

## LGBTI+ in Brazil: the 2016 coup d'état and the 2018 stabbing

Luma Nogueira de Andrade<sup>(a)</sup>

<luma.andrade@unilab.edu.br> 

<sup>(a)</sup> Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociobiodiversidade e Tecnologias Sustentáveis (Masts), Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira. Avenida da Abolição, 3, Centro. Redenção, CE, Brasil. 62790-000.

Amidst the transformations and instabilities that marked Brazil's 2018 presidential elections, with the imprisonment of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), certain judicial miracles took place, such as judges reading and deciding cases in record time by working during weekends, vacation time, and public holidays. This climate of insecurity eliminated Lula's candidacy, who previously had been heavily favored to win the election; thereafter, various other candidates appeared to have a chance. Yet the stabbing of then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro by Adélio Bispo in the city of Juiz de Fora on September 6, 2018 – along with a false information scheme transmitted via Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter – contributed to increasing Bolsonaro's share of the vote throughout Brazil. All of these events, which mixed chance and careful planning, are connected to other regional, national, and international issues, which contributed to the climate of the far-right's rise to power.

In this context, Bolsonaro managed to win the run-off election without participating in a single debate. Business owners invested heavily in social networks, radio and television channels, and in their own businesses.



This campaign mobilized right-wing social movements, religious groups, business leaders, and major hereditary landowners. The far right occupied the streets, spreading impassioned ideas, spreading their truths and post-truths, or their lies and post-lies. The discourse of hate was ostentatiously displayed in the light of day, criminal acts became banal, and the murderers of the past and present gained many public defenders, all eager to destroy their enemies, as we witnessed during the electoral period: A *travesti* murdered by men yelling Bolsonaro's name; soccer fans yelling "Bolsonaro will kill faggots", among other forms of violence.

These attitudes reveal expectations that put a previously veiled desire of destroying the LGBTI+ population into practice. Shamelessly, those who expressed them felt they had the right to attack and even kill people simply because they did not follow heterosexual norms.

These thoughts and actions of the present, which dispute the future, enter into dialogue with other temporalities, creating a novelty that is never completely new or entirely old. These thoughts and actions were once hidden, imprisoned inside a framework that they called "politically correct." Over the course of centuries, for various different reasons, a gamut of rights emerged, a network of social protections that included local, national, and international laws, as well as a series of public policies. Although this understanding of what it means to be human and to have rights was never fully respected – instead, it became transformed into a space of disputes and of the production of inequalities – we cannot deny that it produced at least the sketch of a civilizational project.

It was because of these ideas, as contradictory as they often may be, that some of these people hid and camouflaged themselves, avoiding expressing their fantasies of superiority, their doses of xenophobia, chauvinism, racism, sexism, or anti-LGBTI+ phobias publically. What we saw in this past election was the ostentatious expression of this movement, as people lost any shame in saying what previously seemed unspeakable. They began to insist on saying what they had always wanted to say, but had once been stuck in their throats. The awful face of the banality of evil took on a body and became flesh, acting through discursive and corporal performances.

The project of Havan's (A chain of department stores whose owner and president, a voracious Bolsonaro supporter, boasted that he would compel his employees to vote for the then-candidate. [T.N.]) flock converses with the project of the churches' flocks; neoliberal economics meets conservative society; the project of making capital, the economy, legislation, and public policies more flexible, and of exploiting the fluidity of the state, meets hard and closed existential territories that loath the flexibility of customs. It was through this alliance that these groups invented the idea of a savior of the fatherland who would still be a patriot even as he wanted to sell the fatherland itself, of a soldier who would continue being a Brazilian nationalist even after saluting the US flag, of a Christian who would remain Christian even after defending torture and death.

In our version of neoliberalism, local elites take the lead and define their priorities using the state's resources, as demonstrated by Richard and Pereira<sup>1</sup>. The president and vice-president are both directly connected to the armed forces and openly defend both past dictatorial regimes and current military interventions. Our neoliberalism is militaristic and calls itself patriotic, producing a religious conservatism that hankers for

the entrepreneurship of faith. It is not by chance that Jair Bolsonaro named twenty-two ministers who are aligned with these groups; the old assignments of political leadership roles by political party was substituted, at least partially, by churches, military institutions, internet gurus, etc. The favors traded for influence are still the same; the difference now is that political nominations and nepotism appear disguised as technical choices. The presidents of both House of Representatives and the Federal Senate are Bolsonaro allies, and both are accused of corruption.

This political configuration might leave the government in a comfortable situation, were it not for the internal contradictions of the administration itself. Despite the support from a large portion of congressional representatives from the “Bullet, Bible, Banks, and Cow” caucuses, the Bolsonaro administration seems as unprepared as the earlier Temer government. The only thing maintaining cohesion among its base, despite all disputes, is the desire to put these traditional, conservative interests into practice. This implies a regression for populations that have traditionally been discriminated against, thereby promoting a necropolitics.

As the administration revealed its new ministers, it became apparent that Bolsonaro’s campaign promises would be put into practice through his team of soldiers, pastors and religious fundamentalists, and neoliberals. One of the changes that the new government brought was substituting the name of the Ministry of Human Rights with the Ministry of the Woman, the Family, and Human Rights, imposing elements in defense of the religious caucus by putting both “woman” and “family” in the singular. How will this affect policies for the women most in need of state assistance, such as *travesti* and transsexual women? How will it affect policies for non-heterosexual families? To remain in line with conservative ideals, the government named Damares Alves – a fundamental evangelical pastor – to head the ministry. As soon as Alves was sworn in, she showed her own understanding of gender by affirming that “a new era” was coming to Brazil in which “boys wear blue and girls wear pink.”

Alves’ declarations reveal explicitly her outdated vision of biomedicine in which sex and gender are interdependent. This traditional understanding promotes the negation of the gender identity of *travestis* and transsexuals, inasmuch as it does not recognize men and women as social constructions. The New Era represents a rise of historical regressions that deny all knowledge produced regarding gender and sexuality.

The Minister of Education, aligned with Alves’ doctrine, showed himself to be against so-called gender ideology by affirming that, “nature is what determines genders.” Aside from this speech, he also removed the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion (SECADI) – a secretariat responsible for issues relating to human rights and ethnic-racial relations – from the Ministry of Education, as well as revealing that he would not permit “agendas harmful to our customs imposed by international agencies.” This minister strengthens prejudice and discrimination through the allegation that gender ideology exists, so as to justify the silencing of discussions of gender and sexual diversity in schools. He also agrees with implementing a “school without [political] parties” that excludes the power of critical thinking in schools while opening school spaces to the invasion of religious and military practices.



The Minister of Health went even further, removing from circulation the handbook “Trans\* Men: Can We Talk About Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections?”, a guide to health and prevention for trans\* men.

However, the government knows how to work both with strategies of direct violence against these agendas or of simulated defense, making the two transform into one, so that an attack presents itself as defense, or a defense carries within itself an attack.

This is what occurred, for example, in the Supreme Court Case analyzing the criminalization of anti-LGBTI+ phobia on February 13, 2019. The government’s position, defended by Brazil’s Attorney General, was opposed this litigation, but the Attorney General attempted to maintain that government was not against LGBTI+ people, inasmuch as the Ministry of the Woman, the Family, and Human Rights had a directorship and a council (CNCD/LGBT) responsible for developing actions for LGBTI+ people.

Despite all of this unmasking, all of the government’s stumbles, and all internal divergences, the current administration is well-aligned, and it possesses a team that shares neoliberal and conservative ideals, which make it difficult or impossible to attend to the demands of Brazil’s LGBTI+ population.

We are faced with a new proposal of disciplinary power. This is especially true in schools, where the power of the clergy joins military strategies in disciplining minds and bodies: monitoring what may and may not be taught; erasing figures like Nelson Mandela from school walls as a form of erasing the history of social movements; forcing men to have short hair, women to wear their hair in buns, and everyone to use military uniforms, according to traditional standards of gender and sexuality. It is on this spectrum that we can truly witness a gender ideology, created through military and religious training, in which men wear blue and women wear pink.

It is important that internal organs in defense of human rights understand this sad reality and act together with social movements so as to guarantee LGBTI+ people in Brazil their right to life.

## Copyright

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, BY type (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>).



## References

1. Miskolci R, Pereira PPG. Educação e saúde em disputa: movimentos anti-igualitários e políticas públicas. *Interface (Botucatu)*. 2019; 23:e180353. <https://doi.org/10.1590/Interface.180353>.

**Translator:** Raphael Soifer

Submitted on 03/14/19.  
Approved on 03/17/19.