

# **From Tactical Media to Coded Activism: Techno-determinism and Strategic Fails in Media Uses by Brazilian Progressive Social Movements in Bolsonaro's Electoral Victory**

Carlos Figueiredo

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*This paper analyzes the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by social movements in Brazil, especially during the 2018 presidential elections won by Far Right candidate Jair Bolsonaro. I argue that techno-deterministic behavior of Brazilian leftist groups contributed to Jair Bolsonaro's victory. A broader analysis of Brazilian crisis of hegemony is made to understand the context in which social movements and digital activists act. I also criticize the concept of tactical media from a Gramscian approach. Brazilian digital activists abandoned tactical use of social media made in June 2013's demonstrations and acted guided from a techno-deterministic belief in ICT powers. That way, those activists end up letting their political actions follow an algorithmic logic that we call encoded activism.*

Social media was central to the victory of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro in Brazilian presidential election. Along with his online strategy, Bolsonaro articulated a coalition composed for neoliberals, conservatives, businessmen, evangelical leaders, and military officers. Conversely, Brazilian leftist social movements and parties failed to defeat Bolsonaro in part, because of their misuse of social media. Those groups have opted for social media strategies used successfully at other times such as Brazilian June 2013's demonstrations, but that did not make sense in the conjuncture outlined in 2018's presidential elections.

June 2013's demonstrations were marked by a diversity of demands, many of them contradictory. In that moment, criticisms of the political system were made by both leftist and right-wing groups. This ideological dispute has continued up to the present moment in Brazil, turning into a hegemonic crisis, but in that confrontation leftists' proposals seemed to have garnered greater public sympathy. That momentous victory led to a celebration of social media use and the spontaneity of June 2013's demonstrations. Such ideas have given rise to a belief, among some Brazilian activists, that the Internet would be essentially a libertarian and progressive space without relating its use to tactical and strategic issues.

Social media use has contributed to diverse citizens groups' mobilization, slogans diffusion and participants safety in 2013's manifestations. In that occasion the collective called "Mídia NINJA" - acronym for Narrativas Independentes, Jornalismo e Ação (Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action in Portuguese) - stood out in social media use for political activism. Mídia Ninja activists used smartphones and twitcam apps to broadcast demonstrations and to report police violence. At the same time, Mídia Ninja framed the demonstrations differently from the mass media, which demonized protesters by showing attacks on private and public property rather than conveying protesters' demands.

Nonetheless, the Internet and social media are involved in the contradictions of capitalism itself. They are tools created from capitalist logic and, at the same time, have an emancipatory potential due to their initially decentralized and collaborative character. However, neither social media nor the Internet is essentially emancipatory. Since its privatization in the 1990s, Internet has been transformed into a space dominated by a few corporations interested in selling personalized advertising and advertising from the users' data (Powers & Janblonski 2015). The very idea that the Internet is essentially libertarian and a starting point for revolution is naïve, a mistake that can lead to planning errors and, consequently, contribute to a defeat of progressive forces.

Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory surprised both leftist and right-wing political forces right in Brazil. Bolsonaro's communications team relied on a set of communication tactics that blended social media usage, similar to those used by Cambridge Analytica in Brexit and the US Trump election, to informational military tactics used in so-called "hybrid wars" (Danyk, Maliarchuk & Briggs 2017; Leirner 2019). Most leftists, however, remain stuck with Internet activism and underestimate the power of mass media such as television. In addition, leftist social movements neglected grassroots activism in the struggle for hegemony. This paper hypothesis is that the techno-determinist beliefs of Brazilian leftist groups helped pave the way for Jair Bolsonaro's victory.

To achieve the proposed goal, I discuss the dangers of techno-determinist thinking for activists

such as surveillance and control. I follow the theoretical premises of Political Economy of Communication to show how privatization and commodification of the Internet put obstacles to digital activism. Next, I analyze the Brazilian conjuncture from 2013 onwards and the role of both right-wing and left-wing activism, focusing on the tactical use of the media in this country's hegemony crisis. The analysis includes the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) governments, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, Lula's imprisonment, and Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory. I also critique the concept of tactical media from a Gramscian perspective and evaluate the tactics of both left-wing and right-wing groups via Gramsci's (2011) concepts of "war of movement" and "war of position" in order to understand the leftist groups' tactical mistakes.

### **Social Movements, Technology and Capitalism**

Digital Activism and use of technology in social movements have become a major research topic since the emergence of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) and the demonstrations in Seattle during a World Trade Organization meeting in 1999, and in Genoa, during the G8 meeting in 2001. GJM activists have used social media in an innovative way to mobilize, diffuse and discuss ideas in the struggles against the model of globalization imposed by the neoliberal policies of national governments and supranational entities such as the European Union, IMF, WTO, etc. From those experiences emerged Indymedia, a movement built with the proposal to provide coverage of demonstrations and the GJM different from those provided by the traditional media.

As Della Porta (2015) points out, the GJM was a 'movement of movements' and had an inclusive character for hosting environmentalist movements, feminists, trade unionists, anarchists and various groups linked to leftist ideals. The diversity of groups struggling side by side against neoliberal globalization and claiming for the sharing of common goods, including the media, has prompted a large number of media researchers to adhere to Hardt and Negri's (2000) thesis. Since anti-globalization movements in the first decade of the twenty-first century have massively used the Internet to exchange information and propaganda, social movements have come to be defined by the technology used for communication (Gerbaudo 2012). Gerbaudo notes such a point of view in the theorization of thinkers such as Castells (2013, 2015) and Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004). Castells (2013) uses the concept of networks to define these new social movements. He points out that networked movements are glocal (global + local) and new activists promote horizontal conceptions of organization, with enormous distrust of any kind of leadership.

Hardt and Negri (2000) have elaborated an arsenal of controversial concepts such as "Empire," "crowd," "swarm," and "commons" to account for a new reality that would have arisen from 1970's. For those two thinkers, there is no more imperialism and the force that governs capitalism is the Empire whose difference from imperialism lies in the absence of a definite center. Within their narrative, nation-states are losing strength to international institutions such as the UN, IMF, and WTO, among others. Resistance to Empire is made by the multitude that is 'the whole of society, in human life, that is, the whole of human life that is put as such to work' (Negri, 2015, p. 58). The Empire bases its force on biopower, which is the domination of bodies and desires.

The advent of biocapitalism, according to Hardt and Negri, would mean the complete passage from formal subsumption to actual subsumption. The multitude, comprising all those exploited by the biocapitalist system, would be the historical subject that would oppose the system. In addition, this multitude would be different from the “people,” which would be linked to a notion of representation stemming from contractarian theories (Negri 2002). But the Multitude escapes any form of representation because it is not a unity, like the people, but composed of diverse singularities whose power lies in their capacity to produce from creativity and affects. That creative power is what Hardt and Negri call “constituent power”: ‘Processes of ontological constitution unfold through the collective movements of cooperation, through new fabrics produced by the production of subjectivity. It is in this place of ontological constitution that the new proletariat appears as a constituent power.’ (Hardt & Negri 2000, p.402).

Multitude would act according to swarm logic, which would have its intelligence based on communication. Arisen in networked political organizations, from its emergence, swarms would characterize the political action of the Multitude. Unlike the swarms of ants and bees, the one proposed by Hardt and Negri would be formed by diverse people. Thus ‘[t]he members of the multitude do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other’ (Hardt & Negri 2004, p.92). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) would facilitate the emergence of the Multitude through swarms, by enabling the networking of different singularities. Articulation of these concepts made the works of Hardt and Negri a theoretical paradigm for many researchers concerned with social movements and technologies. In the narrative of Empire, it is possible to observe the elements pointed out by Mosco (2004) as myths of cyberspace: the end of history (everything is different now, new), the end of politics (at least the end of representative politics) and the end of geography (a metaphysical entity called Empire rules the entire world). Castells' (2013) theory of the “network society” also contains the same mythical elements. The concept of mass self-communication ignores the mediations necessary for the existence of representative democracy.

Cycles of protests such as the Arab Spring, Occupy and Indignados were different in aims and activists profile of those observed in the early of 21st century. Gerbaudo (2012) captures that difference and calls into question the theories of both Castells and Hardt and Negri. Gerbaudo (2012) points to two misconceptions in the theories of those thinkers: lack of leadership in these movements, which would lead to a reliance on spontaneous protests, and the existence of a total and unrestricted diversity within those demonstrations. Both Castells, who theorizes about highly distributed networks that lead to a horizontal organization, and Hardt and Negri, who use the concept of swarming, lead analysts who follow their theoretical guidelines to misconceptions about digital activism.

Gerbaudo (2012) researches the motivations, practices and objectives of those demonstrators who participated in 2011's cycles of protests in Egypt, Spain, and the USA and reaches two interesting findings. The first is that the protests were marked by ‘centering’ practices during the demonstrations. The second finding is the presence of ‘soft’ leaders who used social media to organize ‘meeting choreographies’. Soft leaders managed to unify protesters on the streets, making offline networks that gained prominence over digital networks. These soft leaderships created screenplays for demonstrations, proposing simple slogans that served to unify the diversity within the movement. The way Gerbaudo (2012) describes the *praxis* of those

choreographers makes room for an interpretation that regards those militants as “organic intellectuals.” According to Gramsci (2011b), those intellectuals give organicity to the ideas of groups contesting hegemony to construct a new common sense. Another interesting point is made by Burawoy (2015): the fact that such cycles of protest have been local and have voiced localized demands.

### **Coded Activism**

Although Gerbaudo's (2012) observations are pertinent, the criticism contained in this article to Castells and Hardt and Negri lies in the role of mediation. Castells (2015) uses the concept of mass self-communication to account for the role of ICTs in the political action of social movements. Self-communication would be mass communication because social media user content can reach a global audience, and it would be self-communication because it is self-generated. That way, all the individuals in the networks would self-mediate. According to Castells (2015), because networked social movements are horizontal and their participants are suspicious of any direction, including intellectual, anyone could play the role of mediator of ideas between public and social movement.

Hardt and Negri (2000), however, reject any type of mediation. Bolaño's (2002) critique of the authors addresses this question from the mediation role of cultural industries between market and consumers (advertising function) and State and citizens (propaganda function). Bolaño (2015) partially incorporates Habermas' Communicative Action Theory (Habermas 2012) to expose the contradictions located in the intellectual labor without ceasing to regard labor as a source of emancipation, as does Habermas. Hardt and Negri (2000), on the contrary, consider that there is no difference between the system and the “lifeworld,” leaving aside any contradiction between those two instances. Intellectual labor, by its very nature, imposes broader limits on its subsumption (Bolaño 2015). Hardt and Negri (2000) erroneously equate the real subsumption of work with their very particular reading of the Foucaultian concept of biopolitics, since everyday life and production do not differ for those thinkers.

“Real subsumption” is the incorporation of living labor into machinery or software, that is, when variable capital gives rise to fixed capital (Marx 1982). Thanks to the intellectual work of journalists, screenwriters, musicians, the culture industry is able to perform the “programming” function. Bolaño's (2015) definition of “programming” as a third function aims to represent the determinations of the lifeworld over the mediating structure. In the case of the Internet and social media, this third function is called “interaction” (Figueiredo & Bolaño 2017). The need for the culture industry to absorb the demands of the lifeworld on its products generates a series of contradictions that diminish the power of audiences but do not eliminate it completely. The limited capacity of capital to subsume intellectual labor and turn it into dead labor makes it difficult to eliminate the subjective aspects of human labor contained in symbolic goods. The limits of the subsumption of intellectual labor to capital allow workers in the culture industry to insert contradictory meanings into the symbolic goods distributed by producing content that meets the needs of symbolic reproduction of everyday life (Bolaño 2002, p. 15).

Figueiredo and Bolaño (2017) make an interpretation of those changes, highlighting the role played by algorithms in a new mode of lifeworld colonization that is carried out at the same time by the culture industry and social media: “An algorithm is a well-defined computational

procedure that takes some value, or set of values, as input, and produces some value, or set of values, as output” (Cormen et al. 2009, p.5). In the case of social media, the input would be the information collected through the surveillance of individuals' interactions on the Internet, and the output would be advertising, propaganda and other types of personalized content based on the information collected by algorithms of social media sites.

Social Media are able to reach their audiences in a infinitely more efficiently way than broadcasting and print media. Such efficiency is possible thanks to the surveillance of user interactions. That efficiency is theoretically explained by the transition from the programming function to the interaction function. Broadcasting content is distributed within a programming flow that is organized from surveys, which generated a reasonable margin of success, but also meant high risks for capital. Customization of content by algorithms dramatically reduces those risks.

Algorithmic surveillance, while reducing the risk of capital in the production of content, increases the risks to social movements, as they cannot give up the mobilization and agitation carried out on social networking sites. Social movements, therefore, encounter some problems in the digital environment: surveillance, which imposes limits on information exchange and coordination of actions by digital networks, and normalization of users' interactions by algorithms. In that context, what we call *coded activism* arises, that is, the collective action that is attached to the law of the code (Lessig 2006), which is formulated by Internet corporations, and the normalization of interactions imposed by the algorithms of social media corporations such as Facebook and Twitter. Gerbaudo's research (2012) shows how those activists whom he calls “choreographers” were skilled enough not to allow the protests turn into coded activism. The success of mobilization in 2011's cycle of protests experienced in different countries rests precisely on those choreographers' ability to mediate between the movement of which they were part and an audience that was represented by those demands. Those intellectuals gave organicity to the movement's ideas and proposed the construction of a new common sense, creating offline networks from digital networks.

### **June 2013 Manifestations and Digital Activism in Brazil**

The Brazilian demonstrations of June 2013 made dissatisfaction present in different sectors of society, hitherto silent, explode. An unprecedented dissatisfaction was verbalized at that moment. The high popularity rates of various political agents collapsed rapidly as protests unfolded, causing their political capital to evaporate. In order to understand the recent events in Brazil, it is necessary to understand the functioning of what political scientist André Singer (2012) calls Lulism. It is a style of government implanted by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula, based on a weak reformism. Lulism has made individuals at the bottom of the social pyramid experience a rise in their income patterns. According to André Singer, Lulism has as its main support the social class called the sub-proletariat, a term elaborated by Paul Singer (1981, p.22) to designate Brazilian workers who ‘offer their labor force in the market without finding anyone willing to acquire it at a price that can ensure its reproduction under normal conditions’.

After losing middle-class support due to the 2005 Mensalão scandal, which was based on buying parliamentarians' support for laws proposed by the executive branch, Lula's government adopted

policies such as raising the minimum wage, redistributive policies, and increased credit for the working classes. Thus, Lula would have obtained the support of the sub-proletariat. André Singer (2012) identifies that change in voters' preference as an “electoral realignment”. Such a realignment would have transformed Lula into the representative of the so-called sub-proletariat, a politically disorganized class. It was made possible thanks to a governmental orientation that allowed “the adoption of policies to reduce poverty, with emphasis on the fight against poverty, and activation of internal market; without confrontation with capital” (Singer 2012, p.13)

Boito, Jr. (2018) makes a different interpretation of the years in which Brazil was ruled by the PT, closer to that advocated in this paper. Lula succeeded President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) of the Brazilian Social-Democracy Party (PSDB) [Brazilian Social-Democracy Party]. In his government, Cardoso adopted economic policies of neoliberal orientation, putting an end to the hyperinflation at the same time that it privatized public companies. The end of the Cardoso administration was marked by a strong crisis that caused high unemployment. According to Boito, Jr., in the Cardoso years, the group that maintained hegemony in the formulation of public policies was the international financial bourgeoisie. Brazil’s internal bourgeoisie (Poulantzas 1975), made up of industrialists, bankers, and agroindustrials who owned the mass of national capital, were discredited by Cardoso’s economic policies, marked by high interest rates, a national currency overvalued in relation to the U.S. dollar, and expensive credit.

Lula was the leader of the main opposition party to the PSDB, the Workers' Party (PT), created during Brazilian re-democratization by a coalition formed of social movements, trade unionists, progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, and Marxist militants. During the 2002 election campaign, Lula promised an aggressive job creation policy, but when he entered the government Lula maintained Cardoso's conservative economic policy based on the so-called macroeconomic tripod, which presents three pillars: inflation targeting, floating exchange rates and primary surplus in public accounts. ‘Electoral realignment’ pointed out by Singer is accompanied by a shift in the economic policy of Lula’s government from neoliberalism to what Boito, Jr. (2018, p.53) calls “neodevelopmentalism,” the developmentalism that is possible within the peripheral neoliberal capitalist model.

Neodevelopmentalism did not replace the neoliberal foundation in Brazil, that is, the macroeconomic tripod, but it takes economic measures of a heterodox character, such as providing credit at low interest rates for sectors of the national bourgeoisie such as manufacturing entrepreneurs and agricultural industry. This new type of developmentalism is different from that practiced by countries on the periphery of capitalism between the 1950s and 1980s. The old developmentalism was marked by policies that sought industrial independence for countries located in capitalist periphery. Neodevelopment, by other hand, strengthens local production by encouraging low added value such as agriculture, extractivism, manufacturing, etc. There is no strong and lasting incentive for the strengthening of industrial sectors of high complexity and intensive use of technology.

According to Boito, Jr., PT governments represented the interests of Brazilian internal bourgeoisie, that was the hegemonic class in Brazil. Of course, Lula's electoral support did not come from the internal bourgeoisie, but from sub-proletariat. That way, around

neodevelopmentism implanted by PT governments there is the support of internal bourgeoisie, trade unionists, social movements and sub-proletariat. That set of agents who supported government policies of PT is called 'Neodevelopmental Front' by Boito, Jr. (2018).

Nonetheless, Neodevelopmental arrangement showed signs of decline during Dilma Rousseff's first term (2011-2014), after changes in international economic conditions. The high GDP growth rates achieved under Lula's mandates were no longer met, but the government maintained high approval rates among the poorest because of the maintenance of redistributive policies. However, inflation rates rose as the Brazilian economy began to stagnate. At the same time, accusations of corruption weakened the government among the middle class that was the most opposed to PT governments.

The protests that changed the country's political landscape began on June 6, 2013, and had a clear demand: revocation of a R \$ 0.20 increase in bus fares in São Paulo City that would have caused the ticket price to go from R \$ 3.00 to R \$ 3.20. The Free Fare Movement (Movimento Passe Livre, or MPL) was created during a plenary session of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005. For its foundation, the movement is supported by the activists of the Center of Independent Media (Centro de Mídia Independente, or CMI), branch of Indymedia in Brazil. The MPL's founding principles were autonomy, independence, horizontality, and non-partisanship. MPL demonstrations bothered both the São Paulo city government, led by the PT, and São Paulo government, led by the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, or PSDB), PT's main political rival. (Pomar 2013, pp. 11-13).

Initially, the protests were subject to heavy police repression. The traditional media presented a news coverage whose main frame is the disorder caused by MPL for São Paulo daily life. Nonetheless, the people of São Paulo identified with the protesters' demands and joined demonstrations. The high price charged for transportation tickets and poor quality of services provided by private companies licensed by municipal and state governments makes population join the protesters. Mass media continued to frame the demonstrations negatively by highlighting clashes between demonstrators and police and the destruction of both public facilities and private property.

Demonstrators were, for a certain moment, demanding better public services and denouncing the corruption of the Brazilian political system. There was no clear ideological orientation in protests or demands recognizable as a consensus among demonstrators. Leftist groups called for better public services and the establishment of a welfare state as promised in the 1988 Federal Constitution that was enacted following the Civil-Military Dictatorship that ruled Brazil between 1964 and 1985. Right-wing groups were pushing for a decrease in the State's participation in business, privatization of public services, and a decrease in taxes. From that moment, Demonstrations meaning have started to be disputed between different groups. Those different groups were united by the slogan 'It's not just for 20 cents'. The discursive dispute at June 2013's demonstrations was to determine what their demands were beyond a revolt against the 20 cents increase in public transportation tickets.

From that point on, there was a change in media coverage of the demonstrations. If, at the beginning, newspapers and television channels defended the hardening of police repression, after



large sectors came to support the demonstrations, the media coverage made a distinction between protesters. Those who confronted police and attacked the public and private patrimony were called vandals, while individuals who protested in a peaceful way was called demonstrators. Mass media also classified the protests as “anti-corruption demonstrations” and ignored the multiplicity of protesters’ demands. There was an effort by the mass media to manage public debate and consensus building about the meaning of manifestations. Mainstream press attempted to place a portion of the demonstrations within what Hallin (1994) calls the sphere of consensus and another part in the sphere of deviation.

The dispute between *Mídia Ninja*, one of the political novelties of 2013, and traditional journalism was constant during 2013. *Mídia Ninja*’s collective performance was very important for the construction of a counter-frame for the protests. *Ninja Media* begins to cover the manifestations as of June 18 when the 6th demonstration against increase of transportation tickets occurs. Providing crude real-time coverage of the June protests with no editing, using smartphone applications like twitcasting to broadcast, the ‘Ninjas’ embraced what has been called ‘High Fidelity and Low Resolution’ (Lorenzotti 2014). That is, *Mídia Ninja* activists advocate a style of coverage that is faithful to political principles and politically engaged, even if, from a technical point of view, the video quality is low. The important thing was to capture the fact at that time with a coverage different from that offered by the mainstream media. In this sense, we can see their practical affinities with the concept of Tactical Media: ‘The aim is not to reach purity. Nor is “polluting” the image, sound, or text by definition an interesting deconstruction exercise’ (Lovink 2002, p. 259).

Mobility, creative use and deterritorialization are some characteristics of the use of smartphones and social media by *Mídia Ninja*, which allow us to classify this use as tactical (Garcia & Lovink 1997). *Mídia Ninja* activists were able to move quickly between the crowd at the rallies and publicize demands ignored by the mass media, as well as reporting police violence against the demonstrators.

The tactics used by *Media Ninja* and other groups participating in protests to confront established power can be compared to what Gramsci called the “war of movement.” Gramsci draws an analogy between military strategy and political dispute. The strategy used in the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the war of movement based on an open field dispute using rapid and light weapons, the same tactic used by the Jacobins in the French Revolution of 1789. The similarity of the type of war observed in those revolutions made Trotsky elaborate the strategy of “permanent revolution,” because for Trotsky, the French Revolution occurred in waves that continued until 1871. Gramsci, however, argues that the correct strategy to be used in modern States would be the “war of position,” used militarily during World War I. This was not the case with Czarist Russia, in which there was no civil society with solid institutions.

A war of position is trench warfare with heavy artillery, not an open field competition but a confrontation in which it takes patience to overcome the enemy’s defenses one by one. It is important, in this analysis, to revisit the famous comparison between “East” and “West” in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebook* no. 7. In Eastern States, ‘In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the state tottered, a sturdy structure of civil society was immediately

revealed' (Gramsci 2011c, p. 169). Gramsci does not despise the war of movement, but considers that there must be a strategy behind its use. In this case, there is a critique of spontaneity, but not its denial. For Gramsci, spontaneity must be educated, for if 'The presence of a rudimentary element of conscious leadership, of discipline, in every "spontaneous" movement is indirectly demonstrated by the fact that there exist currents and groups that uphold spontaneity as a method.' (Gramsci 2011b, p. 49).

As Roberto Ciccarelli (2017) points out, spontaneous education is not coercive or paternalistic, since the movement characterizes the construction of 'a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form' (Gramsci 1992, p.129). Political confrontation is very different from military war, and Gramsci acknowledged this fact. In a military confrontation it suffices that the strategic objective is reached, that is, that an army can no longer fight and that the victorious army can 'occupy' the enemy territory. Political dispute has an enormously greater complexity, and can be compared to the colonial wars in which the victorious army occupies the conquered territory, but even with the defeated army disarmed the struggle continues in political field and military 'preparation'. Thus Gramsci recognizes three forms of War: War of Movement, War of Position and Underground War. Gramsci draws an analogy between military and political tactics to analyze the independence movement in India that illuminates the analogy between political dispute and military tactics: 'Gandhi's passive resistance is a war of position, which becomes a war of movement at certain moments and an underground war at others: the boycott is a war of position, strikes are a war of movement, the clandestine gathering of arms and of assault combat groups is underground war.' (Gramsci 2011a, p. 219).

June's 2013 demonstrations exposed latent ideological divisions in Brazilian society. At that moment, left-wing groups not aligned with Lulism and PT, and which had little public attention to that point, voiced a dissatisfaction stifled by the popularity of PT governments. At the same time, right-wing groups that never made successful demonstrations came into public existence by participating in June's 2013 demonstrations. There was a dispute over the significance of the protests in the demonstrations. The use of different tactics by movements such as MPL and Mídia Ninja gave, momentarily, a hegemonic and moral superiority to left-wing movements. Left-wing protesters used War of Position, as in the case of street demonstrations, and War of Movement, when they broadcast live police brutality against protesters. However, the PT has decided to continue its policies of agreements for the sake of governance and not to listen to the left-wing groups that have took to the streets. From then on, a group of right-wing social movements would emerge that relied on business and media support, and ironically used tactics similar to those adopted by left-wing groups operating in 2013. However, right-wing movements had the ability to refine these tactics thanks to important economic and institutional support as described below. That momentary victory led left-wing social movements to harbor a delusory belief that the Internet would be a place where a great revolution would take place. The Internet is a space mostly occupied by commercial interests in which there is only the possibility of a War of Movement, due to state and corporate surveillance, or an Underground War, which requires great technical knowledge and financial resources. A kind of War of Position that is waged through mobilization and persuasion in grassroots movements has been largely forgotten by left-wing movements.

The dispute over the meaning of June's 2013 demonstrations continued after the end of that cycle of protests. Right-wing social movements emerged in post-2013's cycle of protest and started to compete on the streets with old and new left movements as well with those aroused after June 2013's. Right-wing social movements such as Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL), Vem pra Rua (VPR) and Revoltados Online began to dispute space with traditional left movements and those arisen under the influence of June 2013's manifestations. Feminist and black people movements and LGBT activists gain strength as the number of strikes by various unions increases (Dieese 2015). Secondary students occupied public schools to protest the precariousness of public education in Brazil. Those students have used protest repertoires and organizational methods similar to those used by Occupy Wall Street activists in 2011.

Nonetheless, as Nobre (2013) points out, June 2013's demonstrations were protests against the political system. In the Brazilian Parliament, there are 30 parties with at least one representative in the Chamber of Deputies, and 15 parties are represented in the Senate, showing extreme party fragmentation. Most of these parties are small, conservative, ideologically fluid, and personalistic. Michel Temer's Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, or PMDB) is a separate case. The PMDB is a constellation of local leaders with no defined ideology who have supported all the elected governments between 1994 and 2014, and who, in all of these opportunities, have managed to elect large numbers of parliamentarians. All governments elected in Brazil needed the support of the PMDB to maintain political stability. The PMDB's support is given in exchange for positions in federal administration and state-owned enterprises. Nobre (2013) calls this political arrangement 'pemedebismo' in allusion to the PMDB's political power. Due to their conservative orientation, the PMDB and the minor personalistic parties impose, vetoes on demands such as women's rights, the rights of the LGBT population, media regulation, and more aggressive reforms to reduce poverty by increasing taxation of large fortunes and inheritance. According to Marcos Nobre (2013), those vetoes are the reason for the weak reformism adopted by PT.

Social support for the PT governments was based on a conciliatory alliance of classes that collapsed when the crisis prevented the government from maintaining the neodevelopmental pact. The internal bourgeoisie abandoned the PT, since the Dilma Government did not have support from its electoral base to deepen reforms of a neoliberal character such as the reduction of workers' rights and reduction of public spending on redistributive policies. Parliamentary support of PT was based on an alliance with PMDB and other small parties - the same as PSDB governments between 1995 and 2002. Nobre believes that June 2013's protests were a response to the slow pace of social change caused by the functioning of Brazilian political system and the PT's manufactured alliance. However, Rousseff government preferred to maintain the existing parliamentary arrangement and continued to seek support from the internal bourgeoisie to strengthen the neodevelopmental pact despite the signs that this economic arrangement was decaying (Carvalho 2018). Dilma Rousseff was re-elected in 2014 with little advantage over PSDB candidate Aécio Neves. Meanwhile, allegations of corruption against high-ranking government officials and a strong economic crisis foreshadowed the difficulties that would arise from 2015 onwards.

### **From Rousseff Impeachment to Bolsonaro Victory**

During the 2014 elections, the Lava-Jato Operation began, commanded by federal judge Sérgio Moro. Lava Jato benefits from a set of anti-corruption measures that were taken by the federal government to respond to criticisms made by 2013's protesters against the Brazilian political system. Lava Jato used methods very similar to Mani Pulite, a famous Italian anti-corruption operation carried out by judges in the 1990s. Moro had already defended the methods of the Italian operation in a paper published in a Brazilian legal magazine (Moro 2004). Among those methods was to seek mass media support to diminish the legitimacy of the accused. It was not difficult for Moro to win press support. The media moguls' aversion to PT and selective information leaks to journalists have made Moro a media hero. Constant media accusations of corruption against PT and the political allies of the Federal government, along with a severe economic crisis, mobilized right-wing movements that emerged after the demonstrations of June 2013. Those movements have made a strong use of social media, and mobilizing the middle and upper classes to go into the streets to demand the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. On August 31, 2016, with little political support, Rousseff's presidential term was annulled, and Vice-President Michel Temer became president.

The crime attributed to Dilma Rousseff to justify the process of impeachment was a supposed manipulation of public accounts. Dilma was accused of intentionally delaying the transfer of money to banks and local authorities, but according to many Brazilian jurists, criminal accusations against Dilma have not been proven (Mascaro 2018). Even with the weakening of PT, Lula continued to lead the polls for 2018's presidential elections. On April 6, 2018, nonetheless, former President Lula was arrested for corruption and money laundering by then Judge Moro, now Moro is Minister of Justice of Bolsonaro government. According to Mascaro (2018), Rousseff's impeachment and Lula's arrest are considered part of a coup d'état. In twentieth century, coups were mostly carried out by the military. However, Luttwak (1969) points to the possibility of another type of coup that becomes viable with the advent of modern state and its complex machinery dominated by a bureaucracy independent of political leadership. A coup 'can be conducted from "outside" and it operates in that area outside the government but within the state which is formed by the permanent and professional civil service, the armed forces and police' (Luttwak 1969, p.4). That way, "a coup consists of the infiltration of a small but critical segment of the state apparatus, which is then used to displace the government from its control of the remainder" (Luttwak 1969, p.12). In Brazil's case, the coup was led by sectors of the judiciary, the Federal Prosecutor's Office and Federal Police lawfare campaign against the PT (Mascaro 2018) and by legislative power. Most of the parliamentarians involved in corruption schemes believed that Dilma's impeachment and Lula's conviction would diminish the impetus of the Lava Jato Operation.

Former President Lula, still in prison, led polls ahead of 2018's elections. The main opposition party to the PT government, the PSDB, also suffered from its own crises. Some PSDB leaders were also involved in allegations of corruption, including Aécio Neves, presidential candidate in 2014. Amidst this troubled scenario, Jair Bolsonaro, hitherto considered a political underdog, started appearing in opinion polls with about 15 percent of the votes to 2018's presidential election. Bolsonaro is a former army captain who was expelled from the Brazilian Armed Forces for indiscipline after creating friction with his superiors by demanding salary increases for soldiers and officers in the 1980s. In his almost thirty-year parliamentary career, Jair Bolsonaro

proposed no notable bills, and his electorate was formed by retirees and pensioners of the Brazilian Armed Forces, whose corporate interests he defended. Bolsonaro gained wider popularity after appearing on Brazilian TV and comedy shows in which he voiced racist, sexist and homophobic statements, which drew admirers in Brazil, a conservative and former slave-owning country.

Apparently, Bolsonaro found it difficult to build a structure for his presidential campaign. He did not have a party to house his candidacy, and after joining the small Social Liberal Party (PSL), he had difficulty finding a candidate for vice president. Only Reservation General Hamilton Mourão accepted his invitation. In the beginning of the electoral campaign, Bolsonaro had low performance in television debates. Even while leading opinion polls, Bolsonaro's popularity has stagnated and he found it difficult to increase his popularity during his campaign. Bolsonaro's popularity began to increase consistently after an attack he suffered on September 6, 2018, when a man named Adélio Bispo de Oliveira stabbed Bolsonaro during a rally in a town called Juiz de Fora. After his imprisonment, the Brazilian court judged Oliveira mentally incapable. Thus, he is not held in a common prison, but kept in a mental asylum (August 2019). Bolsonaro was hospitalized throughout the campaign and could not participate in any rally or debate. Even so, Bolsonaro steadily gained with every opinion poll released and was close to winning the election in the first round, garnering 46% of the valid votes against the 29% of the valid votes for PT candidate Fernando Haddad.

Two causes can be identified for the victory of a hospitalized candidate whose government plan was unknown to most people. The first factor is that Bolsonaro was considered the antisystem candidate. Many citizens voted him in the second round to prevent a victory for Fernando Haddad, whose party is identified with corruption and the current Brazilian economic crisis by a considerable part of the electorate. During crises of hegemony, when no group can gather sufficient forces to obtain consensus, previously unthinkable alternatives and adventurers emerge and can come to power. The second factor is Bolsonaro's successful electoral strategy. While his opponents used political marketing techniques, akin to consumer product advertising, Bolsonaro was betting on fake news, political propaganda disseminated through social media like Whatsapp and Twitter. One noteworthy tactic used by Bolsonaro's team was polemical or antagonistic statements made by Bolsonaro and Mourão in the mass media and that were denied in the social media used by the Bolsonaro communication team.

That way, Bolsonaro's campaign discredited mainstream press in front of its voters who called any criticism of Bolsonaro "fake news." However, on the eve of the first round of elections. Bolsonaro's own communications team was accused by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* of maintaining a scheme to propagate fake news against his opponents to millions of voters through Whatsapp. This scheme was funded by businessmen sympathetic to Bolsonaro candidacy. The use of this tactic on the eve of the first round of elections would cost \$12 million (Mello 2019). That corporate donation, which was not counted against the campaign, constituted an electoral crime.

Piero Leirner, a Brazilian anthropologist who conducts research on the Armed Forces, pointed out that communication tactics adopted in Bolsonaro campaign are similar to a tactic called "hybrid warfare." In that kind of war, "the most crucial principles for the outcome of war are

mainly in the sphere of cognition, for what really matters is to leave the scene as gray and indistinct as possible, to the point of maneuvering the actions of the enemy from “within,” without letting him know that he is being manipulated” (Leirner, 2019). One of the goals of hybrid warfare is to impose an actor's will on the opponent, and social media is a means used to do this because they ‘allow the possibility to achieve strategic goals by unconventional and cognitive effects’ (Danyk, Maliarchuk & Briggs 2017, p.8).

Bolsonaro's campaign manipulated the conservative values of part of Brazilian People by creating fake news about groups that opposed them, such as feminists, LGBT groups, environmentalists, and university professors. Such a tactic ‘aims to manipulate core values, motivational factors and cultural basis (...) of a country’ (Danyk, Maliarchuk & Briggs 2017, p.9). The strategy used by Bolsonaro's communications team fits in with what Gramsci calls the “underground war.” Along with this communication strategy, Bolsonaro obtains the support of agents of the financial market by promising that his finance minister would be the ultraliberal economist Paulo Guedes. After his promises to implement neoliberal policies, media try to normalize Jair Bolsonaro’s imagery, moving it from the sphere of deviation to the sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin 1994).

Left-wing digital activism stuck to Twitter campaigns like #ForaTemer (Get Out Temer) and #Lulalivre (Free Lula) that had little appeal among the poorest, who do not massively use Twitter. In that case, those groups practiced what I call coded activism. Leftists also abandoned popular movements and urban peripheries that were part of the founding of PT in the early 1980s. Today, the Internet is a space occupied by large conglomerates working from a capitalist logic. It is not a space where a war of movement, waged in an open field, can be held, but rather the war of position, where armies use heavy artillery to attack trenches. Wars of position require organization, strategy, and preparation for action.

Right-wing groups used all these tactics: War of Movement, when they took to the streets to demand the impeachment of Dilma; War of Position, when they gathered support and weakened institutions like the press, intellectuals, progressive social movements, the parliament, and the Supreme Court; and Underground War, using the set of tactics called hybrid warfare. In the three weeks before the second round of election, Leftists went to the streets and tried to talk to undecided voters or Bolsonaro voters, who were not totally convinced, to reverse Fernando Haddad’s unfavorable results, but they had run out of time.

## **Conclusion**

Rise of an extreme right-wing candidate to power in Brazil is the unfolding of a hegemony crisis (Gramsci 2011) initiated in June 2013’s demonstrations. The current Brazilian crisis of hegemony is a symptom of a structural crisis of capitalism or, as Gramsci names it, a global crisis. Gramsci draws attention to the fact that the symptoms of a global crisis are different in each country. So the cases of countries where candidates come to power with far-right rhetoric, such as Hungary, Italy, and the U.S., are similar to but not the same as the Brazilian case. However, those cases are part of the same structural or global crisis of capitalism as well as cycles of protests like Occupy Wall Street, the *Indignados*, and the June 2013 demonstrations in Brazil. In a global crisis, the capitalist system becomes incapable of promoting social integration through existing social norms. Global crises are crises of regimes of accumulation that manifest

themselves politically as crises of hegemony in which the current social conciliations are challenged (Hirsch 2010). It is in those moments, when ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born,’ that ‘morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass’ (Gramsci, 2011b, p.33). However, what new situation do the progressive movements intend to build? And how will they do it?

There was no such thing as the “Multitude” that was protesting in the streets, only groups representing contested national projects. The idea of spontaneity and the absence of tactics and strategy confined progressive movements to harmless, defeatist tactics. There was also no such thing as a mass self-communication, only a group of activists called Media Ninja, who are the journalistic branch of a collective called Fora do Eixo.

According to Lovink (2002, p.259), the word ‘tactical... refer[s] to the ambiguity of more or less isolated groups and individuals, caught in the liberal-democratic consensus, working outside of the safety of Party and Movement’. Wark (2010) seems correct in arguing that tactical media theory is a way to bypass the theory of representation, observing that ‘the most tactical thing about tactical media is the rhetorical tactic of calling it tactical’. Apparently, in the face of the current crisis of representation, far-right rhetoric is a seductive response for the people of more and more countries. There is a crisis of representation, that is, a crisis of hegemony, in this moment. But what alternative do progressive movements have to present? It may be necessary to listen again to the advice that Zizek (2011) gave to Occupy Wall Street participants: “One of the great dangers the protesters face is that they will fall in love with themselves, with the nice time they are having in the ‘occupied’ places.”. We must build something new in this interregnum of pathological phenomena, and the idea of tactics to build alternative media is a good starting point. But what are we talking about when we use the word “tactic”?

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*Carlos Figueiredo* is a Post-Doctorate Researcher in Communications in the Federal University of Sergipe, Brazil. He is a journalist and received his PhD in Sociology from Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil.