*xenos*," using the nationalist dichotomy framework of populism. If we analyze the infrastructure of AI's algorithms, we see that an algorithm is a code that also nonetheless locks into place a logic of repetition and stereotyping, often confirming, deepening and reinforcing subjective prejudices through the creation of so-called "echo chambers" or manifestations of bias, including unconscious bias.²⁷⁷ Using the tribal identities framework, algorithms polarize society as they divide individuals tribally into these "echo chambers," reinforcing the "us" versus the "other" mentality. In Brazil's populist context, this social polarization pits the "Brazilian" (demarcated as conservative white Brazilians of European descent) against the "non-Brazilian" (essentially everyone else in the country). As previously mentioned, in the digital space, particularly on social media, Brazilian tribalism appears as the "pro-Bolsonaro" and "anti-Bolsonaro" dueling camps. AI algorithms aren't neutral since the code they are written in contains bias, whether by design, or not. Even if a programmer composes code without intentionally inputting bias, the code can still include unintentional bias arising from the programmer's subconscious mind. Looking beyond the programmer, code used for AI algorithms by companies in the

²⁷⁶ Hrynyshyn, "The Outrage of Networks," 37.

²⁷⁷ Gandesha, "A Composite of King," 133.

technology business sector is biased since companies will prioritize profits above ethics. When it comes to elections, the social media companies have shown that they are more interested in using their AI algorithms to do business than to minimize ethical concerns of their infringement upon free and fair elections. Hence, the structures and infrastructures of AI algorithms caused polarization among Brazilian netizens, which manifested itself in emotional terms around Bolsonaro's polemical persona and demagoguery.

"Psychopolitics" reveals that in today's society, the digital tools/weapons of AI infiltrate our psyche with emotions to reinforce our beliefs or change them, according to the criteria selected by acting political agents.²⁷⁸ This dynamic arises from the current hegemonic form of capitalism in the world, emotional capitalism, under which, we no longer consume physical commodities, but rather emotions, and also under which, humans have become a commodity via their personal data which is mined for profit.²⁷⁹ Populists use politically charged rhetoric to feed a targeted electorate emotions with the aim to fire them up politically and reinforce their tribal identities, or bring them into the fold. This explains why Bolsonaro's discourse is fiercely divisive, since his political goal in doing so is not only to strengthen affiliation within his own tribe, the "pro-Bolsonaro" tribe, but also to recruit new members to it. Political candidates exploit this emotional content to produce enthusiasm, support, or even empathy towards them, as well as hate, disdain, and indignation towards rivals.²⁸⁰ I will explore this further in the digital ethnography that will follow in chapter 6 where I focus on Bolsonaro using his Instagram

²⁷⁸ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 25, 27-28, 36, 46, 63.

²⁷⁹ Han, *Psychopolitics*, 25, 36, 46, 63, 65.

²⁸⁰ Gerbaudo, "Fake-News and All-Too-Real Emotions," 6.

account to target his followers with emotions in order to attract them to the “pro-Bolsonaro” tribe, while repelling them from the “anti-Bolsonaro” tribe (led first by Lula, then by Haddad) by demonizing it. Conversations on social media platforms like Instagram are infused with *emotional politics*, considering that these platforms enable new ways of expressing emotions and of affirming emotional attachments to political groups and leaders online, manifesting as political fandom or hooliganism via trolling attacks, heated language, and moderate jeers and gibes in defense of one’s own tribe.²⁸¹ Veritably, trolling has become one of the main features of social media conversations, as evidenced by smearing, insults, and other negative language, but political trolling goes much further than negative communication, by violating the other tribe’s space through, inter alia, posting heated messages on the other tribe’s social media accounts, challenging them to respond.²⁸² Hence, trolling has become a major factor in group-identity formation in the digital space, which reflects back in the physical space through bitterly divisive ways such as the increasing sociopolitical polarization in Brazil, much like in the United States. Trolling demarcates the “self” (“*ego*”), part of we the “people” (“*demos*”), separate from the “other” (“*xenos*”), which constitutes a building block of group psychology.²⁸³ Thence, Bolsonaro’s supporters enlarge their tribal identity to figuratively encompass their national identity, since they perceive themselves as “real Brazilians,” and their opponents, the other tribe, as “not real Brazilians.” There are strong tribal and territorial imaginaries at the root of trolling given that the actions of trolls work to erect

²⁸¹ Ibid, 3-4.

²⁸² Ibid, 11.

²⁸³ Ibid, 12.

virtual fences and walls emblazoned with signs declaring, “keep out, this is our Homeland.”²⁸⁴ Digital populists use or incite trolling to solidify the tribal identity of their followers and silence their opponents.

The prominence of tribal identities in Brazil (“Brazilian” versus “non-Brazilian”) and on the social media ecosystem of its citizens (“pro-Bolsonaro” versus “anti-Bolsonaro”), arises from the mutation of capitalism and politics in the digital age to emotional capitalism and emotional politics respectively. While the former ravenously consumes emotions, the latter audaciously militarizes emotions in the space provided by neoliberalism. The intense continual use of social media platforms affects people, penetrating their senses, and shaping their essence, to the point that social media becomes an addiction.²⁸⁵ Thus, this infiltration of the psyche by micro-targeting AI algorithms leads to digital addiction and social media tribalism, which permeate Brazilian society both digitally and physically as well, since Brazilian netizens occupy both Brazil’s geographic space and its digital extension online.

“Spectropolitics” shows how collective digital addiction leads to the hegemony of those with power over reality (via language, popular ideas, common truths and lies), since power can now infiltrate mindsets, affections, emotions, and feelings, fortifying the structures of power themselves so that those in power can keep their dominance over society, while those striving for power can achieve it.²⁸⁶ The addictiveness of social media, which is powered by AI algorithms, becomes a digital opium for the masses to

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 67.

²⁸⁶ Tiburi, *Delírio do poder*, 16, 138-9.

make them receptive to populism's message. Brazil's addiction to social media has resulted in the dictatorship of the like, since social media can now penetrate a user's psyche through data mined via its AI algorithms and then micro-target that same user with emotions such as fear, doubt, and anger, to distorting reality according to the message that goes most viral through algorithmic filtering.²⁸⁷ AI's algorithmic hegemony over reality in turn leads to disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric that shape how the electorate views the world and looks back at history. For example, Bolsonaro's social media's messaging has attempted to glorify the 1964 military coup d'état, reframing it as imperative in order to prevent Brazil from falling as the latest domino to communist power during the Cold War. Bolsonaro's disinformation and propaganda in regards to the 1964 coup has spread due to social media's ability to go viral, so that now this distortion of history has become more broadly accepted by a segment of Brazilians on the right of the political spectrum. This was the case with a YouTube video titled "1964," reminiscent of Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, but paying homage to the year of Brazil's military coup, which captivated the nation by arguing that the 1964 military coup and subsequent dictatorship were imperative to save Brazil from the communist menace.²⁸⁸ What this case suggests is that YouTube's algorithms have allowed the pollination of disinformation, including conspiracy theories, to spread across its platform, in order to keep spectators glued to their screens and profit from them watching ads, or clicking on ads. Hence, "spectropolitics" indicates that what matters more in neoliberal societies is doing business rather than considerations for social and

²⁸⁷ Fisher and Taub, "How YouTube Radicalized Brazil."

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

political ethics, with *homo economicus* trumping *homo politicus*, allowing for disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric to permeate on social media. Populists such as Bolsonaro attack the traditional news media (print and broadcast) as “fake news,” in order to push their supporters away from the press, leading them instead to where the actual misinformation is being manufactured and shared: social media.²⁸⁹

It is in the digital space, specifically social media, where affective publics are formed and which can then be manipulated through “psychopolitical,” or “spectropolitical” tactics for political ends. Zizi Papacharissi (Greek-American communications researcher), in *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* traces the evolution of the public sphere from the *agoras* (“marketplaces”) of Ancient Greece to the coffeehouses of eighteenth-century Europe and recently the online and convergent platforms provided by networked technologies, in particular social media, from which affective publics are formed.²⁹⁰ What are affective publics? Affective publics are public formations that are textually formed through expressions of emotions that spread virally through networked crowds.²⁹¹ In other words, affective publics are networked publics that interact on social media via messages that are infused with emotional intensity. This is important since social media has provided the infrastructure for right-wing populists, including their political parties and movements, to spread fake news and misinformation.²⁹² So, affective publics can be manipulated by populists to

²⁸⁹ Reid, “Q&A.”

²⁹⁰ Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 118, 121, 125-6.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 133.

²⁹² Gandesha, “A Composite of King,” 133-4.

achieve their political aims. Papacharissi argues that stories engage through their potential for affective attunement by persuading publics “through their appeal to emotion rather than reason, through an affective identification that supersedes logic and evidence,” evolving beyond the traditional public sphere.²⁹³ Thus, Papacharissi brings the Habermasian “public sphere” to the digital age with the concept of “affective publics,” in a way bridging the Habermasian “public sphere” with Hanian “psychopolitics” and Tiburian “spectropolitics,” since the concept of “affective publics” introduces emotions as building blocks when analyzing the “public sphere.” Thence, text, photos, videos, hashtags, and emojis, shared on social media platforms are structures of feeling that permit people to feel their way into politics and specifically into a particular news stream to repost, listen, and remix content, plus these structures of feeling also permit people to state their views or fragments of those views in messages.²⁹⁴ So, Papacharissian “affective publics” are constructed from social media’s structures of feeling. However, structures of feeling built from convergent and spreadable social media content are liminal structures: fluid and always in flux, in a state of permanent novelty, transition, and reflexivity.²⁹⁵ In the digital ethnography that follows in chapter 6, the affective public that will be put under the microscope and analyzed is the one formed by the structures of feeling built from Bolsonaro’s official Instagram account.

Affective publics are formed from social media’s structures of feeling, whose building blocks are emotions that supersede the conventional logic of the traditional

²⁹³ Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 118, 130.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 116, 118.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 135.

public sphere, the Habermasian public sphere. However, what powers and are powered by affective publics, are streams of sentiments that are blended with collections of opinions and facts to the point that it is difficult to discern one variety of expression from the others.²⁹⁶ To put in another way, affective publics make it difficult to discern what is an emotion, an opinion, and a fact from one another. Moreover, the elevation of feelings to the level of value, in which it is difficult to differentiate them from opinions and facts, leads to Milan Kundera's notion of *homo sentimental* transforming into *homo hystericus*, since people, perceiving feelings as value, engage in hysteria, because feeling is no longer feeling, but an imitation of feeling, a show of feeling.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless, we must remember Marx's warning about political leaders masquerading as fools, which for Kundera would mean *homo hystericus*, since political leaders elevate their political sentiments to the level of value. Assuredly, *homo hystericus* is merely biding time through theatrics, in order to minimize the risk of exposing the *homo sentimental* hiding within, whose personal sentiments could reveal a dictatorial thirst for power and political machinations to achieve absolute power. Therefore, it is imperative for populist leaders aspiring to become authoritarians to conceal the *homo sentimental* hiding within them until it's the ripe time to clinch absolute power (after gaining power and being firmly established), even though not all of them reach that political end game and are derailed. Ergo, affective publics make it easier to spread disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric with the aim of catapulting populists with authoritarian tendencies to power. However, while Papacharissi does find social media

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 129.

²⁹⁷ Kundera, *Immortality*, 194-5.

plays a key role in the forming of affective publics, she doesn't look deeper at the algorithms that power these platforms and form these publics.

While social media platforms provide an augmented space where politicians of all stripes can form and mold to their liking their own affective publics, beneath the structures of these platforms are the AI algorithms that power them. These affective publics can be mobilized during elections to vote a certain way and catapult populist candidates to power since the AI algorithms that form these publics on social media are capable of penetrating their psyches and micro-targeting them with their own emotions to feel a certain way not only on issues, but more importantly towards candidates. Ergo, AI poses a danger to democracy via its algorithms since it gives the necessary digital tools to populists to form their affective publics and stir them during election races to vote a certain way through coercive means. Algorithms after all affect democracy by creating an uneven digital playing field for rival political forces, regulate the formation of public opinion, and violate the privacy of users via the pervasive vigilance of tech.²⁹⁸

Nevertheless, algorithms don't just give politicians the tools to chisel their own affective publics to their liking, but also allow for affective publics to form in bitter opposition to these same politicians. Thus, social media becomes a battlefield of opinions where opposing affective publics clash through their different visions of the world.²⁹⁹ This in turn further solidifies tribal identities ("us" versus the "other") that in the context of Brazil's social media ecosystem become the "pro-Bolsonaro" versus the "anti-Bolsonaro" tribal camps or affective publics. The formation of opposing affective publics that feel

²⁹⁸ Amadeu da Silveira, *Democracia e os códigos*, 56.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 45.

differently about events and those in power undermines democratic society since these feelings cloud the perception of reality and thus cast doubt on what is fact from opinion.

Consensus is essential for a healthy democracy, but when the members of a society can't agree upon what is true or false, what is fact or opinion, this undermines some of the basic building blocks of democratic institutions. Truth and reality lose their luster to become, as claimed by Nietzsche, "illusions, metaphors... worn-out and deprived of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their imprint and are now no longer seen as coins but as metal."³⁰⁰ Thus, the perception of truth and reality as relative enables their commodification and weaponization, which manifests itself through media, both traditional and digital. In the post truth world, people give more importance to emotions and personal beliefs than to objective facts.³⁰¹ "We live in a strange world... where everyone can choose their own reality and buy their own truth," Greta Thunberg observes.³⁰² In contemporary politics, the inability to agree on facts, has led to further polarization and the break-up of the public square with commonly agreed upon facts, deconstructing it into affective publics with divergent and at times clashing facts and opinions. This is what in *1984*, Orwell cautions as the labyrinthine world of doublethink, where people know the truth, but still tell carefully constructed lies, holding contradictory opinions that cancel each other out, but believing both to be true.³⁰³ Populists weaponize truth to weaken democratic institutions and further consolidate power, which is even more so if they aim ultimately for absolute power. In the United States, Trump's advisor

³⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *On Truth and Untruth*, 30.

³⁰¹ Dias Silva and Duarte Oliveira, "O Monopólio da Verdade," 116.

³⁰² Thunberg, *No One Is Too Small*, 40.

³⁰³ Orwell, *1984*, 39.

Kelly Anne Conway coined the phrase “alternative facts” in 2017 as a defense of debunked statistics that inflated the number of people attending Trump’s presidential inauguration.³⁰⁴ The Trump administration used “alternative facts” to defend his presidential inauguration attendance numbers vis-à-vis Obama’s, as a tactical public relations grenade, part of a broader war against the news media. In Brazil, social media became a candyland of disinformation favoring Bolsonaro’s candidacy during the 2018 presidential race, in particular WhatsApp, where encryption shielded the app’s private group chat rooms, but also blocked the ability to fact-check messages and rebut viral hoaxes, ultimately sugarcoating reality to the “pro-Bolsonaro” tribal camp’s liking.³⁰⁵ Thus, WhatsApp became an impenetrable fortress of disinformation where only targeted recipients could view messages aimed at influencing their voting behavior in the 2018 elections. One of those messages on WhatsApp was from a political candidate that claimed that 400 million Brazilians lived in extreme poverty, despite Brazil’s population being almost half that amount.³⁰⁶ Unfortunately, not all Brazilians had the knowledge or the ability to find out that this was a lie and therefore some likely accepted it as truth. Hence, social media has become a minefield of disinformation where the lines between truth and lies, facts and opinions are not merely blurred, but demolished, with consequences at the ballot box. When populists benefit from AI algorithms on social media during election races and rise to power due to the uneven political playing field created as a result, these consequences can affect democracy itself as happened in the

³⁰⁴ Rutenberg, “‘Alternative Facts’ and the Costs.”

³⁰⁵ Sims, “WhatsApp Groups and Misinformation”; Isaac and Roose, “Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp.”

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

United States with Trump's undermining of America's democratic institutions, or with Bolsonaro doing the same in Brazil. Bolsonaro's meteoric rise to power however was a bigger shock than Trump's given Brazil's image abroad as a tropical paradise and racial democracy.

Tropical Romanticism

The shock that sparked from Bolsonaro's 2018 electoral victory was amplified by tropical romanticism. This European vision distorts Brazil through the lens of colonialism, presenting a seductive wild land of diverse and exotic flora and fauna, where "all race gradients, from white to black, through the most diverse shades" of mixed European, African, and Amerindian peoples interacted through harmonious race relations, which in turn fostered the ideology of Brazil as a racial democracy.³⁰⁷ Thus, the veil of tropical romanticism made Brazil seem like a tropical luxuriant country where different races could live in harmony under the umbrella of democratic institutions. Nevertheless, in reality, tropical romanticism portrayed a vision of Brazil that distorted the reality of race relations and power dynamics that permeated through Brazilian society, which allowed rich white Brazilians of European descent to accumulate power at the top of the social pyramid, exercising their hegemony over the rest of their fellow-citizens beneath them.

Tropical romanticism gave European explorers, conquerors, and colonizers the ability to view themselves as separate from the exotic land of Brazil and especially its

³⁰⁷ Araujo, *Brazil through French Eyes*, 50, 55.

multiracial population. Thus, tropical romanticism enters into dialogue with Edward Said's concept of "orientalism," given that both discourses help Europeans define their identity vis-à-vis the other.³⁰⁸ So, tropical romanticism and orientalism can both be conceptualized as different types of colonial lenses from which Europeans and their descendants set themselves apart intellectually and socially from those they subjugated. As far back as Columbus, Europeans adopted an "orientalist" view of the New World since the land, the people, and the flora and fauna they encountered there all appeared to them not only as exotic, but more importantly as the other.³⁰⁹ Tropical romanticism gave Europeans a way to make sense of all the novel things and new peoples they encountered. In essence, the tropics and in particular the New World appeared to Europeans as both paradisiacal and pestilential, while the humans living there were perceived as not fully developed as rational adults, but rather as nature's children.³¹⁰ Ergo, tropical romanticism also gave Europeans an ideological justification to conquer and colonize far from Europe's shores, taking over land, resources and peoples in the tropical climes.

In Brazil, tropical romanticism casted an illusion of the country as a paradise of tropical exuberance and as a harmonious racial democracy. Accordingly, this European vision of paradise depicted the New World as a Garden of Eden, whose ethereal beauty, gigantic scale, and herbaceous fertility infused the Europeans with a sense of wonder.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Ibid, xix.

³⁰⁹ Stott, "Jungles of the Mind," 39, 43.

³¹⁰ Arnold, "Illusory Riches," 8, 11; Scott, "Paradise in the New World," 77, 82, 87-8; Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 59.

³¹¹ Arnold, "Illusory Riches," 11; Scott, "Paradise in the New World," 77, 82; Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 58, 59, 61, 62.

Brazilians used tropical romanticism to claim that Brazil, rather than the entire Americas, was the Garden of Eden, later contributing to the claim that Brazil was the location of El Dorado, a lost city of gold hidden somewhere deep in South America.³¹² This image of Brazil being the location of El Dorado was also incorporated in the symbolism of its flag. In school, Brazilians learn about the flag's symbolism: the green rectangle mirrors the riches of Brazil's rainforests, the yellow diamond (rhombus) mirrors Brazil's gold and mineral riches, the starry blue circle mirrors Brazil's sky, where the Southern Cross shines and indicates God's blessing, and the white band letters capture the national motto: *Ordem e Progresso*, translated from Portuguese into English, "Order and Progress."³¹³ Tropical romanticism was used to present a paradisiacal image of Brazil abroad, while in the country itself, it was used to explain its founding and chart its trajectory over a brighter horizon.

Much like Manifest Destiny that was the idea that fueled the expansion of the United States across North America believing it to be predestined, tropical romanticism also sparked the idea that Brazil was predestined to a glorious future. Darcy Ribeiro, a Brazilian intellectual and former politician, argued that the dialectical forces of history fused the European, African, and Amerindian peoples living in Brazil into a *homo tabula rasa*, a new race, that would incorporate the best qualities from each but also be "more receptive to the innovations of progress."³¹⁴ Thus, Brazilians, as a *homo tabula rasa*, would be the architects of a new country that would not only take up space in the

³¹² Ibid, 61.

³¹³ Ibid, 5.

³¹⁴ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 174.

geographical coordinates of South America, but become its leading regional power.

Unlike Manifest Destiny though, tropical romanticism didn't foresee Brazil becoming the hegemon of South America, but rather carving up space in which to develop and flourish in coexistence with other nations. The amalgam of the different races in Brazil into a conquering macroethnicity, led also to a territorial expansion of the nation, which mimicked the ethnogenesis of the Portuguese conquerors who were genetic descendants of Roman, Carthaginian, and Celtic-Iberian peoples and who preserved their Latin identity by resisting Nordic and Saracen invaders.³¹⁵ Thus, tropical romanticism not only gave Europeans a way to identify themselves vis-à-vis the other they encountered as they explored and conquered the Americas (in particular Brazil), but it gave Brazilians a way to claim their own identity and chart their own destiny. Brazilians perceived themselves like Romans, as a Latinized macroethnicity, and they perceived their country as a new Rome, a tropical Rome, better than the old Rome of antiquity because it was forged from the miscegenation of Europeans, Africans, and Amerindians.³¹⁶ The idea of Brazil as a new Rome, a tropical Rome, gave Brazilians a vision of what they could become if they strived for grandeur as a *homo tabula rasa*, a new macroethnicity, that was carving up its space in South America. Marilena Chaui, a Brazilian philosopher, claims that the forging of Amerindians, Africans, and Lusitanians (the Portuguese colonizers) into a new race, led to the belief that prejudice didn't exist in Brazil and that the country was in fact a racial democracy, where racial and religious discrimination were finally overcome.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Ibid, 261, 321.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 185-6, 321-2.

³¹⁷ Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 6, 8, 26.

However, Bolsonaro's electoral victory in 2018 shattered the illusion casted by tropical romanticism depicting Brazil as a paradise and racial democracy, since his emotionally charged populist rhetoric exposed deep divisions within Brazilian society and intergenerational trauma in the national psyche.

Tropical romanticism was a mirage that veiled the reality of life in Brazil both abroad and within its borders, covering up the violent history, race relations and power dynamics that shaped the country and its people. However, defining what makes the Brazilian people Brazilian is difficult since they are one of the most culturally heterogeneous people in the modern world.³¹⁸ This is why Ribeiro points out in *The Brazilian People*, that Brazilians appeared to Europeans as a strange people and exotic.³¹⁹ As previously mentioned Brazilians are a *homo tabula rasa* emerging from the amalgam of Europeans, Africans and Amerindians living in the territory of present-day Brazil. This amalgam of the three races into the Brazilian macroethnicity wasn't harmonious, but rather violent. Apart from miscegenation, the ethnogenesis of the Brazilian nation stems from the genocide of the "other" (the "*xenos*"), mainly Amerindian tribes and African slaves at the hands of European colonists.³²⁰ This extermination occurred because Brazil's Amerindians and imported Africans were perceived as inferior by the Europeans arriving on the country's shores or those born in the colonial settlements. The image of Brazil's Amerindians has oscillated from the savage cannibal to the heroic 'bon sauvage.'³²¹ This is why Bolsonaro referred to Brazilian Amerindians living in

³¹⁸ Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 194.

³¹⁹ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 42.

³²⁰ Tiburi, *Como conversar com um*, 213; Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 316-17.

³²¹ Araújo de Oliveira Batista, "Exoticizing Hans Staden," 34.

reservations as animals in zoos.³²² The image of Afro-Brazilians has been tied to that of slaves due to the violent institution of slavery that commodified them in the past.³²³ Hence, the reason why Bolsonaro referred to the weight of Afro-Brazilians living in *Quilombolas* (Black maroon settlements) in arrobas, which is a unit of measurement used to weigh cattle and other livestock in Brazil, adding that they're not even fit for procreation anymore.³²⁴ Bolsonaro's remarks about Brazilian Amerindians and Afro-Brazilians brings to light the prejudice and racism with which white Brazilians view their fellow citizens.

Besides the prejudice and racism that surfaced once tropical romanticism's spell was broken, violence also appeared. Violence has a deep history in Brazil, ignited by sparks of conflict resulting from the collisions between Amerindians, Africans, and Europeans that eventually led to the amalgam of the three races.³²⁵ Ergo, in spite of tropical romanticism depicting Brazilians as a multiracial paragon, the reality of the past and present shatters this illusion. Despite Brazilians being a fusion of all three races, Amerindians and Africans were considered inferior races to the superior one of the Europeans. Therefore, in the past, there were efforts to stop the perceived degeneracy and impurity caused by the miscegenation with the two inferior races by diluting their genetic contributions to the Brazilian macroethnicity, via a policy of whitening and replacing

³²² Bolsonaro, "BOLSONARO E OS ÍNDIOS"; Bolsonaro, "Prefeito, de origem indígena"; Simões, "Brazil's Bolsonaro."

³²³ Chauí, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 27.

³²⁴ Angyalossy Alfonso, "Bolsonaro's take," 43; *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Veja 11 frases polêmicas."

³²⁵ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 116.

them with the genetic contribution of eugenically superior European immigrants.³²⁶ Starting from the 1870s, eugenics, social Darwinism, and other forms of racism arising from pseudoscience, infected the minds of Brazilian politicians, portraying the Amerindian and African genetic contribution to the Brazilian macroethnicity as a hindrance to the country's development and sparking the need to address the problem they created in Brazilian society.³²⁷ Thus, the Brazilian state actively took action to dilute their contribution to the genetic composition of the Brazilian macroethnicity not only through favorable immigration policies meant to be a magnet to attract eugenically superior European immigrants, but also through draconian laws meant to repress and racially discriminate against the inferior populations of color. An example of the draconian laws implemented by the Brazilian state was when following the 1964 military coup that toppled João Goulart's government, the Brazilian military dictatorship denied the existence of racism and removed the category of race from the national census in the 1970s.³²⁸ As already expressed, Bolsonaro's remarks regarding Brazilian Amerindians and Afro-Brazilians reveal the prejudice and racism hidden by the tropical romantic notion of a racial democracy, but ultimately uncovered and put under the national limelight during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. The racism unleashed by Bolsonaro is cathartic, since racist feelings were brewing beneath the surface of Brazilian society, but now Brazilians can finally express their racism in the physical public square and not just in the digital public square.³²⁹ Furthermore, Brazil's national ideology denies the

³²⁶ Chauí, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 49; Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 156, 310.

³²⁷ Angyalossy Alfonso, "Bolsonaro's take," 36.

³²⁸ Ibid, 36, 38.

³²⁹ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 94.

country's racist past, while imagining the country's destiny progressing toward an all-white Brazilian utopia that will come about through the genocide of Afro-Brazilians and Brazilian Amerindians, which is a form of narrative violence.³³⁰ This fantasy of an all-white Brazilian utopia clashes with the racial democracy envisioned by tropical romanticism (in which Brazilians as a mixed-race people of all racial colors live in a relative rainbow-like harmony), revealing competing narratives within Brazil's national ideology.³³¹ Brazilian populists like Bolsonaro have used the dangerous fantasy of Brazil as a white utopia to psychopolitically trigger their affective publics in the digital public square to vote for them in elections, regardless of the consequences this could have, potentially ripping to shreds the fabric of Brazilian society.

Once tropical romanticism's hex was broken, extreme inequalities within Brazilian society also surfaced. According to a study, Brazil's richest 1% hoard 28% of the country's wealth, which is the highest in the world.³³² Brazil's extreme wealth inequality is accentuated since it is a country with continental proportions, inhabited by approximately 211 million people racially mixed from European immigrants, African slaves, and Amerindian natives, tied together by the Portuguese language, but with six white Brazilians hold the same amount of wealth as 100 million of their compatriots.³³³ Historically, the tropical romantic notion of racial democracy has made it difficult for Brazilians to talk about inequalities based on race, especially extreme wealth inequality,

³³⁰ Ibid, 95-96.

³³¹ Ibid, 103.

³³² Whitaker, "Comprendre la victoire."

³³³ Paiva, "Hegemonic media and inequality," 103.

so that they can address those problems.³³⁴ In essence, Brazil has never been the racial democracy depicted by tropical romanticism. Democracy was imported to the country by the rural and semi-feudal aristocracy that molded it to their liking in order to secure their rights and privileges.³³⁵ Thus, Brazilian democracy perpetuates the hegemony of the country's elite who were the ones who imported it and rigged the rules of the political game in their favor, which has led to Brazil having the highest wealth inequality in the world. This inequality has manifested itself geographically by dividing Brazil in two, following the divergence of the country's natural terrain. This natural division of Brazil into two Brazils, one coastal and the other interior, opposes coastal Brazil (which is cosmopolitan, educated, and rich) and interior Brazil (which is rustic, illiterate, and poor).³³⁶ Ergo, Brazilian democracy, far from being a racial democracy, has turned out to be oligarchic at its core. These oligarchic tendencies and manifestations of Brazilian democracy have deep roots in its history.

Brazil's violent history, race relations and power dynamics were put in the national spotlight by Bolsonaro's populist campaign and subsequent victory during the 2018 presidential race. Where do they originate from? The country's violent history, race relations, and power dynamics emerged from the sugar plantation, which was the first form of large agricultural industrial export enterprise that made colonial Brazil economically viable for the Portuguese colonizers and formed the basis of the nascent Brazilian culture and society.³³⁷ The sugar plantation was were the slave plantation

³³⁴ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 96.

³³⁵ Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil*.

³³⁶ Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 67.

³³⁷ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 192.

system developed as a structural model, but this system would later move from sugar production to tobacco, indigo, cacao, and coffee.³³⁸ Nevertheless, the slave plantation system that emerged as a structural model from the sugar plantation era of the country's history would go on to shape the national character of *homo brasiliensis*. This would ensure that elements from colonial slave society would linger in contemporary Brazilian society in the form of a structural hierarchy in the social space that verticalized race relations and power dynamics to that of a superior that gives orders and an inferior that obeys.³³⁹ Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chaui argues that these differences and asymmetries in turn are manifested in inequalities that reinforce the command-obey dichotomy of Brazilian society and that result in not only physical oppression, but also mental and emotional oppression.³⁴⁰ Besides the command-obey dichotomy of Brazilian society, there were other ramifications from the structural model of the slave plantation system that were inherited from Brazil's sugar plantation era. The ruling class composed of plantation owners, led Brazil's transition from colony to independence and from empire to republic, meaning that the machine of the Brazilian state was created only for the greater consolidation of power by and greater enrichment of this same ruling class.³⁴¹ As a result of the extreme concentration of power and wealth at the hands of Brazil's plantation owning ruling class, there was widespread social resistance to resolving the question of slavery up to the waning days of the Brazilian Empire, so the country delayed

³³⁸ Ibid, 196.

³³⁹ Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 89.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ribeiro, *The Brazilian People*, 285.

abolition for some time, becoming the last one in the Americas to abolish slavery with the passing of the so-called “Golden Law” in 1888.³⁴² The delay in abolishing slavery allowed time for the transition to take place towards the modernization of agriculture, which made the slave plantation system obsolete.³⁴³ The delay also allowed time for developing the tropical romantic imagining of the Brazilian nation as a racial paradise composed of white Brazilians in the center, then inferior Afro-Brazilians in a liminal state of inclusion, and lastly Brazilian Amerindians on the fringes.³⁴⁴ So, the asymmetrical structure of race relations in Brazil inherited from the monocultural economy of the sugar plantation persisted once slavery was abolished in 1888. Thus, Chaui’s command-obey dichotomy of Brazilian society reveals that it is authoritarian at its core and its authoritarian tendencies manifest themselves politically by periodically injecting authoritarianism into the Brazilian state.³⁴⁵ The asymmetrical structure of race relations and the oppression it caused in turn poisoned the psyche of *homo brasiliensis*.

The violence and oppression resulting from the Chauian command-obey societal structure inherited from the sugar plantation led to intergenerational trauma and made the Brazilian people susceptible to authoritarian outbreaks throughout the country’s history. The most nefarious example of these authoritarian outbreaks occurred when the Brazilian Armed Forces carried out a coup d’état in 1964 (removing from power President João Goulart, who was colloquially known as “Jango”) and installed a dictatorship without resistance, arguing that it was necessary in order to save the country from the communist

³⁴² Angyalossy Alfonso, “Bolsonaro’s take,” 35-6; The Brazilian Report, “Slavery in Brazil.”

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Angyalossy Alfonso, “Bolsonaro’s take,” 35-6.

³⁴⁵ Chaui, *Brasil: Mito fundador*, 90.

threat.³⁴⁶ The argument put forth by the Brazilian military dictatorship to justify its inglorious actions stems from the domino theory, which posited that once one country fell to communism in a geographic region it would unleash a chain reaction and cause the other non-communist countries in the same geographic region to fall like dominoes to communism as well.³⁴⁷ However, in reality not all of Latin America followed in Havana's footsteps once communists emerged victorious from the Cuban Revolution. Ergo, the communist threat as game played by the domino theory didn't materialize and the argument posed by the Brazilian military as a justification for its 1964 coup turned out to be just an excuse for its nefarious intervention. This faulty argument has also been used by Bolsonaro to defend the military's actions in toppling President Goulart and establishing the dictatorship that lasted a little over two decades from 1964 to 1985. The Brazilian people are yet to cope with the violent crimes committed by the 20-year military dictatorship, since there has been a state-imposed collective amnesia regarding this dark chapter in their history and also because the Brazilian state is the only one in Latin America that failed to bring torturers from the military regime to justice.³⁴⁸ Hence, the Chauian command-obey framework of Brazilian society explains the relative passivity of *homo brasiliensis* and the *demos* at large with regards to violations of fundamental human rights by the *polis* during Brazil's modern history. Brazil's elite have used tropical romanticism's notions of racial paradise and racial democracy as an opium

³⁴⁶ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 97-8.

³⁴⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Domino theory."

³⁴⁸ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 96-7; Safatle, "Fascist Neoliberalism and Preventive," 186.

to keep the Brazilian people in their place in society, not questioning their socioeconomic status, much less questioning the government.

Propelled by the dangerous duo of AI and populism, Bolsonaro's victory during the 2018 Brazilian presidential election sent shockwaves around the world, since Brazil was considered to be the epitome of a multicultural democracy, and also since Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric was politically corrosive and socially divisive. This paradox posed by Bolsonaro's electoral victory might seem puzzling at first glance, but it can be explained by the hallucination created by tropical romanticism. Bolsonaro's campaign during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race and his subsequent victory, dissipated tropical romanticism's hallucinatory mists, which depicted a rainbow-like harmony between the races in a utopian-like democracy. Once tropical romanticism's hallucinatory mists cleared, the reality of racial prejudice, violence, and oppression in a dystopian-like state masquerading as a democracy appeared. Brazil has never been a racial democracy, but rather a nation state that is at its core authoritarian due to the command-obey state of mind inherited from the sugar plantation era and ingrained in the psyche of *homo brasiliensis*. This authoritarian impulse within Brazil's national character has had periodic outbursts throughout its history. However, while in the past there were outbursts of authoritarianism in Brazil via undemocratic means, like in the infamous 1964 military coup, now authoritarianism has crept up to power via the ballot box due to the realities afforded by the digitalization of politics in general and the possibilities opened up by digital populism in particular. What blew open these possibilities for authoritarianism to infiltrate Brazilian politics at the ballot box was the explosive mixture of AI and populism.

What's the Danger?

What's dangerous about AI and populism being used in combination to influence elections is that populist leaders like Bolsonaro can be democratically elected to power, but once they're in power, they work to undermine the same democracy that gave them that power. Equally as consequential, these leaders riding the populist new wave implement agendas that favor the economy regardless of the damage done to the environment. Therefore, the dangerous combination of AI and populism pose an existential threat to not only democracy itself, but also humanity via the destruction of the environment.

While the Brazilian state isn't a racial democracy as depicted by tropical romanticism, it does have democratic institutions, that although wobbly since their foundations were erected by the sugar plantation aristocracy, are in danger of being further weakened and even demolished by the digital populist threat. Whereas before, democracies ended through military coups and violent power grabs, now they can also end at the ballot box, where authoritarian candidates can win democratically, but once in power start to gradually undermine democratic institutions.³⁴⁹ Also, populist leaders in power suffocate democracy by dynamiting checks and balances on executive power and claiming that only they reflect the legitimate voice of the people, blurring the lines between the state and themselves, ultimately subverting the rule of law and constitutionality.³⁵⁰ To undermine checks and balances on the executive branch of the

³⁴⁹ Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 12.

³⁵⁰ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 6; Gandesha, "Introduction," 10.

state, populists attack the media by labelling it as “fake media,” call political rivals dishonest politicians, and complain that judicial authority is unjust, corroding respect for the press, the judiciary, as well as free speech and political dissent.³⁵¹ Umberto Eco warns that whenever a politician casts doubt regarding the legitimacy of parliament, because it no longer represents the “will of the people,” fascism can be detected, which he called ur-fascism, or eternal fascism, believing it never went away, but rather is always lurking on the fringes of society, positioning itself for the opportune moment to reemerge and take power.³⁵² Thus, according to Eco’s theory, the new wave of populism should be considered as the reemergence of ur-fascism, eternal fascism. However, as I argued earlier in this thesis, digital populism builds on past imaginations and manifestations of autocratic power, that includes but is not limited to fascism. Ergo, digital populism contains elements of fascism as posited by Eco and exemplified during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, with Bolsonaro attacking the legitimacy of Brazil’s democratic institutions. Even after Bolsonaro’s presidential inauguration on January 1, 2019, he continued to attack the free press through tweetstorms, accusing media giants Globo, *Veja*, and Metropoles, of being “villains, liars, and publishers of Fake News.”³⁵³ The neutrality of *Lava Jato* (“Car Wash”), a series of corruption investigations that led to 150 convictions and recovered US\$12 billion dollars, disgracing Brazilian politicians, was put into question after Bolsonaro selected the judge who convicted Lula to jail to be his minister of justice, right after assuming the Brazilian presidency.³⁵⁴ So, even after his

³⁵¹ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 22; Gandesha, “Introduction,” 10.

³⁵² Eco, *Contra el fascismo*, 33, 55-56.

³⁵³ Foggin, “Bolsonaro’s weaponized social media.”

³⁵⁴ Weizenmann, “‘Tropical Trump’? Bolsonaro’s Threat,” 13.

presidential inauguration, Bolsonaro kept eroding trust in the judiciary. Thence, digital populism incorporates fascist tendencies that rot democracies from within by undermining their institutions.

Besides undermining democratic institutions, digital populists also target free speech and political dissent. Eco underpins that ur-fascism, eternal fascism, is a fuzzy totalitarianism, since it's composed of a collage of different political and philosophical ideas, among which is an intolerance for disagreement, that is considered treason.³⁵⁵ Additionally, disagreement (as a sign of diversity) clashes with ur-fascism's strive for consensus and broad appeal, which means that ur-fascism is racist by nature, discriminating against intruders, against the "other" (the "*xenos*").³⁵⁶ Since the current wave of populism builds on past imaginations and manifestations of autocratic power, including fascism, it does incorporate various fascist elements such as being prejudiced against diversity. Bolsonaro poses a risk to Brazilian democracy, because he represents a segment of Brazilian society that always rejected the emergence of the New Republic (*Nova República*) from the 1988 Constitution and its institutions that stand for pluralism (ethnic, religious, and sociocultural diversity), additionally because democracies also die.³⁵⁷ Attacks on diversity, on pluralism, or the curtailing of free speech and political dissent, indicate that democracy is in jeopardy. This also applies to the Brazilian state, that although is not a racial democracy, does have wobbly democratic institutions that at least for the moment allow for the expression of a rainbow of perceptions. However,

³⁵⁵ Eco, *Contra el fascismo*, 25, 41.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 42.

³⁵⁷ Neves, "Eleição de Bolsonaro."

Bolsonaro's populist discourse targeting Brazil's LGBTQ+ community, Blacks and Amerindians, now threatens them politically via policy, since he hoards the executive power of the state and can roll back their rights.³⁵⁸ The toxicity of Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric is evident when he expressed his anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments saying that he would be incapable of loving a homosexual son and would rather see him die in an accident than appearing out there with a lover, plus saying that beating children can prevent them from becoming gay.³⁵⁹ Besides expressing his homophobia, Bolsonaro has also expressed his racist views. During an April 2017 speech given at an elite club in São Paulo, Bolsonaro said he went to a *quilombola*, where the lightest Afro-Brazilian weighed seven arrobas (a unit of measurement used for cattle and other livestock), adding that residents living there (which he called that race in the bottom) are lazy and can't even procreate anymore, lastly complaining that R\$1 billion (Brazilian reals) are wasted on them yearly.³⁶⁰ This lucid example put Bolsonaro's racial prejudice and racism against Afro-Brazilians in the limelight. However, his racism isn't just confined towards Afro-Brazilians, but rather also towards Brazilian Amerindians. While declaring that he favors the abolition of Indigenous reservations established by the 1988 Constitution, Bolsonaro claimed that Brazilian Amerindians kept in reservations were essentially animals in zoos.³⁶¹ Furthermore, Bolsonaro stated that a Brazilian Amerindian who had thrown a glass of

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Winter, "System Failure"; *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Veja 11 frases polêmicas"; Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 13.

³⁶⁰ Angyalossy Alfonso, "Bolsonaro's take," 43; *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Veja 11 frases polêmicas."

³⁶¹ Bolsonaro, "BOLSONARO E OS ÍNDIOS"; Bolsonaro, "Prefeito, de origem indígena"; Simões, "Brazil's Bolsonaro."

water at him during a public hearing to demarcate a reservation, should eat grass outside in order to keep up with his origins.³⁶² Besides dehumanizing Brazil's Amerindians by comparing them to animals, Bolsonaro has also expressed a desire to see them liquidated. In the 1990's, he lamented that Brazil's cavalry was unable to follow the example set by America's cavalry who fought and decimated the native tribes during the expansion of the country.³⁶³ These three examples elucidate Bolsonaro's racism towards Brazilian Amerindians. In addition to targeting Brazil's LGBTQ+ community, Afro-Brazilians and Brazilian Amerindians, he has singled out Venezuelan refugees arriving in the country from the northern border. On the campaign trail, Bolsonaro promised to block the porous entry of Venezuelan refugees in order to prevent Brazil from turning into another Venezuela (where a leftist authoritarian government rules with an iron grip), which he accused the Workers' Party of conspiring to do.³⁶⁴ Ergo, Bolsonaro harbors anti-pluralist views that undermine the expression of a rainbow of perceptions in Brazil. The danger lies in these anti-pluralist views being turned into executive policy that rolls back minority rights.

Authoritarianism deals the final blow to democracy via the adoption of a new constitution or the declaration of the state of exception, which is what digital populists with autocratic inclinations attempt to do once in power. Populists who have enough power will seek to establish a new constitution, a populist one, that constructs a new sociopolitical framework and creates a new set of rules for the political game.³⁶⁵ With a

³⁶² *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Veja 11 frases polêmicas."

³⁶³ Simões, "Brazil's Bolsonaro."

³⁶⁴ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 88.

³⁶⁵ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 62.

new populist constitution, populist leaders seek a new system that allows for the unrestrained expression of the popular will, or further secures the direct institutional relationship between the executive leader and the people.³⁶⁶ Thus, if adopted, the new populist constitution is rigged in favor of populist politics in general, populist leaders in particular. While both the adoption of a new constitution and the declaration of the state of exception can be carried out within democracies, they can both also lead to autocracy. Giorgio Agamben claims that the state of exception appears in limbo between democracy and absolutism, since not only is the temporary and controlled use of full powers compatible with democratic constitutions, but also the systematic and regular use of it leads to the death of democracy itself.³⁶⁷ Furthermore, Agamben signals that since there is no exacting standard of effective limitations in modern constitutional systems upon a temporary concentration of powers (whether martial rule, state of siege, or constitutional emergency powers), democracies can be transformed into dictatorships if conditions become favorable to it.³⁶⁸ This descent into dictatorship via a temporary concentration of powers is what occurred in Brazil during the Cold War. As previously highlighted, the Brazilian Armed Forces declared a state of emergency when they took over in 1964, removing President Goulart from power, but instead of calling for new elections, installed a dictatorship shortly after without any resistance.³⁶⁹ Brazil's rapid descent into dictatorship via the declaration of a state of emergency in 1964 seems like a lucid

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 3, 7.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 8.

³⁶⁹ George, "Hell, or Salvation?," 97.

example of Agamben's analysis. However, while he did warn about martial rule, Agamben's analysis of the state of exception didn't factor in the armed forces as agents in its calculus, but rather just democratic institutions. Therefore, Brazil's example elucidates the possibility of the state of emergency being put into effect by an undemocratic institution such as the military.

The state of exception becomes a danger to Brazil's democracy if Bolsonaro's rhetoric is carried out by his actions. His illiberal and authoritarian discourse glorifies Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship and attacks the legitimacy of the New Republic's (*Nova República*'s) institutions, with him saying in a 1999 TV interview that he would perform a coup and close Brazil's congress, if given the chance, in order to go straight to a dictatorship.³⁷⁰ Besides glorifying the 1964 military coup and expressing desires to carry out a new coup, Bolsonaro has used incendiary language vowing to neutralize the opposition via extrajudicial means. In that same 1999 TV interview, he stated that he favors using torture, saying that the people favor it too.³⁷¹ However, he failed to provide any evidence in the form of surveys or polls to back up his claim that the people favored torture as well. Therefore, Bolsonaro was merely justifying his inclination for state torture by presuming that he was just reflecting public opinion on the matter. Besides publicly endorsing torture, Bolsonaro has called Human Rights Day "the day of losers."³⁷² His disdain for human rights and predilection for torture is further evinced through his emotionally charged populist rhetoric. Unmoved by the testimonies of

³⁷⁰ Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 12; Subvertase, "Bolsonaro: 'Tortura.'"

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 12-13.

victims and the historical record concerning Pinochet's dictatorial rule in Chile, Bolsonaro said to the São Paulo-based magazine *Veja* in 1998, "Pinochet should have killed more people," expressing a similar view regarding the 1964-1985 Brazilian military dictatorship.³⁷³ Bolsonaro reignited his polemical claims regarding Pinochet by telling Michelle Bachelet (former Chilean President and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the time), in 2019, after she criticized the increase in police violence in Brazil under his presidency, that if it wasn't for Pinochet's crushing of the left in 1973, among them her father, today Chile would be another Cuba.³⁷⁴ As a result of Bolsonaro's verbal attack against Bachelet, that recalled the extrajudicial acts committed by Pinochet's dictatorship, Chilean politicians galvanized around Bachelet and spoke out against this. Jaime Quintana, a Chilean senator, responded by saying that in reality, deep inside, Bolsonaro is a dictator dressed as a democrat.³⁷⁵ Chilean Senator Quintana is right in his assessment that Bolsonaro masquerades as a champion of democracy, when his values and actions reveal an autocratic nature lurking within. Thus, knowing the crimes and human rights violations committed by Pinochet's dictatorship, Bolsonaro still justified them with fear tactics, by playing the communist threat card. His fiery populist rhetoric merely reflects that his values are anti-human rights, pro-torture, and pro-extrajudicial killings. In 2016, Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to impeach then President Rousseff to an army coronel who tortured leftist dissidents during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, doubling down and calling the coronel "a Brazilian hero"

³⁷³ Kuhlenbeck, "Dreams of Dictatorship," 24.

³⁷⁴ Meganoticias, "Jair Bolsonaro y su dura réplica."

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

when summoned before the ethics committee of Brazil's Congress.³⁷⁶ Subsequently, Rousseff was removed from office, ending 14 years of Workers' Party rule in Brazil.³⁷⁷ This example further uncovers Bolsonaro's autocratic nature that masquerades itself through democratic power, since he dedicated his vote to impeach Rousseff to the army colonel who was responsible for the torture of dissidents on the left side of the political spectrum during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship and even had the audacity to call him "a Brazilian hero." Moreover, a great part of his discourse is oriented toward the idea of violent repression against the opposition from the left, with mention of forced exile and prison, plus alluding to physical aggression and total elimination of adversaries.³⁷⁸ Bolsonaro declared at a rally in São Paulo, one week before the election run-off, that he would sweep the communist threat out of Brazil once in power, giving his political opponents two alternatives, either they leave the country or they get thrown in jail.³⁷⁹ Besides using fear tactics to justify Brazil's 1964 military coup and Pinochet's 1973 coup in Chile, Bolsonaro also used fear tactics in his populist rhetoric, seeking to silence the opposition by playing the same old communist threat card. Alarming, a poll showed that the military was Brazil's most respected institution, while Brazilian societal satisfaction with democracy was the lowest in Latin America.³⁸⁰ So, if Bolsonaro did attempt to carry out a coup, close Brazil's Congress, and install a new military dictatorship as he previously declared on TV, there might not be a viable Brazilian

³⁷⁶ Winter, "System Failure."

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Neves, "Eleição de Bolsonaro."

³⁷⁹ Weizenmann, "'Tropical Trump'? Bolsonaro's Threat," 12.

³⁸⁰ Winter, "System Failure."

resistance to foil the coup, as occurred in 1964. However, it appeared that he was less willing to carry through with his words once he emerged victorious from the 2018 Brazilian presidential race and assumed the Brazilian presidency at the start of 2019. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro has appointed military officials to his cabinet, leading to a militarization of government and society.³⁸¹ Hence, besides a coup being carried out and a state of exception being declared, spearheaded by the military (an undemocratic institution), as occurred in Brazil in 1964, there's another way democracy can be militarized and infiltrated from within, via executive appointments to the cabinet, as recently occurred in Brazil, upon Bolsonaro assuming the presidency at the start of 2019. So, by the end of 2020, without the deployment of tanks, about half of the appointed ministers in Bolsonaro's cabinet were active members of the military.³⁸² Ergo, militarizing the cabinet is another way democracy can be undermined, potentially leading to a declaration of martial law, or a state of emergency (state of exception), and ending up in a dictatorship.

Through his words and actions, Bolsonaro has attacked Brazil's democratic institutions, hinted at spearheading a coup, and militarized the executive branch of government. This is why Bolsonaro threatens Brazil's democracy in particular and digital populism threatens democracy in general. Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese politician and 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate) warned "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it."³⁸³ While it remains to be seen what further

³⁸¹ Ibid, 13.

³⁸² Del Río and Cesário Alvim Gomes, "The militarization of the Bolsonaro administration."

³⁸³ Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear*, 180.

verbal attacks or illiberal acts Bolsonaro will commit, especially if he fears losing power as Suu Kyi warned about, Bolsonaro assumed power through corrupt means, having corrupt principles and values contrary to those of the New Republic (*Nova República*). Thus, the damage to Brazil's volatile democracy has already been made. The synchronicity of AI and populism as argued in this thesis is what led to his meteoric rise to power and as a ripple effect posed this existential threat to not only Brazilian democracy, but the concept of democracy itself.

Besides the existential threat posed to democracy, the confluence of AI and populism also threatens humanity via the economic exploitation and destruction of the environment. While the political agenda of liberal democracy prioritizes *homo economicus* over *homo climaticus*, causing a new crisis, this has been exacerbated under populism. In Brazil, Bolsonaro's electoral victory and subsequent presidency have been detrimental to the Amazon through both his actions and inaction. In 2019, he waited for nearly two weeks before sending 44,000 troops to combat raging fires in the Amazon rainforest.³⁸⁴ However, Bolsonaro didn't have a change of heart with respect to his views on the environment, but was rather pressured into dispatching the military to extinguish the fires raging across Brazil, only after European leaders noticed his initial indifference and threatened to walk away from a trade deal struck in June, in addition to calls made to boycott Brazilian products.³⁸⁵ Even though he succumbed to the pressure from European leaders, he also shot back at them. After Germany declared it would freeze its \$39 million fund for conservation efforts in Brazil, Bolsonaro shot back at chancellor Merkel

³⁸⁴ Fox, "Amazon in Flames," 328.

³⁸⁵ Simões, "Brazil's Bolsonaro."

in a message saying, “Take that money and use it to reforest Germany, O.K.? You need it way more than we do here!”³⁸⁶ Due to his initial indifference and inaction as president, Bolsonaro wasted precious time in combatting the fires. Yet, he had the audacity to blame pro-conservation NGOs for starting the fires, accusing them of trying to undermine his presidency, but failing to provide any evidence to back up his accusations.³⁸⁷ His accusations blaming pro-conservation NGOs go against logic since the main goal of those NGO’s is to conserve the environment and not destroy it for economic reasons like he has advocated. Nonetheless, in an effort to polish his tarnished image, shift the blame on the cause of the fires, and deflect criticism for his initial incompetence in responding, Bolsonaro declared the dispatching of troops for fire-combat “a war against criminal fires.”³⁸⁸ Despite his foolish attempt to shift blame to pro-conservation NGOs, Bolsonaro is responsible for the blazing fires that raged throughout Brazil in 2019 through his pro-business and anti-environmental agenda. Loggers, farmers, ranchers, and illegal land grabbers sparked the fires, incited by Bolsonaro’s rhetoric promoting the Amazon’s economic exploitation through deforestation, additionally they were empowered by his government’s axing of Brazil’s environmental enforcement agency with budget cuts amounting to \$23 million.³⁸⁹ There was an 84 percent increase in fires burning in the country in 2019 (the first year of Bolsonaro’s presidency), compared to the previous year, with more than half of the fires located in the Amazon region, which is troubling since

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Fox, “Amazon in Flames,” 328; Yeung, “Blame humans for starting the Amazon fires.”

the Amazon forest produces about 20% of the world's oxygen and is often called "the planet's lungs."³⁹⁰ His previous declarations on the environment before the 2019 fires and poor response to them as Brazilian president, highlight the direct threat he poses to Brazil's Amazon, which can lead to a breakdown of the planetary climate system and the biosphere, threatening the survival of the human species.

If under liberal democracy priority is given to *homo economicus* over *homo climaticus*, this becomes more exacerbated under digital populism's rule, where the former takes center stage and the latter is simply ignored. In Brazil, Bolsonaro declared that a wildlife reserve on Rio de Janeiro's coastline could lose this designation in order to be developed into a "Brazilian Cancun."³⁹¹ He has also advocated for giving industries more access to protected areas of the Amazon, declaring that he champions reducing or outright eliminating the rights of Brazil's Amerindians to their land, plus he has allowed illegal logging, ranching and mining to continue in the Amazon without any consequences.³⁹² This is why he complained against having Brazilian Amerindians in reservations, using simile to compare them to animals kept in zoos, as earlier analyzed in this thesis. However, Bolsonaro wasn't acting out of altruism, but rather out of greed, protecting and expanding the economic interests of Brazil's conservative elites. Under a plan known as the Baron of Rio Branco Project, Bolsonaro's government sought to facilitate the economic exploitation of the Amazon through the construction of large-scale bridges, dams, and highways, in a bid to attract non-Amerindian settlers, impacting

³⁹⁰ Fox, "Amazon in Flames," 328; Yeung, "Blame humans for starting the Amazon fires."

³⁹¹ Simões, "Brazil's Bolsonaro."

³⁹² Ibid; Fox, "Amazon in Flames," 331.

27 Indigenous communities and protected areas in the region.³⁹³ Moreover, Bolsonaro's government stirred up conspiracy theories of foreign countries waiting at the borders for the opportune moment to blitz in and seize Brazil's resources with his secretary of strategic affairs, Maynard Marques de Santa Rosa, claiming that Brazil risked foreign invasion by Chinese troops at its border with Suriname.³⁹⁴ However, this was merely a propagandistic move by Bolsonaro's government, in a bid to minimize criticism of their plans to economically exploit the Amazon, through an appeal to nationalism and xenophobia. By reframing the economic exploitation of the Amazon through the prism of tribal politics at the nation-state level, Bolsonaro cleverly reformulated the *homo economicus-homo climaticus* crisis of modern liberal democracy into an imperative of strategic national security. This tactic was previously used by the 1964-1985 military dictatorship with its Amazon development plan that resulted in the construction of highways and the opening up of the region's resources for exploitation, alleging this was necessary before foreign countries sneaked in and stole these Amazonian resources, despite costing the lives of 8,350 Amerindians who were killed.³⁹⁵ In addition to developing a plan to economically exploit the Amazon, Bolsonaro revoked a 2009 ban prohibiting public funding for sugarcane cultivation in the Amazon, potentially leading to an expansion of sugarcane plantations there, in a push for more economic development of the region, without caring for the harm this will cause to the rainforest.³⁹⁶ The ban was implemented during Lula's presidency when ethanol (a biofuel made from sugarcane)

³⁹³ Ibid, 328.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 329.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 328.

³⁹⁶ Brainard, "Brazil supports sugarcane growing," 778; Teixeira, "Brazil cancels decree."

was promoted as an eco-friendly alternative to fossil fuels that would help countries reduce their carbon footprints, but concerns arose that its production would accelerate the Amazon's deforestation, since Brazil is the world's largest producer of sugarcane.³⁹⁷ Hence, Bolsonaro's illiberal government followed in the 1964-1985 military dictatorship's path regarding economically exploiting the Amazon without concern for the environmental damage this could cause. In spite of the similarities in policy towards the Amazon between Bolsonaro's government and the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, the repercussions are different. The stakes are higher now, with the planetary climate system and biosphere facing the risk of total collapse, jeopardizing humanity.

Bolsonaro's agenda towards the Amazon risks environmental catastrophe that could ultimately result not only in civilizational collapse, but also the extinction of the human species. Greta Thunberg reflects, "Our civilization is so fragile it is almost like a castle built in the sand. The façade is so beautiful but the foundations are far from solid."³⁹⁸ While some may find it difficult to connect the dots indicating the Amazon rainforest's deforestation could spiral out of control and potentially lead to the collapse of civilization, possibly threatening humanity, research provides evidence to back this up. Research done by Dr. Bernardo M. Flores (who teaches ecological resilience at São Paulo's University of Campinas) indicates that once the Amazon rainforest reaches the tipping point, due to climate change and human activities such as deforestation, this will accelerate the expansion of savannas, altering the ecosystem's dynamics, with disastrous

³⁹⁷ Brainard, "Brazil supports sugarcane growing," 778; Teixeira, "Brazil cancels decree."

³⁹⁸ Thunberg, *No One Is Too Small*, 44.

consequences for not only Brazil, but also the international community as well.³⁹⁹

Despite the possibility of the Amazon rainforest turning into a savanna, with all the consequences that would entail, Bolsonaro accelerated the Amazon's exploitation, indifferent to the concerns of *homo climaticus*, focused solely on the imperatives of *homo economicus*. Nevertheless, humanity's future is tied to the Amazon's future. An international group of researchers argued that the loss of the Amazon rainforest could trigger a domino effect, since the Amazon regulates climate and stores a big amount of carbon that if lost will accelerate global warming, causing the planet to go past the tipping point and turn into an inhospitable greenhouse, a "Hothouse Earth."⁴⁰⁰

Bolsonaro's populist rhetoric and policies have led to further exploitation of the Amazon's resources, in spite of the consequences this may unleash. Therefore, given that the confluence of AI and populism propelled Bolsonaro to victory during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, this confluence also set into motion a ripple effect that poses this existential threat to the Amazon's rainforest, civilization, and ultimately *homo sapiens* as a species.

³⁹⁹ Fox, "Amazon in Flames," 329-30.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, 330-1; Steffen et al., "Trajectories of the Earth System."

Chapter 6: Digital Ethnography

“Propaganda is a monologue which seeks not a response but an echo.” – W.H. Auden⁴⁰¹

At this point in the thesis, I will engage in an ethnography of Bolsonaro’s Instagram posts. Jair Bolsonaro created an Instagram account on March 11, 2013 under the Instagram name: Jair M. Bolsonaro, and the Instagram handle: jairmessiasbolsonaro. His Instagram handle has a verified badge (a blue badge with a check symbol) that appears at the end, meaning that Instagram has confirmed that this account is linked to the authentic public figure of Bolsonaro. He has a colored picture of himself smiling and waving as his profile picture. After data mining Bolsonaro’s entire Instagram posts up to December 2020, I have focused on twenty of those posts for this digital ethnography.

By September 24, 2018, thirteen days before the October 7 general election, Bolsonaro had more than 3 million Instagram followers according to a post that he shared on the platform after reaching that milestone on that day.⁴⁰² On the shared photo, he’s making the shape of a heart with his index fingers and thumbs. The color of the image includes shades of purple. Looking from the lens of “psychopolitics,” Bolsonaro is using the heart symbol and the shades of the color purple to cast himself in a more favorable light to Instagram users. The user is now consuming the emotion of love which is transmitted by the symbolism of the post.

By October 24, 2018, four days before the October 28 runoff election, Bolsonaro reached more than 5.3 million Instagram followers as bragged about on another milestone

⁴⁰¹ McDiarmid, *Saving Civilization*, 68.

⁴⁰² Bolsonaro, “+3 MILHÕES DE SEGUIDORES.”

post that was shared on that day.⁴⁰³ On the photo, he's smiling and gives a thumbs up while surrounded by a big crowd of people who are capturing his presence with the cameras on their cellphones. The image includes the colors green and yellow, which are the national colors of Brazil. On the top left corner, is Bolsonaro's campaign slogan "BRASIL ACIMA DE TUDO, DEUS ACIMA DE TODOS!" Translated to English from Portuguese, this means "BRAZIL ABOVE EVERYTHING, GOD ABOVE EVERYONE!" In the comments section, he wrote: "Subindo e para a direita!" Which in English means, "Going up and for the right!" He's alluding to his assumption that the increase in his followers will turn into votes cast for him in the runoff election. He ends the comment with four emojis, one of the Brazilian flag, one of a thumbs up, and two of the index finger pointing to the right. Under the "spectropolitics" lens, this image also arouses a feeling of joy and excitement since members of the crowd shown in the photo are smiling with their hands raised as they capture on their cellphones their encounter with Bolsonaro. Moreover, by Bolsonaro skillfully using the national colors of Brazil, green and yellow, along with his campaign slogan and the Brazilian flag emoji, he's making the link between Brazilian patriotism and his campaign. Thus, the user is being fed joy and Brazilian patriotism wrapped up in Bolsonaro's personal brand.

On March 31, 2017, the anniversary of the 1964 Brazilian military coup d'état, Bolsonaro shared a photo of himself in a suit and tie, with his right hand over his heart with the superimposed heading: "March 31, with big support from the Brazilian population, the military freed Brazil from becoming a new Cuba. Brazil above

⁴⁰³ Bolsonaro, "+5.3 Milhões DE SEGUIDORES."

everything, God above everyone.”⁴⁰⁴ The photo is blended with the image of the Brazilian flag. In the comments section, he wrote: “1964: the truth tortures!” Bolsonaro is trying to rewrite history by framing the 1964 military dictatorship as necessary in order to save Brazil from becoming communist, which was alluded to via the danger of becoming a new Cuba. Hence, he celebrates the anniversary of the 1964 Brazilian military coup d’état. He also tried to minimize or brush aside the crimes committed by the dictatorship by writing “the truth tortures!” Here, Bolsonaro was indirectly responding to the claim that the 1964 military dictatorship imprisoned, tortured and murdered Brazilian dissidents. Since Bolsonaro has fiercely defended the Brazilian military dictatorship, he needed to change the narrative surrounding it by distorting the truth, which his Instagram account allowed him to do. By including the Brazilian flag, he further casts the anniversary of the military coup as patriotic, since Brazil was saved from the communist threat. His campaign slogan was included to further emphasize in the mind of his Instagram followers that he would protect Brazil at all costs from any threats once elected president. His hand over his heart “spectropolitically” symbolizes his love for Brazil and his honesty, in a way visually hiding the disinformation he emitted.

Bolsonaro continued to defend the Brazilian military dictatorship through a photo he shared on July 28, 2017, in which he saluted deceased Colonel Carlos Brilhante Ustra (who became the first military official accused by a São Paulo civil court of being a torturer during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship) on what would have been the colonel’s birthday.⁴⁰⁵ In the photo, the colonel stands on the left, in front of a waving

⁴⁰⁴ Bolsonaro, “1964: a verdade tortura!”

⁴⁰⁵ Bolsonaro, “A verdade jamais será sufocada.”

Brazilian flag, while Bolsonaro, dressed in a suit and tie, stands on the right and salutes him. On the top of the photo is the superimposed heading: “The truth will never be suffocated.” On the bottom right corner of the photo is a green and yellow Jair Bolsonaro logo with white text. In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote “07/28 would have been the birthday of a symbol, who fighting in favor of Brazil, helped to stop our country from transforming itself into a socialist nation following the example of Cuba or Venezuela! Congratulations Brilliant Colonel! May God be with us!” In this post, Bolsonaro not only persists in defending the 1964 military coup, but also indirectly endorses torture. However, Bolsonaro is clever in again framing the dictatorship and the crimes it committed through the optics of patriotism, which is why “spectropolitically” he includes the Brazilian flag and salutes. Thus, Bolsonaro is saluting both the flag and the deceased colonel, in a way changing the narrative, masquerading the colonel as a patriotic hero, instead of the military murderer that he was. Bolsonaro again plays the communist card, arguing that the blood-stained actions of the colonel and by extension the 1964-1985 Brazilian military dictatorship were necessary to prevent the spread of communism in Brazil, since he explicitly mentioned the risk the country faced in following the path of Cuba or Venezuela. Bolsonaro uses word play with the colonel’s last name to call him brilliant, in reference to his actions committed during the dictatorship, since he said “*Brilhante Coronel*” (Brilliant Colonel) instead of “*Coronel Brilhante*” (Colonel Brilhante), given that in Portuguese “brilhante” means “brilliant.” Hence, this word play can be seen as Bolsonaro further congratulating and lauding the deceased colonel for not only his birthday, but also for the cleverness he displayed in his role imprisoning, torturing and murdering dissidents.

On a post Bolsonaro shared on September 8, 2016, there's a video clip of Lula, speaking on stage, holding a microphone, standing in front of a group of supporters and telling them: "A Bolsonaro appears, like a Hitler appeared, like a Mussolini appeared."⁴⁰⁶ In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote: "LULA RECOGNIZES THE ONLY OPPOSITION IN BRAZIL." Bolsonaro brushes aside Lula's claim that he's following in the footsteps of Hitler and Mussolini through his populism that parallels Nazism and Fascism in some aspects, instead claiming that Lula is merely casting him as the opposition (his main competition) in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, since this was before Lula was jailed on corruption charges and barred from running in the elections.

On December 12, 2017, Bolsonaro fires back against Lula's linking of him to Hitler and Mussolini, by sharing a video clip of Hugo Chávez being interviewed, where the former president of Venezuela promised to adhere to the country's democratic principles by agreeing to turn over power after five years and even saying he would willingly step down if after two years, he turned out to be a fiasco, a failure, or committed a crime, or an act of corruption, or something that justified his ouster from power before his five years were over.⁴⁰⁷ In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote: "Hugo Chávez and Lula before the elections, posed as democratic." In this post, Bolsonaro fired back against Lula (who previously linked him to Hitler and Mussolini), by himself linking Lula to Hugo Chávez. This was also before Lula was imprisoned and barred from running in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. So, Bolsonaro attempted to "psychopolitically" feed his followers fear, fear of Lula (which Bolsonaro linked to Hugo

⁴⁰⁶ Bolsonaro, "LULA RECONHECE."

⁴⁰⁷ Bolsonaro, "Hugo Chávez e Lula."

Chávez), fear of the Workers' Party (which by association is tainted by Bolsonaro as socialist and communist), and fear of Brazil turning into a Venezuela.

A year before the Brazilian presidential elections, Bolsonaro shared a video clip on August 31, 2017, in which he put his arm around an indigenous Brazilian mayor, saying: "an Indian is a human being just like us, like you're seeing here. We cannot leave him inside an indigenous reservation as though he were an animal in a zoo."⁴⁰⁸ On the bottom right corner of the video is a green and yellow Jair Bolsonaro logo with white text. In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote: "The Indian in Brazil can't be treated like an animal inside a zoo. Watch the entirety of the conversation by writing on YouTube: 'BOLSONARO E OS ÍNDIOS: A VERDADE.'" Translated from Portuguese into English, this means: "BOLSONARO AND THE INDIANS: THE TRUTH." While it may seem like Bolsonaro is interested in the well-being of Brazil's Amerindians, what he really cares about is the exploitation of their reservations, in particular extracting the natural resources from these reservations that are mostly in the Amazon. However, Bolsonaro is cunning in concealing this desire in order to appear to care more about the well-being of Brazil's Amerindians. Nevertheless, what Bolsonaro has demonstrated is that he is merely using Brazil's Amerindians as pawns to achieve his economic aims in the Amazon. For the "spectropolitical" optics, Bolsonaro puts his arm around the indigenous mayor, to visually symbolize camaraderie and even Brazilian national brotherhood. Nevertheless, what he is trying to do is reframe the narrative of opening up the Amazon (including the Amerindian reservations) for exploitation by rebranding it as essential to the social and economic integration of Brazil's Amerindians. Moreover, if

⁴⁰⁸ Bolsonaro, "Prefeito, de origen indígena."

one pays careful attention to the video clip, behind Bolsonaro was a poster that read:

“HADDAD THE CANDIDATE OF THE GAY KIT.” So, Bolsonaro was

“spectropolitically” also using this Instagram post to make a false accusation towards the candidate who eventually became his main rival in the 2018 general and runoff presidential elections.

On September 3, 2017, Bolsonaro shared a photo of himself wearing a polo shirt with his arms crossed and staring straight ahead at the viewer. Bolsonaro is in black and white, while the background is dark blue. Superimposed on the photo are the words in yellow: “Brazil opens the Amazon for the world to explore its gold. Meanwhile our prospectors are still being treated like bandits.”⁴⁰⁹ On the top right corner of the photo is a green and yellow Jair Bolsonaro logo with white text. In the comments, he wrote: “Wow the ‘critics’ blur everything and now say that I’m leftist!” He ended his comment with three laughing emojis with tears coming out of their eyes and an exclamation mark. In this post, Bolsonaro openly states his desire for the economic exploitation of the Amazon via “spectropolitics.” In the photo, Bolsonaro is staring straight at the Instagram user, to catch his/her attention. Also, he has his arms crossed, symbolizing that what he has to say is important. The yellow color of the headline in this context is meant to represent gold, especially when contrasted with the background image that’s in black and white, plus dark blue. Therefore, Bolsonaro’s body language and the aesthetics of the photo together amplify the propaganda of the heading which calls for the economic exploitation of the Amazon.

⁴⁰⁹ Bolsonaro, “O Brasil abre a Amazônia.”

Bolsonaro brought up the gay kit again in a photo he shared of himself, on August 28, 2018, in which he wore a suit and tie, holding a book with a drawing of a naked male body on a page on the left and a drawing of a naked female body on a page on the right, with Bolsonaro putting a finger through a hole on the male body where the genitalia would go.⁴¹⁰ In the comments section, he wrote: “One of the books that teach sex for children at schools that Globo doesn’t want to show!” Bolsonaro was using the book he was holding as a “spectropolitical” prop to show visual proof of his claims and accusations of a gay kit being distributed to kids in school. Furthermore, Bolsonaro attacks O Globo, one of Brazil’s media giants, by claiming that it is trying to hide the truth from Brazil’s ordinary citizens.

On August 30, 2018, he shared a video of himself holding the same book as previously analyzed in the prior Instagram post saying “O Globo claimed that this book wasn’t distributed in schools.” However, Bolsonaro goes on to claim that what really happened was that this book arrived in many elementary school libraries in all of Brazil, saying that a principal gave him the one he was holding. He further says “They want to legalize pedophilia and sexualize our children. The PT government doesn’t care about your child in the classroom at all.”⁴¹¹ In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote: “The newspaper *O Globo* from today, 08/30/2018, says that information about the book about sex for children in schools is FALSE. – Look at what they do to once again disqualify whoever doesn’t interest them! Follow the TRUTH! Watch the complete 3-minute video on our channel on YouTube by clicking the link in the bio.” In this post, Bolsonaro

⁴¹⁰ Bolsonaro, “Um dos livros.”

⁴¹¹ Bolsonaro, “Jornal O Globo.”

continued to bring up the gay kit in his attack against O Globo. Using the optics of “psychopolitics” it becomes apparent that Bolsonaro is stirring up anger in his followers by accusing O Globo of hiding the truth from the Brazilian public regarding the gay kit and accusing the Workers’ Party government of trying to legalize pedophilia by sexualizing children. So, Bolsonaro is suggesting there’s a conspiracy between the media, through O Globo, and the government, through the Workers’ Party, in perverting school children who are innocent.

After both Haddad and Bolsonaro advanced from the October 7, 2018 general election to directly face each other in the October 28, 2018 runoff election, Bolsonaro shared a photo collage, on October 9, 2018, with him dressed in a suit and tie, standing on the right, with his hands crossed, in front of the Brazilian flag, while Haddad, stands on the left, wearing a red t-shirt with the face of a young Lula and white letters underneath that read: “LULA LIVRE!” While a black and white image of Lula behind bars is placed next to him, to his right. In the middle of Bolsonaro and Haddad/Lula are the words: “EM QUEM VOTAREI?”⁴¹² Using “spectropolitics,” Bolsonaro accentuated the two choices for his followers that are part of the Brazilian electorate, to vote between himself or Haddad during the runoff election. He used the Brazilian flag again to infuse his followers with patriotism, contrasting the green, yellow, white and blue colors of the flag, with the red and white t-shirt worn by Haddad. So, Bolsonaro compared his professional business attire with Haddad’s casual clothes, to make himself appear as the more qualified candidate to be Brazil’s president. He also stressed the red worn by Haddad, since red symbolizes communism, socialism, and the Workers’ Party. So, he

⁴¹² Bolsonaro, “EM QUEM VOTAREI?”

was able to tie Haddad (the Workers' Party's presidential candidate) to communism and socialism. Therefore, Bolsonaro framed the narrative of the runoff election in Manichaeian terms, between a patriot (himself) and the communist/socialist enemy (his rival Haddad).

On October 25, 2018, Bolsonaro shared a video clip continuing his propaganda attack on Haddad, in which a sepia toned photograph of Haddad is shown first, while subtitles declare that Haddad is Lula's puppet and that Haddad created the gay kit.⁴¹³ Then, a black and white photograph of Haddad is shown, while the subtitles claim that despite Haddad trying to hide his participation with the launch of the gay kit, the truth will show itself. Afterwards, a photo collage is shown, with a black and white photo of Haddad in front of the Workers' Party's flag (a red flag with a white star) and a white and black photo of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in front of the Venezuelan flag, which is in color, while the subtitles declare: "Now, Haddad proposes to change the Constitution, just like Maduro did in Venezuela." The following headline in red letters briefly appears superimposed over the photo collage: "CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION." In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote "THE WORKERS' PARTY IS BRAZIL AT THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS." In the video clip's three photos of Haddad, he is shown wearing a suit, as opposed to the previous post that was analyzed in which he was shown just wearing a red t-shirt. "Spectropolitically" Bolsonaro presented Haddad more professionally in this post, in a way acknowledging Haddad as his rival in the runoff election which was three days away from the day the post was shared. However, Haddad is again accused of creating the gay kit. Besides that, Haddad

⁴¹³ Bolsonaro, "O PT É O BRASIL!"

is accused of being a liar for trying to hide this from the Brazilian public. Moreover, he's being labeled a puppet whose strings Lula pulls, who by this time was in prison. More importantly, Haddad is "spectropolitically" juxtaposed next to Maduro in a photo collage in which the two of them are positioned so that it seems they are staring at one another, so that the public can think that they have met and so can equate Haddad with the Venezuelan president. Haddad is accused in the video clip of trying to turn Brazil into a Venezuela by changing the constitution just like Maduro, which Bolsonaro uses to "psychopolitically" inject his followers with fear, fear of Brazil becoming a socialist dictatorship like Venezuela.

Bolsonaro congratulated Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez for winning the Paraguayan presidential election on April 22, 2018, in a post shared on Instagram from Twitter on April 23, 2018.⁴¹⁴ In the shared tweet, Bolsonaro wrote: "Paraguay to the Right. Congratulations Mario Abdo Benítez. In the ideological battlefield, the enemies of democracy, progress, and the family must be decimated at the ballot boxes. In October, it will be the turn of our people to shout: 'Brazil above everything! God above everyone!'" On top-center of the message screenshot Twitter is written in its iconic light blue font and the emojis of the Brazilian and Paraguayan flags are shown on the top right corner. Bolsonaro, just like other populist leaders, looks at the world in Manichaeian terms, which is why he congratulated Paraguay's president, since he's on the right of the political spectrum, just like Bolsonaro is himself. Bolsonaro used the Brazilian and Paraguayan flag emojis as "spectropolitical" props to not only arouse patriotism in his followers, but also to visually illustrate the changing geopolitical landscape in South America with

⁴¹⁴ Bolsonaro, "Paraguai à Direita."

Paraguay shifting to the right. Moreover, Bolsonaro militarized the 2018 Brazilian presidential race into an ideological battlefield, in which he casted his adversaries as enemies of democracy, progress, and the family. Furthermore, he urged his followers to come out and cast their votes in October to symbolically eliminate their enemies, which in this election were mainly Brazilians on the left of the political spectrum. He finished by adding his campaign slogan, to not only remind his followers of his presidential candidacy, but also to amplify their tribal fervor.

On June 2, 2018, Bolsonaro shared a video clip of men, some of which wore red hats or a red t-shirt, and who attacked passing semi-trailer trucks by throwing objects at them.⁴¹⁵ In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote, “With those red-capped thugs, there can be no dialogue... I talk only with civilized people.” While from the video clip itself it isn’t easy to see who the attackers were and moreover what was their motive, Bolsonaro quickly indicated that they were from the Workers’ Party by emphasizing “those red-capped thugs.” So, Bolsonaro doesn’t have to explicitly name the Workers’ Party, because by merely mentioning that they wore red hats, his Instagram followers can connect the dots and assume the attackers to be from the Workers’ Party itself (since the color red is considered to be the party’s color), or at the minimum, Workers’ Party sympathizers (meaning still adversaries that are dangerous and need to be eliminated). More importantly, by indicating that those attackers were from the Workers’ Party, Bolsonaro is trying to frame the party as violent and uncivilized, in other words, not fit for their candidate to win the presidential race. This also plays to not only Bolsonaro’s campaign goal of legalizing the purchase of guns as a deterrent to violence on the streets

⁴¹⁵ Bolsonaro, “Com esses marginais.”

of Brazil, but to also polish his image as the law and order presidential candidate. Additionally, Bolsonaro attacks the Brazilian public square, by telling his followers not to engage in conversations with their fellow-Brazilians on the other side of the political spectrum, since he's indicating that the other side is violent and uncivilized. However, what Bolsonaro is also attempting to do is to avoid having his Instagram followers engage in conversations that will get them questioning the web of lies, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric they encounter on his platform. So, to minimize the risk of him losing Instagram followers and more critically important losing voters on election day, he brushes aside the entire opposition as dangerous.

The militarization of the election continues in a video clip he shared on October 22, 2018, in which a giant screen is shown at an outdoor political rally with Bolsonaro appearing on the screen yelling, "We're going to sweep from the map those Brazilian red bandits! We're the majority. We're the real Brazil."⁴¹⁶ The massive amount of people at the pro-Bolsonaro rally viewing the video and listening to Bolsonaro are shouting, clapping, and waving Brazilian flags. In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote what he said at the beginning on the giant screen: "We're going to sweep from the map those Brazilian red bandits!" In this post, Bolsonaro continues the propaganda of portraying his political opponents as dangerous elements that need to be neutralized. Whenever Bolsonaro mentions "reds," such as those "red-capped thugs" in the previous post or "those Brazilian red bandits" in this post, he alludes generally to all Brazilians who are on the left of the political spectrum, but specifically to the Workers' Party and its followers. So, when Bolsonaro declares that the "reds" will be swept from the map, it can be taken

⁴¹⁶ Bolsonaro, "Vamos varrer do mapa!"

that what he means is that the Workers' Party will be defeated on election day in Brazil. However, given Bolsonaro's glorification of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship and his approval of using torture as a means for political ends, this declaration can be taken as him literally meaning what he said, be it by driving political opponents into exile abroad through pressure or by force, or by the government imprisoning, torturing and ultimately murdering them, or by his followers hunting them down, erasing them from the map. Thus, Bolsonaro is "psychopolitically" injecting his followers with anger and hate towards Haddad, the Workers' Party, and all of his other political opponents, including Brazilians who will vote against him. The sea of Brazilian flags and the euphoria expressed by those at his rally sugarcoat Bolsonaro's propaganda and emotionally charged populist rhetoric with Brazilian patriotism and the feeling of joy and excitement, presenting Bolsonaro more favorably to his followers and ultimately casting him as their only viable choice on election day, which was six days away when the post was shared.

Bolsonaro shared a video clip on September 5, 2018, in which he appeared before a group of TV journalists who were reaching out to him with their microphones, yelling about the possibility of electoral fraud in the 2018 Brazilian presidential election.⁴¹⁷ In the video clip, he told the group of journalists: "the Workers' Party discovered that the key to success was the electronic ballot box." Behind him was one of his sons and other supporters. In the bottom of the video clip, the heading reads: "Jair Bolsonaro, candidate to the presidency of the republic (PSL)." In the comments section, he wrote "More truths about the possibility of fraud in the electronic ballot boxes." With just about a month away from the October 7, 2018 general election, Bolsonaro was sowing the seeds of

⁴¹⁷ Bolsonaro, "Mais verdades."

doubt regarding its fairness. However, he didn't come up with concrete evidence to back up his claim. He was merely testing the waters, in case he lost, so that he could claim there was electoral fraud. However, since he made it past the general election and emerged victorious from the runoff, this specific stream of disinformation ended. Hence, Bolsonaro was following the populist playbook, since populists claim that all elections are tainted with fraud except those they win.

About two weeks before the general election, Bolsonaro shared a photo of himself on September 20, 2018, in which he wore a suit and tie, smiled and looked up, superimposed on the photo are the words: "OUR CONSTITUTION WILL BE THE MAP AND THE LIBERAL PRINCIPLES WILL BE OUR COMPASS FOR US TO NAVIGATE ON THE ROAD TO PROSPERITY. WE HAVE THE RIGHT BASES AND PEOPLE TO, FINALLY, BRING TO OUR COUNTRY THE VALUES THAT ARE PRINTED ON OUR GREEN AND YELLOW FLAG: ORDER AND PROGRESS! JAIR BOLSONARO."⁴¹⁸ On the top of the superimposed words are giant yellow opening quotation marks in between two yellow lines, while on the bottom of the superimposed words, his name, "JAIR BOLSONARO," is highlighted in yellow. At the bottom of the photo, Bolsonaro's twitter handle appears following a yellow twitter bird icon to denote what platform to use it on: @jairbolsonaro. In the comments section, Bolsonaro wrote: "Let's go," followed by the emoji of the Brazilian flag. In this post, Bolsonaro is addressing concerns his followers might have that he might turn out to be authoritarian himself, once in power. This is why he declared that the Brazilian constitution would be the map and liberal principles would be the compass which he

⁴¹⁸ Bolsonaro, "Vamos."

would use to govern as president if elected. Furthermore, he implied that when elected president he would bring to fruition the motto emblazoned on the Brazilian flag: Order and Progress! Nevertheless, Bolsonaro suggested that he would adhere to the Brazilian constitution merely to masquerade his true desire of taking Brazil back to the same form of government as the 1964-1985 military dictatorship. He cited the motto imprinted on the Brazilian flag and used the Brazilian flag emoji to further cover up his selfish reasons for winning the presidency by making it seem that he's actually more interested in the future of the country. Moreover, if analyzed "psychopolitically," he shared this post in an attempt to infuse his Instagram followers with pride and joy. He smiled and squinted his eyes as he looked up, to visually seem happy, using the color yellow in the photo (with the yellow typography accents and the yellow Twitter bird icon), which symbolizes sunshine and happiness, to further amplify this emotion. His reference to the Brazilian constitution and the motto of the Brazilian flag, plus his use of the Brazilian flag emoji, was not only to make his followers feel proud to be Brazilian, but also to make it appear that Bolsonaro cares more about his fellow patriots than himself winning the presidency.

Bolsonaro shared a photo of himself on October 27, 2018, one day before the runoff election, in which he wore a yellow shirt with a green round collar, that contained black printed words in the middle of the shirt itself reading: "MEU PARTIDO É O BRASIL."⁴¹⁹ Translated from Portuguese into English it reads: "MY PARTY IS BRAZIL." He's standing in front of the Brazilian flag that's waving in the air illuminated from behind by the sun. In the bottom of the photo is the heading: "PRESIDENTE BOLSONARO VICE GENERAL MOURÃO." The font of the heading is in white, the

⁴¹⁹ Bolsonaro, "ATÉ A VITÓRIA!"

background section of the heading is green, the number 17 is in yellow, and the first “O” in “BOLSONARO” has been made to include the yellow diamond (rhombus), blue sphere and white diagonal band of the Brazilian flag. In the comments section, he wrote: “UNTIL VICTORY, GOD WILLING!” This was followed by four emojis of the Brazilian flag. What’s interesting about this post is that in the photo Bolsonaro is wearing a t-shirt, since in nearly all the other posts we have analyzed, he’s wearing a collared shirt. Interestingly, he’s not juxtaposing Haddad in a suit and tie next to him in this photo, while he did that to Haddad in a previous post that we analyzed, in which Haddad is wearing a red t-shirt while he’s wearing a suit and tie. Analyzed “spectropolitically,” in this post, Bolsonaro was trying to cast himself as a normal everyday Brazilian that can relate with most of his compatriots, instead of a politician who’s been entrenched in power for decades. In a previous post that was analyzed, Haddad was shown wearing a red t-shirt, that symbolizes the color of communism, socialism, and the Workers’ Party, to cast him as the enemy. While in this post, Bolsonaro is wearing a yellow and green t-shirt, the national colors of Brazil, to signal that he’s beyond partisanship, that he can appeal to Brazilians from diverse backgrounds, and that he cares more about the country than his party. Hence, the reason why the shirt reads “MY PARTY IS BRAZIL” and why mention of his party is done discretely by including the logo of the PSL, *Partido Social Liberal*, Portuguese for “Social Liberal Party,” on the top right corner of the photo in fine print. Moreover, Bolsonaro is “psychopolitically” feeding his followers more joy, which is visible on the photo with his smile, and the sun shining from behind, in order to make himself appear in the most favorable light to the electorate. Besides that, by using the Brazilian flag behind him in the photo, the national colors on his t-shirt, mentioning the

country's name on his shirt, using the national colors and flag in the heading, and adding the Brazilian flag emoji in his comment, Bolsonaro was injecting his Instagram followers with more pride and patriotism, reminding them of which candidate was more concerned about his country than his party. However, Bolsonaro was merely using propaganda to conceal his anti-democratic and anti-pluralist inclinations, in a bid to appear more moderate and obtain more votes from the center of the political spectrum.

After being accused that his election campaign was propelled by the use of AI bots, Bolsonaro shared a post on April 26, 2018, composed of a collage of photos of large outside gatherings of fans throughout Brazil with the geographic shape of Brazil superimposed on the collage of photos. The words emblazoned on top are: "THE LATEST GENERATION OF ROBOTS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SPREAD THROUGHOUT ALL OF BRAZIL. THANK YOU VERY MUCH EVERYONE! Jair Bolsonaro."⁴²⁰ In the comments section, Bolsonaro simply entered the thumbs up emoji. This post was shared in reaction to claims during the 2018 presidential election race arguing that his campaign was propelled by the use of AI bots. Therefore, Bolsonaro was defending his campaign from what he saw as an attack from one of Brazil's media giants, in this case *Veja* (a Brazilian weekly news magazine and the leading weekly publication in the country). Nevertheless, he also did it in a deceiving way by playing on the ignorance of his Instagram followers, of which the average individual doesn't understand what AI robots (AI bots) are, imagining the robots that are depicted in pop culture, instead of the actual AI robots (AI bots) that *Veja* was referring to, which are comprised of algorithms and interact with users on social media. So,

⁴²⁰ Bolsonaro, "ROBÔS COM INTELIGÊNCIA ARTIFICIAL."

Bolsonaro played on this ignorance on the part of his Instagram followers, to suggest that *Veja* was referring to his followers themselves as robots in the sense that robots are depicted in pop culture. This deception was reinforced by the rainbow colors of the photo collage that included hues of orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, which were meant to symbolize the diversity of Bolsonaro's followers, in order to contrast their humanity with robots, who are generally imagined as being metallically uniform. This is also why, he shared this photo collage of his followers coming out in large groups in support of his candidacy. Ultimately, by sharing this post, Bolsonaro was firehosing the truth and also inciting his followers to react themselves with anger and ridicule towards the media. Hence, Bolsonaro was pulling their strings like puppets through the emotions aroused by "psychopolitics."

Shortly after joining Instagram, Bolsonaro shared a black and white photo of himself, on April 10, 2013, in which he's wearing sunglasses and a white buttoned-up dress shirt with a pen in his pocket, but what was most striking is that he's laughing while wearing a crown on his head and holding a scepter.⁴²¹ In the comments section he wrote: "There exists a page on Facebook called 'Bolsonaro Joker.' It's worth a laugh!" Since Bolsonaro shared this photo of himself as king, even though he indicated he was just doing it for fun and was joking about it, it demonstrates how he subconsciously sees himself and thinks about power, in a way revealing his authoritarian dreams and aspirations. This becomes even more apparent with the declaration he gave on April 20, 2020, that we first encountered at the beginning of this thesis paper, where he said, "I am,

⁴²¹ Bolsonaro, King Bolsonaro.

really, the constitution.”⁴²² In retrospect, Bolsonaro’s declaration allowed us to peek into his subconscious mind and become aware of his authoritarian dreams and aspirations, since it echoes King Louis XIV’s declaration “*L’État c’est moi*,” which in French means “I am the state.”⁴²³ While it may appear that Bolsonaro is merely joking and having a good time with this photo he shared of himself depicted as king, it does recall what Marx warned about in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, with democratically elected leaders masquerading as fools, but in reality plotting behind the scenes to obtain absolute power.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Carvalho, “Eu sou a Constituição”; UOL, “EU SOU A CONSTITUIÇÃO.”

⁴²³ Rowen, “*L’État c’est moi*,” 83.

⁴²⁴ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 75-6.

Chapter 7: Juxtaposition to Traditional Media

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy.” –

Nelson Mandela.⁴²⁵

At this juncture in the thesis, I will now juxtapose several of Bolsonaro’s Instagram posts to traditional media sources in order to focus on three controversies surrounding Bolsonaro’s political career. The gay kit fabrication targeting his 2018 election rival Haddad, the use of AI bots to give his political campaign a decisive edge in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, and his reverence of the 1964 military dictatorship will be the three controversies that I will zero in for further analysis. While digital and traditional media both provide the space to spread propaganda and emotionally charged populist rhetoric, they both differ to an extent on the transmission of misinformation. This juxtaposition between digital and traditional media will reveal how social media gives populists the platform to circumvent the fact-checking filters of traditional media in order to spread misinformation and not be directly countered with their propaganda and emotionally charged populist rhetoric.

Bolsonaro launched a smear campaign on social media using a combination of disinformation and propaganda tactics to link Haddad with the gay kit that he claimed targeted Brazilian school children in an effort to tarnish Haddad’s image ahead of the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. In his Instagram posts dated August 31, 2017, August 28, 2018, August 30, 2018, and October 25, 2018, Bolsonaro accused Haddad of

⁴²⁵ McKenna, “15 Nelson Mandela Quotes.”

creating the so-called gay kit, which he claimed was distributed to elementary school libraries throughout Brazil with the aim of sexualizing and sodomizing children, all of which Bolsonaro further claimed was being covered up by both the media giant O Globo and Haddad himself.⁴²⁶ As already discussed the AI algorithms that power social media platforms such as Instagram allowed Bolsonaro to micro-target the segment of the Brazilian electorate that is composed of social media users, forming from this segment an affective public. Hence, these Instagram posts that Bolsonaro shared with his followers spread disinformation and propaganda to cast his rival Haddad as a radical and himself as the only viable alternative for the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. However, when Bolsonaro was asked directly by a female participant of the television show *Chega Mais* what he had to say about the gay kit being used as educational material to end prejudice in schools, he responded by agreeing that the gay kit was used to combat homophobia starting with 6-year-old children and that the gay kit was composed of short films.⁴²⁷ Ergo, juxtaposing this declaration on the TV show *Chega Mais* with what he stated on his Instagram account, Bolsonaro gives two different versions of what the gay kit is. On his Instagram account, Bolsonaro states that the gay kit consisted of a pornographic book distributed to elementary schools in order to corrupt children by sexualizing and sodomizing them. However, on the TV show *Chega Mais*, Bolsonaro states that the gay kit consisted of short films that were used to combat homophobia in school. Thus, one of Bolsonaro's versions of the gay kit must be true, while the other would by corollary be false. Bolsonaro appeared on the TV show *Chega Mais* and was asked to comment on the

⁴²⁶ Bolsonaro, "Prefeito, de origen indígena"; Bolsonaro, "Um dos livros"; Bolsonaro, "Jornal O Globo"; Bolsonaro, "O PT É O BRASIL!"

⁴²⁷ Claudiney Rafael, "Ditadura não foi golpe militar."

gay kit by the female participant in 2015, years before he declared his candidacy to clinch the Brazilian presidency in 2018. Also, this was years before Haddad crystallized as his main rival for that election. Ergo, Bolsonaro didn't then have a reason to falsely accuse Haddad of sexualizing and sodomizing children via the gay kit as he did several years later. The juxtaposition of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts and his appearance on the TV show *Chega Mais* also reveals the different affective publics that were formed for each medium. While Bolsonaro can mold to his liking the affective public that forms around his social media accounts without being countered for his disinformation and propaganda, this isn't the case with traditional media like television, where his claims can be directly countered and exposed as lies.

During the course of the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, Bolsonaro's campaign was accused of benefitting from the use of AI bots, which he tried to deflect by ridiculing this accusation and playing on the ignorance of his followers. The Instagram post he shared on April 26, 2018, was Bolsonaro's attempt to firehose the truth regarding the use of AI bots that gave his campaign the necessary propulsion needed to clinch the election.⁴²⁸ In the digital ethnography section of this thesis, I focused in depth on this Instagram post, arguing how Bolsonaro was firing back at Brazil's leading weekly publication *Veja* for the publishing of the article that exposed his campaign's use of AI bots that ended up giving him an unfair advantage, ultimately propelling him to victory in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race.

Bolsonaro didn't just firehose *Veja*'s claims on Instagram though, he also took to YouTube to fight back with his distorted version of reality. On his YouTube channel,

⁴²⁸ Bolsonaro, "ROBÔS COM INTELIGÊNCIA ARTIFICIAL."

Bolsonaro uploaded a video on April 21, 2018, a few days before posting on Instagram, in which he holds up a copy of the magazine *Veja* and reads from the cover “ELEIÇÕES: Robôs e perfis falsos impulsionam a campanha de Bolsonaro na internet,” translated from Portuguese into English this means “ELECTIONS: Robots and fake profiles propel Bolsonaro’s campaign on the Internet.”⁴²⁹ The headline is one of several on the cover of that issue of the magazine, while it doesn’t take up the majority of the cover, it is featured prominently on the upper right and it also features a small-sized photo of Bolsonaro himself. In the video, Bolsonaro wears glasses and a black t-shirt with a white Nike swoosh logo on the upper left of the t-shirt, plus he also has his hair uncombed. So, spectropolitically, Bolsonaro is transmitting two messages. First, besides wearing glasses to read the magazine, they serve symbolically to assert that Bolsonaro is the professional authority and that what he is saying about *Veja*’s article about him is not only important but also true. Second, the Nike t-shirt and his uncombed hair not only capture Bolsonaro’s casual appearance while recording the video, but also serve to symbolically amplify his claim that *Veja*’s article attacking his campaign is not to be taken seriously. This dual message is also evident in the title of the video “REVISTA VEJA: Bolsonaro usa robôs de última geração para obter sucesso na internet. kkk,” which translates from Portuguese into English as “MAGAZINE VEJA: Bolsonaro uses the latest generation of robots to obtain success on the Internet. kkk.” The title of the video is important not only because in it Bolsonaro explains what the video is about, but more importantly he uses it to fire back with ridicule at *Veja*’s claim that his campaign used the latest generation of robots to obtain success on the internet and as a consequence had an unfair edge in the

⁴²⁹ Bolsonaro, “REVISTA VEJA: Bolsonaro usa robôs.”

2018 Brazilian presidential race. As the video progresses, Bolsonaro reads the *Veja* article itself emphasizing that it declares that there are traces of external interference in his digital mobilization when comparing it to Trump's 2016 election and that his work on the Internet can only be detected by using the latest generation of robots with artificial intelligence. Bolsonaro counters by claiming that his digital mobilization is based on truth and later ends the video by affirming that he has the Brazilian people on his side.

The affective public that was formed by viewing his YouTube video rant against *Veja's* article is psychopolitically coerced into taking his stance with regards to the claims raised. While some of Bolsonaro's YouTube followers can also be his Instagram followers, it seems likely that not everyone is. Therefore, once seeded on his social media accounts, the disinformation about the article pollinates in the digital ecosystem and is able to reach a wider audience, eventually moving from the digital public square to the physical public square. Ergo, Bolsonaro's digital strategy allowed him not only to firehose the claims raised by the article but also to form affective publics on both platforms (Instagram and YouTube), leaving them to connect the dots and assume that what *Veja* referred to as the AI bots that helped propelled Bolsonaro's campaign were the sentient robots from science fiction. Hence, by corollary, as implied by Bolsonaro, *Veja* was attacking his followers by labelling them robots.

As put under the limelight earlier in this thesis, a group of Bolsonaro's followers recorded themselves ridiculing *Veja's* claim that his 2018 campaign was propelled via the use of AI bots, since they believed *Veja* was alluding to robots as portrayed in science fiction and that it was referring to Bolsonaro's followers as robots according to this meaning. The people in the video, who are all presumed to be Bolsonaro's followers and

likely ended up voting for him in the election, are seen marching mechanically one by one, moving in a robotic manner, and saying in a robotic-sounding voice that they're Bolsonaro's robots.⁴³⁰ Through his Instagram and YouTube accounts, Bolsonaro was able to control the narrative and turn the tables against the media, in this case firehosing *Veja*'s claim that his campaign was using AI bots and thus had an unfair advantage in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race by distorting the meaning of the word robot in the sense that *Veja* was actually using in the article. As a consequence, he was able to turn his followers into zombies that not only appeared to believe what his take on the magazine's meaning of the word robot was, but also acted through mockery in response to their assumption that they were being labelled as robots by merely being his followers. Nevertheless, behind the smokescreen of duplicity, Bolsonaro was merely pulling their psychopolitical strings to think and act like he wanted them to as part of his affective public.

Bolsonaro was able to distort the meaning of the word robot from what the *Veja* article actually meant through his Instagram post and YouTube video that we have already analyzed, since he controlled the narrative on both platforms. However, by analyzing the article itself, the article's intended meaning of the word robot is revealed. The article, titled "*O real e o imaginário*," translated from Portuguese into English, "The real and the imaginary," claims that Bolsonaro was catapulted from being a relatively obscure politician to a giant in the social media ecosystem and thus positioned himself as the frontrunner in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race.⁴³¹ The article claims that

⁴³⁰ BLOG DO PIVA CANTIZANI, "EU SOU ROBÔ."

⁴³¹ Rangel, Castro, and Mattos, "O real e o imaginário."

Bolsonaro sought the services of a company that specialized in polishing the image of politicians on the Internet, but that the company refused to help him since it was already helping other candidates. Then, the article goes on to affirm that research, undertaken by Exata Inteligência em Comunicação Digital for *Veja*, showed a year before the election that there was a plan set in motion to propel Bolsonaro's popularity in the digital ecosystem with an army of fake profiles, robots, and propagandists working on his behalf. Put under the spotlight was the Twitter profile of Will Bolsonaro (@dr4_will), who was the most active profile analyzed by the survey conducted by Exata, posting 549 times between September 7 and October 7, 2017 (averaging eighteen posts per day). However, Will Bolsonaro's Twitter profile (@dr4_will) had the Brazilian flag with captions in favor of Bolsonaro as his profile picture, instead of an actual photo of a human user, plus also lacking any information regarding the user who runs the profile. This in turn leaves the reader wondering if there's an actual person behind the Twitter profile of Will Bolsonaro (@dr4_will)? Bolsonaro's meteoric rise in the social media ecosystem and positioning as the frontrunner in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race was due to external interference that showed parallels with Trump's own rapid rise on social media and positioning to beat the odds during the 2016 American presidential race. While the article points out that it is not known whether Bolsonaro is the mastermind behind a digital campaign to increase his clout on social media exponentially, he has undoubtedly benefitted from having this army of fake profiles, propagandists and AI bots working on his behalf to increase his followers on social media. Bolsonaro himself told *Veja*, "Everything ours is spontaneous, but there are many people that work for me, that trust

me. I don't know 99% of them.”⁴³² Considering how Bolsonaro sought the services of a company to increase his clout in the digital ecosystem even though the company mentioned in the article refused, it seems plausible that he or someone in his entourage was able to secure the help of another one that was willing. Bolsonaro's reply to *Veja* regarding his increase in popularity on social media also leaves it open ended whether or not there was a concerted infiltration on his behalf strategized by him or someone in his campaign. What is certain though, as evidenced by the survey undertaken by Exata on *Veja's* behalf, is that Bolsonaro's meteoric rise on social media and positioning as the frontrunner in the 2018 Brazilian presidential race was in part due to the army of fake profiles, propagandists and AI bots that were dispatched on his behalf. According to researcher Sergio Denicoli, this army interfered in the electoral process by manipulating public opinion on social media surreptitiously, becoming part of the conversation that moves from the digital public square to the physical public square, and ultimately translating to electoral victories at the ballot box.⁴³³ He goes on to say that the latest generation of robots, the AI bots that are part of this army, resemble more and more the organic profiles of real people and that they can only be detected using AI itself. Therefore, when juxtaposing this meaning of the word robot with what Bolsonaro implied *Veja* meant and made his affective public believe via his Instagram and YouTube accounts, it becomes evident that he was merely firehosing *Veja's* intended meaning of the word robot in order to pit his followers against the magazine and discredit the claims raised by the article.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

Besides the investigative journalism done by *Veja* to uncover the intricate nexus between AI and populism via the mobilization of a digital army of fake profiles, propagandists and AI bots working to increase Bolsonaro's popularity on Twitter, *Folha de São Paulo* and the BBC reported on a parallel digital mobilization that occurred in favor of Bolsonaro on WhatsApp. *Folha de São Paulo* reported that evidence found from research conducted by the Instituto de Tecnologia e Sociedade do Rio (ITS), collaborating with MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), indicated that companies bought packets of rapid-firing messages targeting the Workers' Party and Bolsonaro's main election rival Haddad on WhatsApp, benefitting Bolsonaro during the 2018 Brazilian presidential race.⁴³⁴ So, not only was there external interference detected on Twitter, but also on WhatsApp. Thus, stepping back to obtain a telescopic view, there appears to be a digital playbook being used to uneven the political playing field in the digital space, principally on social media, in favor of Bolsonaro. According to *Folha de São Paulo*, the money spent on WhatsApp to rapid-fire messages reached R\$12 million (Brazilian reals), in essence meaning that it was an undeclared donation for Bolsonaro's campaign, which is not only illegal but also an electoral crime in the country.⁴³⁵ As stated earlier in this thesis, this money came from Brazil's conservative elites, who owned the companies that engaged in the illegal electoral acts, since they saw Haddad and further Workers' Party rule as a threat to their political power and economic hegemony. The BBC reported that Stilingue (a Brazilian AI company) and Cambridge Analytica, which arrived in Brazil in 2017 and announced a partnership with the Brazilian company A

⁴³⁴ Mena, "Estudo aponta para automação."

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

Ponte Estratégia in March 2017, both used AI software that's able to read texts in Portuguese in order to sweep the internet and data mine the profiles of Brazilian users.⁴³⁶ Stilingue and Cambridge Analytica could then micro-target them with emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda, with the ultimate aim being that they be manipulated to vote for a particular candidate.⁴³⁷ So, over a year before the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, the BBC reported on the groundwork being laid down for digital populism's latest domino to fall. In Brazil, WhatsApp grew in popularity to such gigantic proportions, that it was used as an alternative to TV and radio during the 2018 elections, according to the BBC.⁴³⁸ Hence, the millions spent on WhatsApp to rapid fire content targeting Haddad in favor of Bolsonaro, as reported by *Folha de São Paulo*, was done since WhatsApp provided a sizable audience comparable to TV and radio, the difference being that as stated earlier in this thesis, WhatsApp is a candyland of misinformation that makes it easier to micro-target and manipulate people. Additionally, *Folha de São Paulo* reported that Tecnologia e Sociedade do Rio (ITS) and MIT researchers found evidence of users conspiring together through an elaborate coordination web to rapid fire messages within WhatsApp groups via automation, whether bots (purely AI) or cyborgs (users who use a certain level of autonomous AI).⁴³⁹ Ergo, besides the evidence found by the research conducted on Twitter by Exata Inteligência em Comunicação Digital for *Veja*, this other research undertaken on

⁴³⁶ Veras Mota, "Robôs e 'big data'."

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Mena, "Estudo aponta para automação."

WhatsApp by Tecnologia e Sociedade do Rio (ITS) in collaboration with MIT, as reported by *Folha de São Paulo*, also indicated external interference and the use of bots. In his Instagram post and YouTube video we have analyzed earlier in this thesis, Bolsonaro warped the meaning of bot, or robot, intended by *Veja*, in order to conjure up the sentient machines depicted in science fiction and imply that his followers were being labelled as such by the magazine, aiming to discredit the claims raised against him in the article he ranted against. To prevent such misunderstandings, the BBC took the extra step to educate their readership by explaining that bots are AI tools used to manipulate public opinion, through their expressing of political views and their interaction with humans on social media, spreading disinformation undetected.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the BBC reported that these AI bots are able to map the profiles of voters and group them according to their emotions – fears, dreams, and ambitions.⁴⁴¹ Therefore, the current wave of populism has adapted to the new reality of emotional capitalism, under which emotions are commodified and consumed, by sharpening its digital tools to include AI bots that surreptitiously penetrate the psyche of netizens and manipulate their emotions for political gains, in the process metamorphosing into digital populism.

Juxtaposing Bolsonaro's Instagram post and YouTube video to the *Veja*, *Folha de São Paulo*, and BBC news articles, as analyzed in this section of the chapter, highlights the different affective publics that formed around each. The former allowed Bolsonaro to control the narrative since he was the creator of the content, while the latter didn't. Ergo, this was the reason why Bolsonaro misinformed the affective public that formed around

⁴⁴⁰ Veras Mota, "Robôs e 'big data'."

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

his social media accounts regarding *Veja*'s intended meaning of the word robot (bot), while the traditional media sources gave the affective publics that formed around each of them a lucid explanation of what they meant by using the word bot.

As a way to smooth his polemical image and broaden the appeal of his brand of populism that is socio-politically divisive and venerates the 1964 military coup, Bolsonaro also used disinformation and propaganda tactics to cast the 1964-1985 military dictatorship in a more positive light ahead of the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. His Instagram posts from March 31, 2017, and July 28, 2017, were both attempts to rewrite history by declaring the 1964 military coup d'état as an existential necessity for Brazil in order to stop the country from becoming the latest domino to fall to communism.⁴⁴² The individual members of the affective public that was directly receptive to these Instagram posts were mostly his followers on Instagram, but the disinformation and propaganda Bolsonaro emitted regarding the 1964 military coup spread to other social media platforms, eventually moving from the digital public square to the physical public square.

Juxtaposing Bolsonaro's two Instagram posts defending the 1964 military coup to other media reveals not only the different affective publics formed around each, but also a change in the messaging aimed at each affective public. When interviewed by nine journalists on Globo News (from TV Globo), weeks before the 2018 election, Bolsonaro took a more cautious tone. He was asked by Miriam Leitão (a Globo News journalist) what risk there was in a government of his for those acts from the past that he doesn't consider dictatorial to repeat themselves? Bolsonaro responded by affirming that there

⁴⁴² Bolsonaro, "1964: a verdade tortura!"; Bolsonaro, "A verdade jamais será sufocada."

was zero risk, zero, that it was a different moment, a different era what occurred then.⁴⁴³

With a few weeks remaining for the October general election, Bolsonaro was less combative and took on a more moderate tone when expressing his views on the 1964 military coup. Besides not wanting to jeopardize his chances of emerging victorious in the then upcoming 2018 election by appearing too extreme to TV Globo's audience, Bolsonaro was also concealing his real feelings regarding the 1964-1985 Brazilian military dictatorship since the panel of nine journalists interviewing him could counter his distorted version of reality regarding the dictatorship's past actions.

On the TV show *Chega Mais*, Bolsonaro was asked by a female participant if he believed that only the return of the military to power would help Brazil's political and economic situation? He replied that this was what the people were clamoring for on the streets, the return of that era's values, that it was a completely different Brazil from the one seen today, that there were human rights during the military dictatorship and that it wasn't a military coup, since the national congress removed President João Goulart from power on April 2, 1964.⁴⁴⁴ Interestingly, Bolsonaro expressed his feelings regarding the dictatorship with less reservations, since this was years before he was running for president in 2018 and also because his audience was different than when he was interviewed on Globo News, plus the person who asked him the question wasn't a journalist but rather an ordinary citizen participating on the TV show *Chega Mais*. Therefore, this time, Bolsonaro was more candid in his reply and less reserved in terms of the disinformation and propaganda he said on TV. Although he tried to rewrite history by

⁴⁴³ Poder360, "Jair Bolsonaro cita apoio."

⁴⁴⁴ Claudiney Rafael, "'Ditadura não foi golpe militar.'"

implying that since the national congress officially removed President Goulart from power on April 2, 1964, the events preceding were not a military coup, his Instagram posts from March 31, 2017, and July 28, 2017, both acknowledge that the military did commit a coup in order to stop the country's fall to communism.⁴⁴⁵ Hence, juxtaposed to these two Instagram posts, where Bolsonaro controlled the narrative without being fact-checked, what he said on TV was dishonest in that he hid his actual feelings regarding the 1964 military coup on Globo News and cherry-picked facts regarding the coup to then firehose what occurred during the military dictatorship on the TV show *Chega Mais*.

When Bolsonaro was interviewed by Jair Marchesini on the TV show *Câmera Aberta*, on TV Bandeirantes, in 1999, he spoke his raw thoughts and expressed his raw feelings, without any reservations and in a combative tone, regarding carrying out a follow-up coup to the 1964 military coup. Marchesini asked Bolsonaro if he would close the national congress if he were president of the republic today? Bolsonaro replied, "Without a doubt, I would carry out the coup the same day, the same day."⁴⁴⁶ In this TV appearance, Bolsonaro wasn't masquerading as a more moderate and less extreme politician, or hiding his feelings vis-à-vis the 1964 coup, or firehosing history by cherry-picking facts about the dictatorship, but was rather honest with what he would do to the country's democratic institutions if he were Brazil's president, at a time when he wasn't. Bolsonaro's autocratic nature was further revealed when he told Marchesini, "You won't change nothing in this country via voting, absolutely nothing. Unfortunately, it will only change when we hurl ourselves into a civil war... If some innocent people will die, that's

⁴⁴⁵ Bolsonaro, "1964: a verdade tortura!"; Bolsonaro, "A verdade jamais será sufocada."

⁴⁴⁶ Subv ertase, "Bolsonaro: 'Tortura.'"

all right.”⁴⁴⁷ As already stated, Bolsonaro was interviewed by Marchesini on the TV show *Câmera Aberta*, on TV Bandeirantes, in 1999. So, almost two decades before the 2018 Brazilian presidential race, he had no need to masquerade his corrosive populist views or firehose Brazil’s past, specifically the 1964-1985 military dictatorship era. Thus, his inclination to autocracy and despotism was revealed in all its rawness and brutal honesty during this interview on TV. Ergo, when Bolsonaro told journalists upon leaving the Palácio da Alvorada, on the morning of April 20, 2020, that he was against the end of democracy, that democracy and freedom is what they can expect from him above all else, he was merely deflecting criticism for his participation in an act that championed a new military intervention in the country, as reported by *Folha de São Paulo*.⁴⁴⁸ However, moments later he told the journalists that autocrats generally conspire to gain power, but that he was already in power, that he was already the President of the Brazilian republic, adding “I am, really, the constitution.”⁴⁴⁹ Nevertheless, history has shown that even Hitler and Mussolini came to power via democratic institutions, with the former being appointed German chancellor during the waning days of the Weimar Republic in 1933, and the latter being appointed prime minister of the Kingdom of Italy, at the time a constitutional monarchy, in 1922. Although, in hindsight, the democratic institutions of Weimar Germany and the Kingdom of Italy were weak, they were nonetheless considered democratic before being derailed to autocracy. Ergo, Bolsonaro’s assertion that he wouldn’t become an autocrat because he already gained power democratically and

⁴⁴⁷ Bolsonaro por ele mesmo, “GUERRA CIVIL NO BRASIL.”

⁴⁴⁸ Carvalho, “Eu sou a Constituição.”

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

was now Brazil's president, doesn't mean that he doesn't harbor autocratic impulses as evinced by juxtaposing his Instagram posts to his television appearances on Globo News, plus the TV shows *Chega Mais* and *Câmera Aberta*. Further revealing Bolsonaro's draconian aspirations was his Orwellian doublethink, stating that he stood for democracy and freedom, while at the same time echoing Louis XIV's words "L'État c'est moi," French for "I am the state," with his own declaration "Eu sou, realmente, a constituição," Portuguese for "I am, really, the constitution."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁵⁰ Rowen, "L'État c'est à moi," 83; Carvalho, "Eu sou a Constituição"; UOL, "EU SOU A CONSTITUIÇÃO."

Chapter 8: Conclusion

“Real patriotism reconciles the homeland with humanity.” – Joaquim Nabuco, a Brazilian writer, diplomat, and leader in Brazil’s abolitionist movement.⁴⁵¹

The main puzzle I sought to solve in this thesis was how did President Bolsonaro emerge victorious from Brazil’s 2018 election in a country lauded as a racial democracy, despite his divisive populist rhetoric? To solve this puzzle, it was imperative to investigate the research problem that it sparked: the danger posed by Bolsonaro’s victory to Brazil’s *Nova República* (New Republic). Ergo, it was necessary to deconstruct this danger into the two main forces of AI and populism, to then probe how their dangerous synchronicity propelled Bolsonaro to victory, ultimately leading to the existential threat to not only specifically Brazil’s *Nova República* (New Republic) and the Amazon, but generally to democracy and the biosphere. This puzzle was extremely challenging to solve since there are many intertwining intricacies between AI and populism. Therefore, I engaged in a contextual analysis, a digital ethnography, and a juxtaposition between traditional and digital media in order to arrive at an answer.

My thesis analysis indicates that Bolsonaro emerged victorious from the 2018 Brazilian presidential race since AI and populism were able to take advantage of weaknesses in Brazilian society arising from the polarizing command-obey societal structure, inherited from the country’s violent history, in particular the sugar plantation era. The synchrony of AI and populism proved so dangerous because together they were

⁴⁵¹ Nabuco, *O Abolicionismo*, 96.

able to exploit these weaknesses in Brazilian society in the digital universe, in particular in the social media ecosystem, so that once a crack was made, the illusion of a racial democracy came shattering down, revealing a polarized state that is autocratic at its core, reflective of the verticalization of power and race relations. The polarization in the digital public square spilled over to the physical public square, bitterly dividing Brazilian society in the lead-up to the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. Ultimately, the combination of AI and populism exploited weaknesses in Brazilian society which lead to the euphoric victory of Bolsonaro on October 28, whose power as president of Brazil poses an existential threat to specifically the *Nova República* (New Republic) and the Amazon rainforest, but generally to democracy and the environment.

My analysis examined how the social media ecosystem, which is run by AI algorithms, not only amplifies the geographic reach of populist leaders, but also allows them to control the narrative. The digital ethnography zeroed in on a selected number of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts, twenty to be precise, in order to analyze how Bolsonaro used this platform to spread disinformation, propaganda, and emotionally charged populist rhetoric. The juxtaposition of his twenty Instagram posts to the selected traditional media sources sharpened the extent to which Bolsonaro was able to circumvent the fact-checking filters of traditional media by spritzing disinformation on social media without being countered with facts. Thus, the juxtaposition brought into focus the gay kit fabrication against Bolsonaro's 2018 election rival Haddad, Bolsonaro's distortion of the meaning of the word robot to discredit the accusation that his campaign benefitted from the use of AI bots, and the rewriting of history in order to justify the 1964

military coup and the two-decade-long brutal dictatorship that followed, which Bolsonaro venerates and considers a blueprint for the Brazilian state.

What contributions can be uncovered from my work on the danger posed by the convergence of AI and populism during Brazil's 2018 presidential race? The field of international studies is interdisciplinary, drawing on several bodies of theory to explain a world with tangled intricate connections. Therefore, in my research, I drew on different bodies of theory to untangle and analyze these connections as it relates to my thesis topic. I did so by conducting research that spanned two analytical domains: AI and populism. My analysis traced the antecedents to the current wave of populism that also contributed elements to its essence, before examining how populism has evolved in order to adapt to the digital era, metamorphosing into digital populism. Digital populism uses social media (including social media sites and social media apps) powered by AI algorithms, to polarize people in the digital public square, which then cascades and polarizes them in the physical public square as well, for political gain in elections. Algorithmic filtering, firehosing, and astroturfing are some of the psychopolitical and spectropolitical methods my research found that digital populism uses to exploit and exacerbate social divisions in the digital ecosystem in order to form affective publics that are receptive to the emotionally charged populist rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda spritzed by digital populists online. My research found that Bolsonaro's 2018 blitz to election victory sent shockwaves around the world due to the shattering of the illusion casted by tropical romanticism, which imagined Brazil as a racial democracy, in order to hide the country's weaknesses in the form of socioeconomic inequality, political polarization, and intergenerational trauma arising from its violent history, all favoring the perpetual

hegemony of the conservative elites. Consequences highlighted in my analysis that arise from Bolsonaro's digital populist blitz to power in 2018 are the existential threats his presidency poses to Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic) and the Amazon rainforest at the microlevel, democracy (civilization) and the biosphere (survival of the human species) at the macrolevel.

This study had limitations. Because of the gigantic scale of the social media ecosystem, including both social media sites and social media apps, coupled with the constraints of time, I decided to focus on Bolsonaro's Instagram account for the digital ethnography, in particular twenty of his Instagram posts. Due to WhatsApp's encryption barriers, I found it impractical to put the pro-Bolsonaro content circulating there under the microscope. Hence, another reason why deciding to focus on Instagram was based on access practicality. Moreover, Instagram is mobile-centric just like WhatsApp, so selecting Instagram was a great choice since I would be analyzing a social media app that approximates WhatsApp in some aspects, but still isn't an impenetrable fortress to break into and study in. Due to time constraints, I also found it impractical to study comments, reactions, and media shared by netizens responding to Bolsonaro's Instagram posts. This was another reason why for temporal practicality, I just zeroed in on twenty of Bolsonaro's Instagram posts for the digital ethnography. Likewise, the gigantic scale of traditional media's scope, including print media and digital media, coupled with time constraints also limited my options for the juxtaposition between social media and traditional media. The social media that was juxtaposed to traditional media was Instagram, specifically the twenty Instagram posts from Bolsonaro's official account. What was difficult to select were the traditional media sources. Nevertheless, I made sure

that the traditional media sources I did select were not only from within Brazil, but also from abroad for a more balanced perspective.

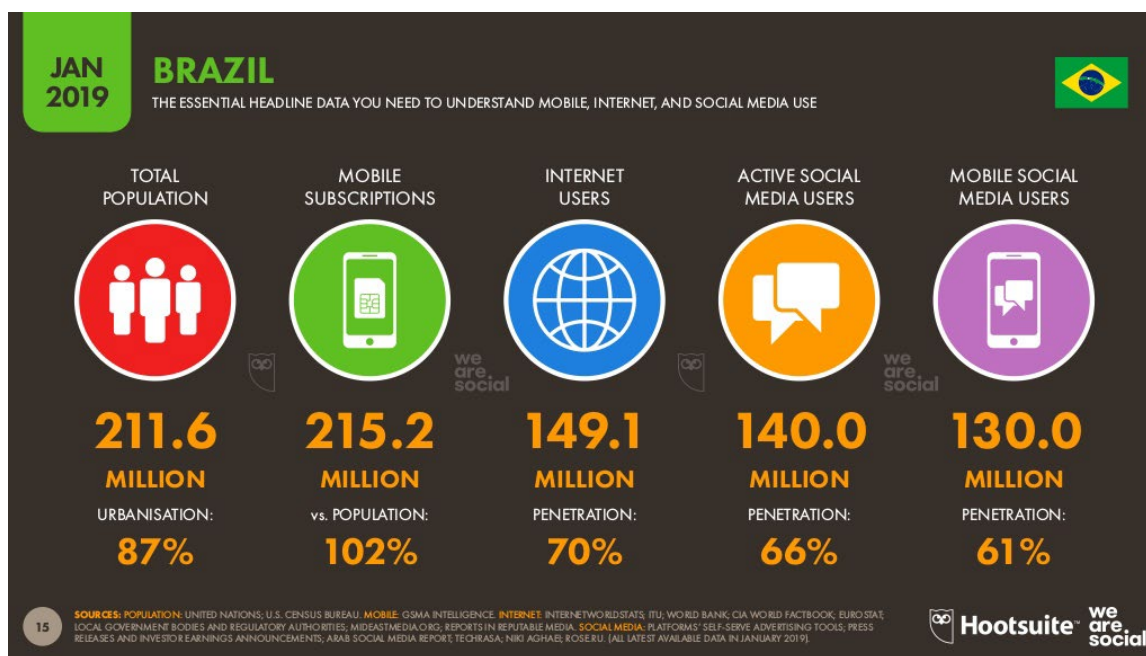
Having made theoretical contributions and indicated some of the limitations I had undertaking my research, I would like to pinpoint three promising areas of future work for research on the convergence of AI and populism: digital populism. First, an analysis of the comments, reactions, and media shared by social media users responding to the digital populist leader's posts. In the Brazilian 2018 presidential race context, this means analyzing the content response by netizens to Bolsonaro's social media posts. This will allow for a qualitative and quantitative study of the digital populist dynamics playing out in the affective publics that are formed around particular social media platforms. Second, future research should focus on alternative social media such as Parler, 4chan and Truth Social. As I was concluding my research, Parler and 4chan were notoriously reported on by the media due to the platform they provided for conspiracy theorists, racists, and the insurrectionists that stormed the United States Congress on January 6, 2021, in an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 American election that Trump lost. Whereas, Trump was banned from Twitter and other mainstream social media sites for having incited the January 6 insurrectionists, he subsequently launched his own social media app called Truth Social. While my research focused on mainstream social media, the prominence of alternative social media and the bigger threat they pose offers a tantalizing prospect for future research on digital populism. Third, while research will continue to focus on future elections around the world, where applicable, it should do so through a digital populist analytic framework to study how digital populism adapts to changing spatiotemporal dynamics. My thesis focused on the 2018 Brazilian presidential race. However, there are

many implications this race has had for not only Brazil but also for the world. Therefore, future research on the 2022 Brazilian presidential race should continue the analysis of digital populism, likewise future research on elections around the world involving populist candidates should do so through an analysis of digital populism as well.

Lastly, in the final analysis, the rolling of the dangerous dice of AI and populism may lead to the end of Brazil's *Nova República* (New Republic) and spell doom for the Amazon rainforest, or it may not, but it has undoubtedly already further weakened Brazil's wobbly democratic institutions and resulted in further deforestation of the Amazon. Instead of passive determinism, merely allowing digital populism to gamble with democracy and the environment, people should awaken from their political slumber. While the die has been cast and Brazil already crossed the digital Rubicon on October 28, 2018, the people can resist a dystopian future through the spark of knowledge and the will to action. Only by learning about the threat posed by digital populism to their freedom and potentially their existence, and by becoming politically awakened and civically active, can the people protect their essential human rights from the new leviathan.

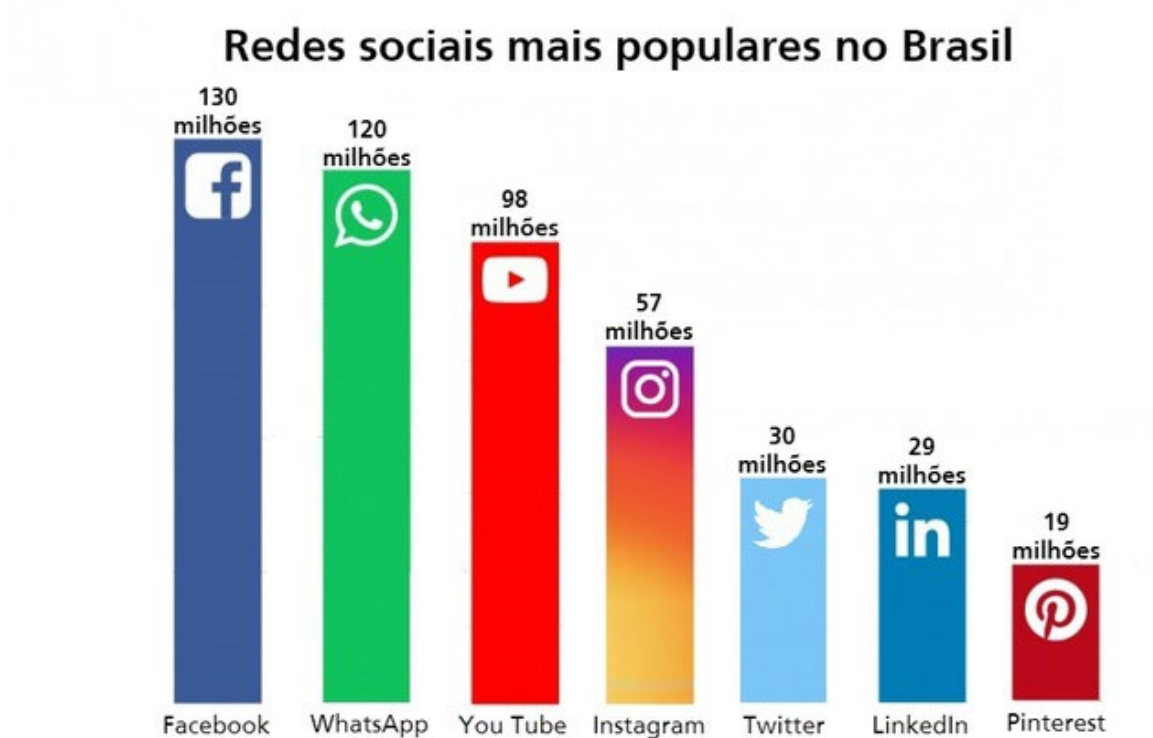
Appendix A: Figures

Figure 1: Social Media Use in Brazil by January 2019 ⁴⁵²



⁴⁵² Kemp, "Digital 2019: Brazil."

Figure 2: Most Popular Social Media in Brazil in 2018 ⁴⁵³



⁴⁵³ Diana, "Redes Sociais."

Figure 3: Instagram statistics in Brazil in 2019 ⁴⁵⁴



⁴⁵⁴ Priory Comunicação, “Redes Sociais no Brasil.”

Figure 4: Percent of population who use Instagram for news by country in 2020 ⁴⁵⁵



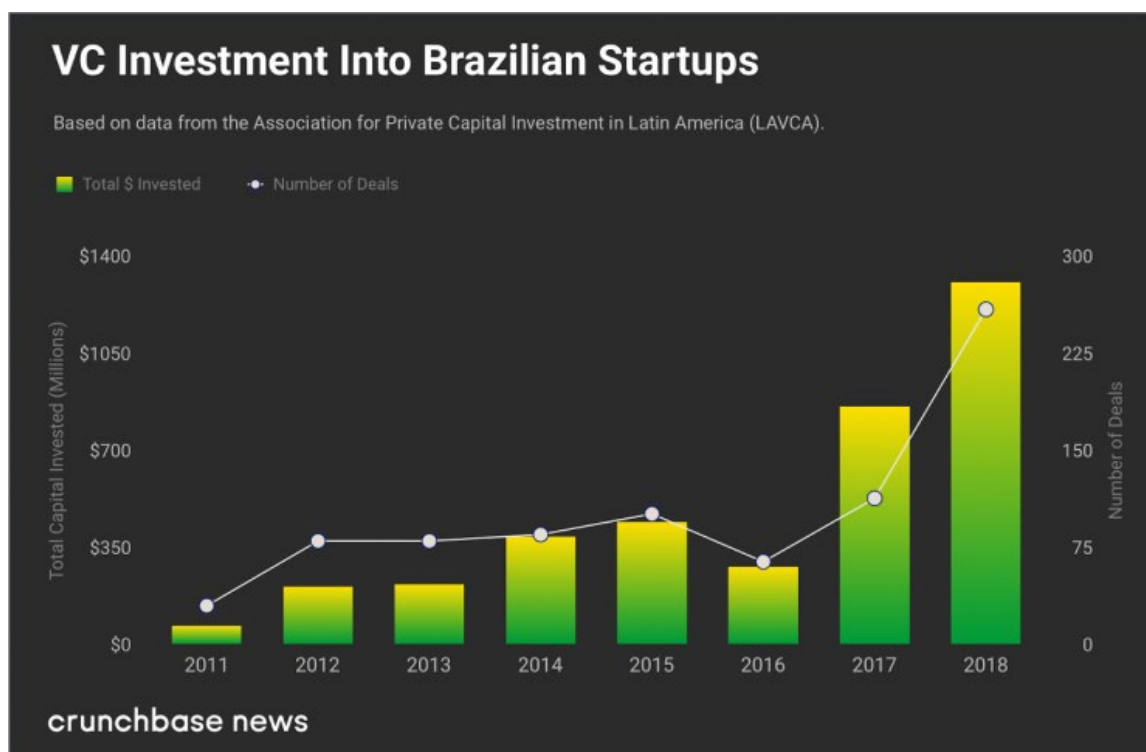
⁴⁵⁵ Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*, 30.

Figure 5: YouTube statistics in Brazil in 2019 ⁴⁵⁶



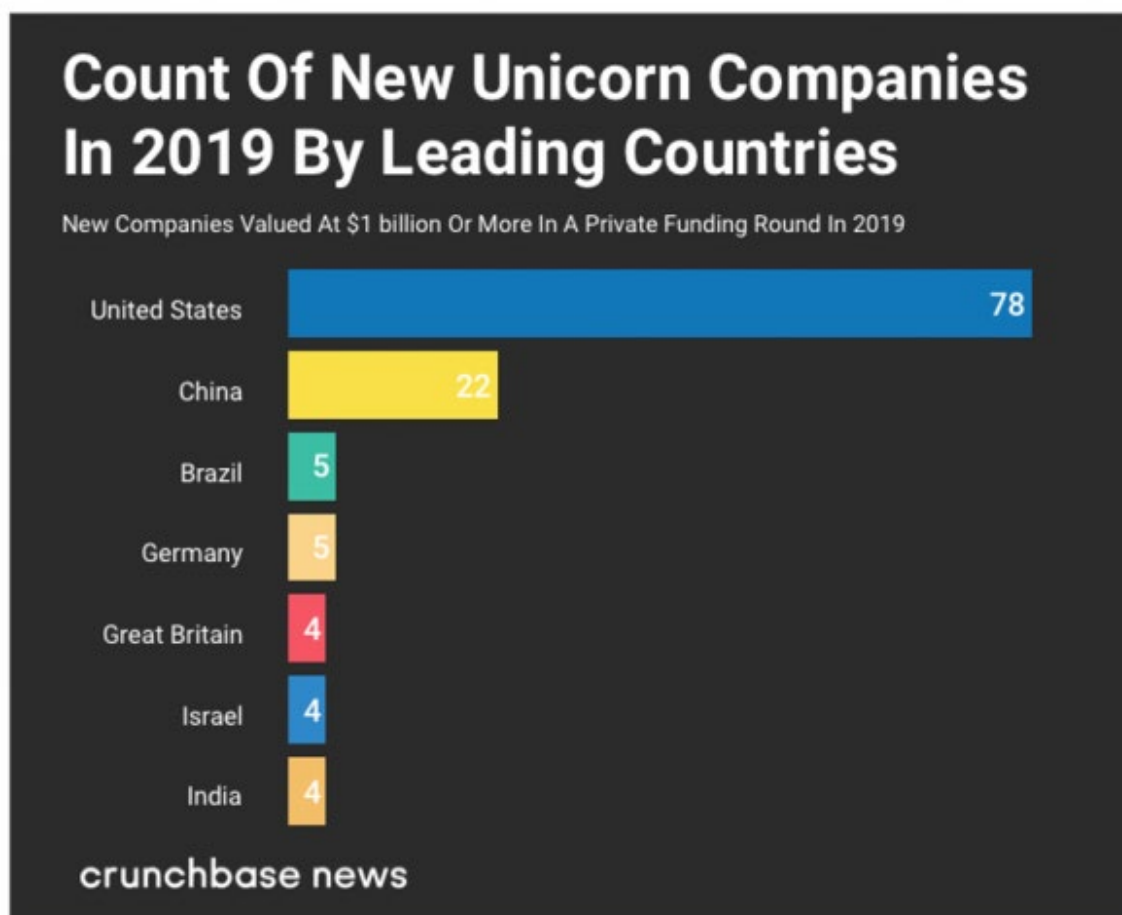
⁴⁵⁶ Priory Comunicação, “Redes Sociais no Brasil.”

Figure 6: Change in venture capital investment in Brazilian startups 2011-2018 ⁴⁵⁷



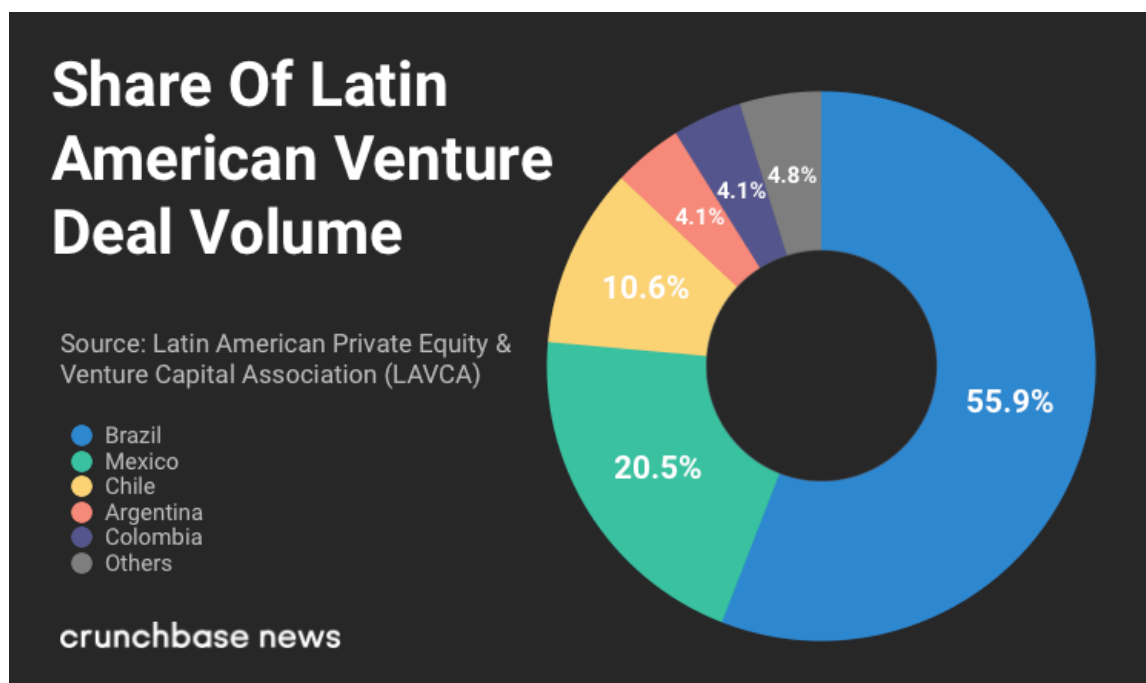
⁴⁵⁷ Azevedo, “Venture Funding in Brazil.”

Figure 7: Comparison of leading countries in new unicorn companies in 2019 ⁴⁵⁸



⁴⁵⁸ Teare, “The New Unicorns of 2019.”

Figure 8: Brazil's Share of Latin American venture deal volume in 2018 ⁴⁵⁹

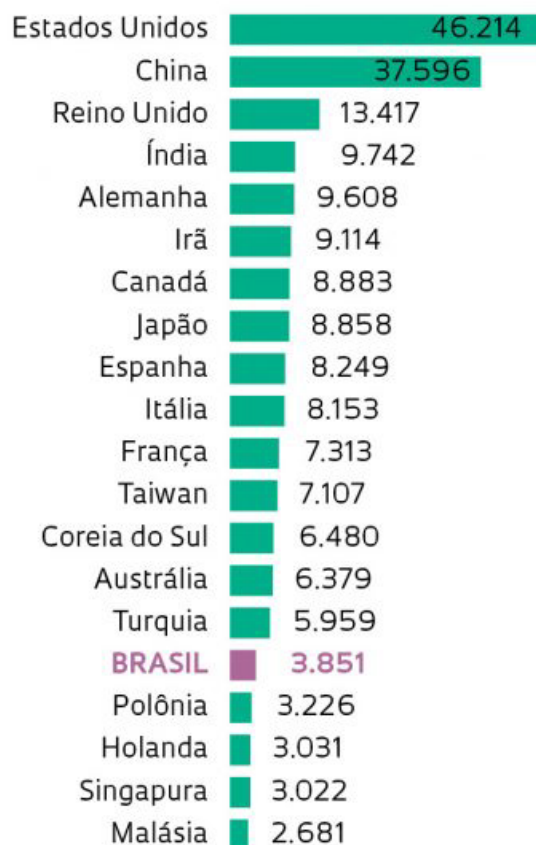


⁴⁵⁹ Azevedo, "Latin America Has 'Arrived.'"

Figure 9: Number of publications on topics tied to AI by country ⁴⁶⁰



Número de publicações por país
na base Web of Science sobre
tópicos ligados à pesquisa em
inteligência artificial*



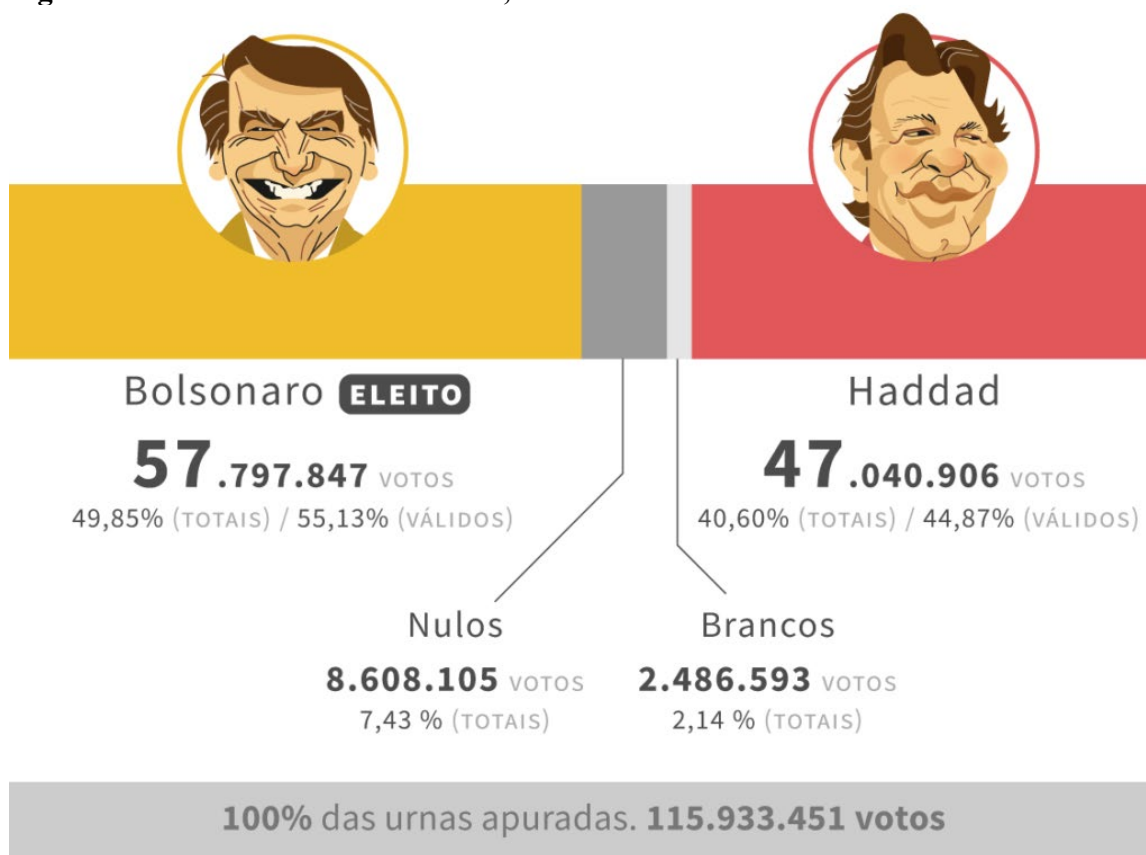
* Inteligência artificial, aprendizado de máquina, aprendizagem profunda e redes neurais

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⁴⁶⁰ Marques, “Quando a Ciência exige.”

Figure 10: Amazon Rainforest in Numbers ⁴⁶¹⁴⁶¹ Whitfield, "Amazon fires size latest."

Figure 11: Results of the October 28, 2018 Brazilian election ⁴⁶²



⁴⁶² *Gazeta do Povo*, “Mapa de presidente.”

Appendix B: Maps

Map 1: Brazil and its territories in the world ⁴⁶³



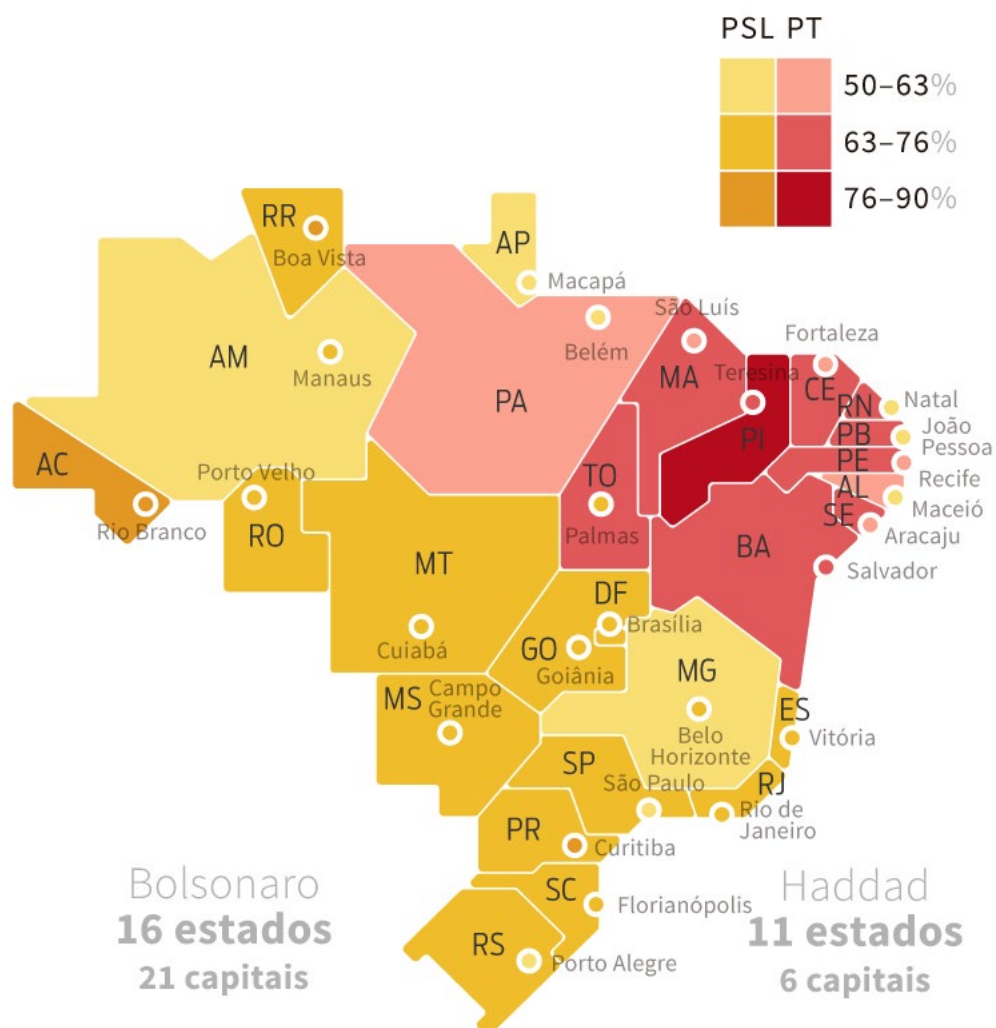
⁴⁶³ MapSof.net, “Brazilian Territories – Brazil maps.”

Map 2: Brazil's states, the state capitals, and other prominent cities ⁴⁶⁴



⁴⁶⁴ abc-distancias.com, “História dos estados do Brasil.”

Figure 3: October 28, 2018 Brazilian election results by state & state capital ⁴⁶⁵



⁴⁶⁵ *Gazeta do Povo*, “Mapa de presidente.”

Map 4: LGBT deaths in Brazil by state in 2018 ⁴⁶⁶



⁴⁶⁶ Gustavo and Rodrigues, "AL está entre os."

Map 5: Brazil's Blue Amazon ⁴⁶⁷

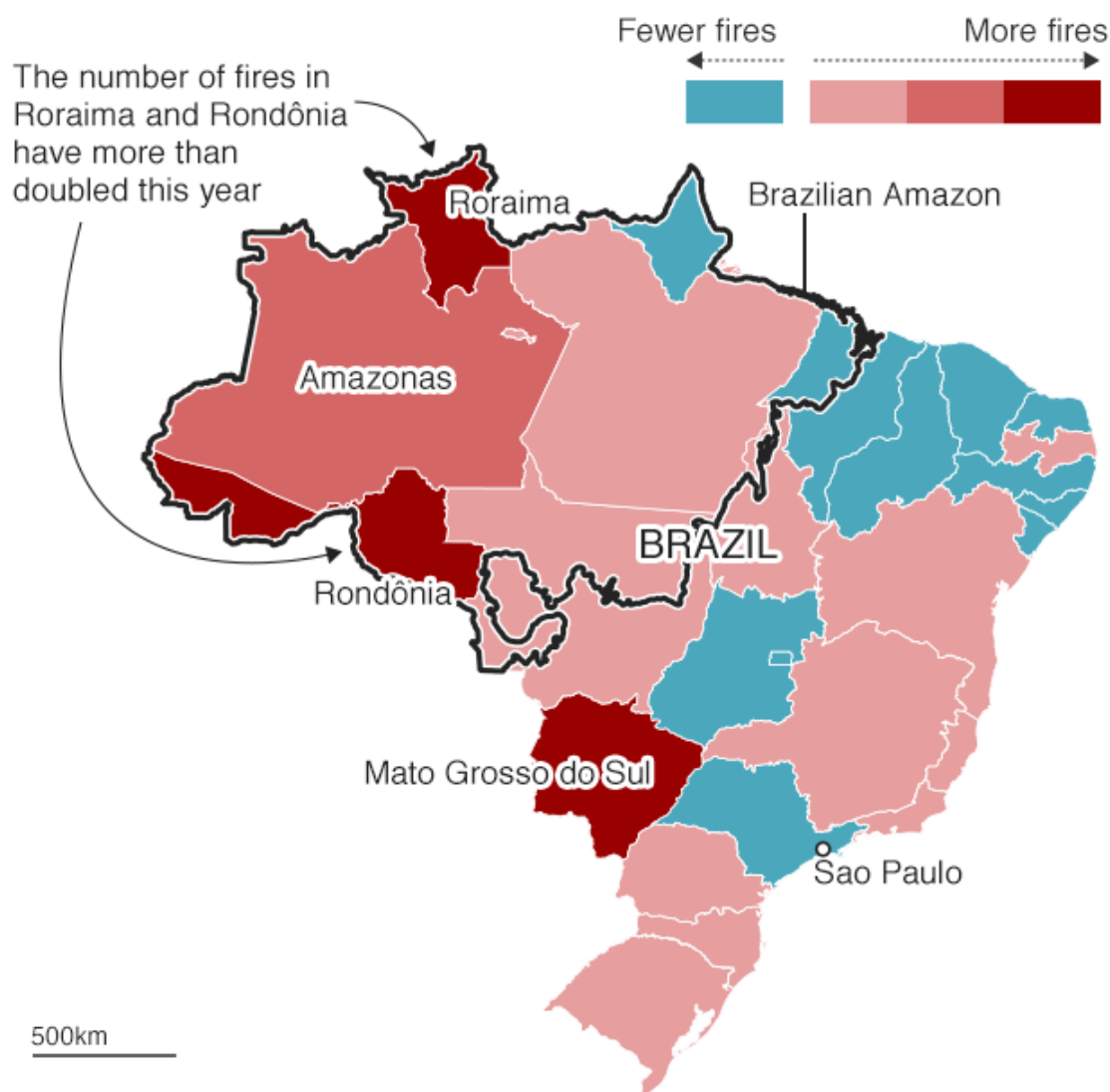


⁴⁶⁷ Thompson and Muggah, “Amazônia Azul.”

Map 6: Map Comparing Brazilian Amazon Fires in 2019 to 2015-2018 ⁴⁶⁸

More fires in the Brazilian Amazon this year

Percentage change in number of fires by state so far in 2019 compared with average over same period in 2015-2018



Source: National Institute for Space Research (Inpe)

BBC

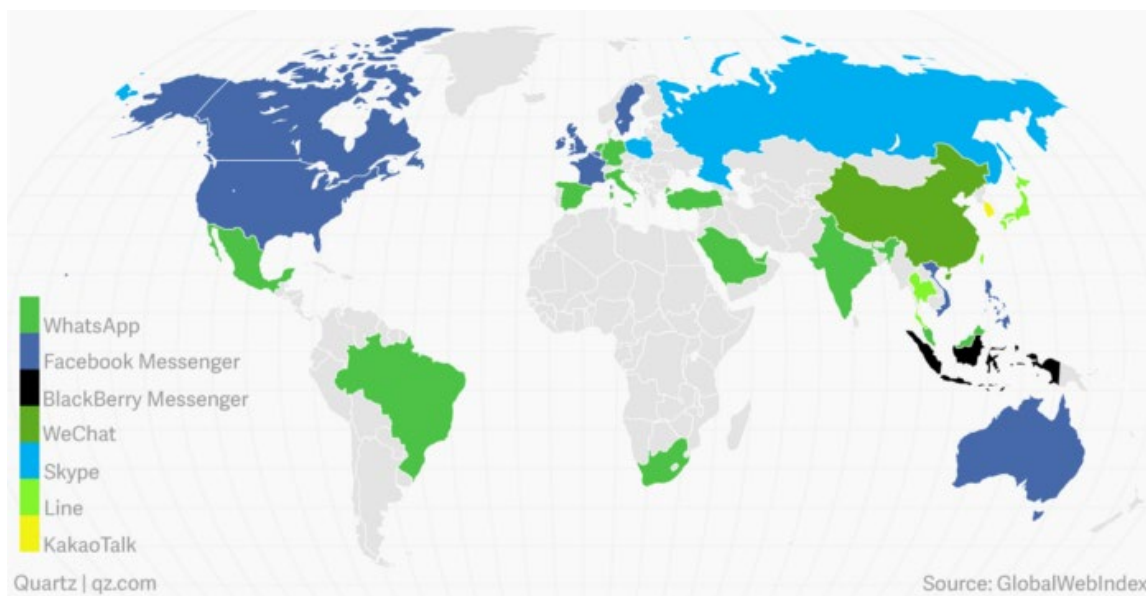
⁴⁶⁸ Rodgers et al., "The Amazon in Brazil is on fire."

Map 7: The Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) World ⁴⁶⁹



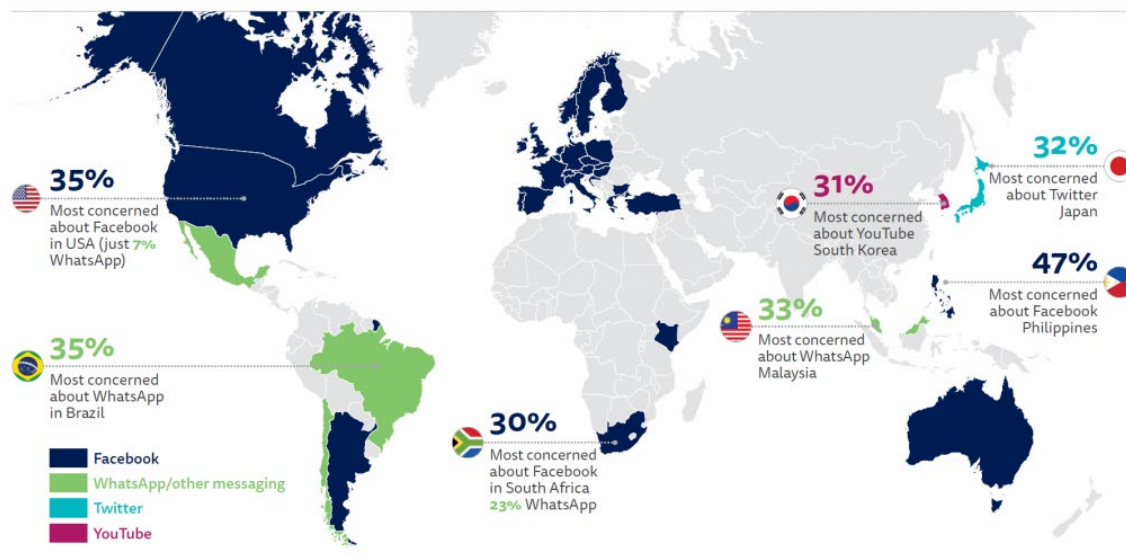
⁴⁶⁹ Goucha Soares, “Português, 3ª língua.”

Map 8: Most popular messaging app. by country ⁴⁷⁰



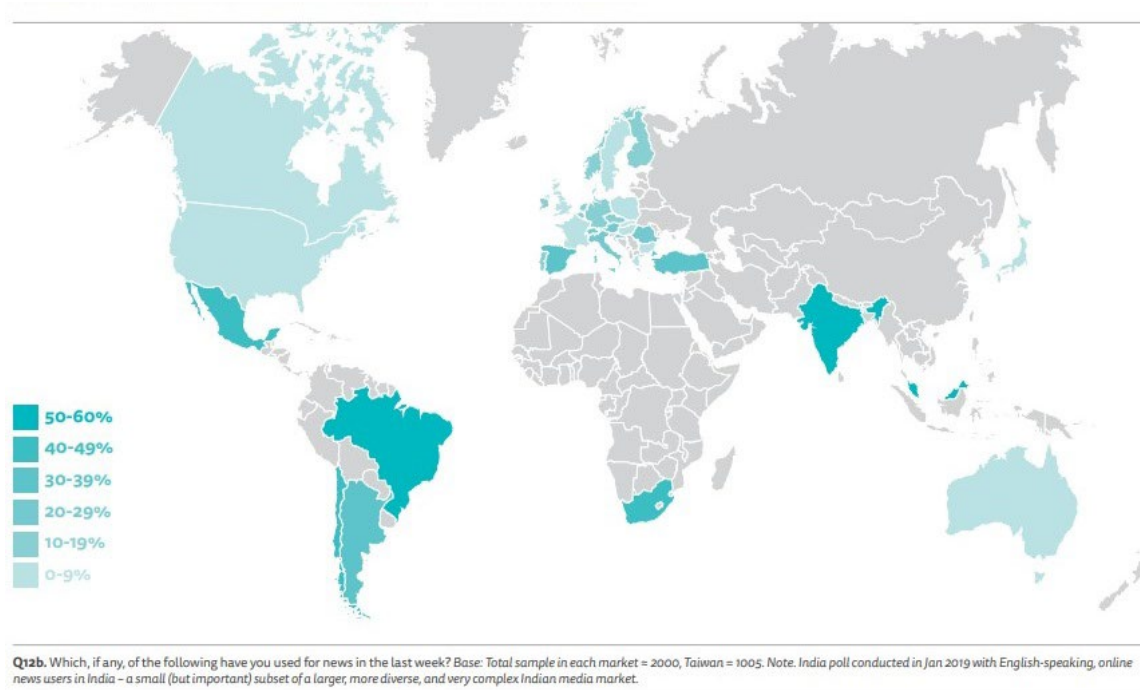
⁴⁷⁰ Unger, “A summary of findings.”

Map 9: Most concerning platform for false & misleading information by country ⁴⁷¹



⁴⁷¹ Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*, 20.

Map 10: Proportion that use WhatsApp for news by country ⁴⁷²



⁴⁷² Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, 19.

Map 11: Level of government AI ethics involvement by country ⁴⁷³



⁴⁷³ Bouanna et al., *The World Wide Race*, 7.

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