The Semiotics of Masculinity Ideology and Hegemonic Masculinity in Bolsonaro’s Brazil

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Abstract
Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is a struggle between embattling ideologies. The process in which masculinity ideology continuously wins this struggle is dubbed Hegemonic Masculinity. The hypothesis this article will aim to prove is that under President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil is going through a phase of strengthening of masculinity ideology, curbing the room for dissent in the hegemonic struggle. In order to substantiate this hypothesis, Bolsonaro’s self-projected persona will be analysed through a semiotic interpretation of the pictures in his official Facebook account. As Bolsonaro is the head of the state and the government, the ideology behind his self-portrayal is indicative of the underlying ideology of his rule. The relevance of this study comes from presenting an innovative way to point out the presence of hegemonic masculinity in politics. This allows for the connection of institutionalised hegemonic masculinity with human security, bringing to light how the privileging of masculinity ideology leads to the silencing of dissenting voices and the neglect of non-hegemonic insecurities.

Keywords: Brazil, Gender Studies, Hegemonic Masculinity, Hegemonic Struggle, Politics

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Introduction

Hegemony, in the Gramscian understanding of the term, is a struggle between embattling ideologies. The process in which masculinity ideology continuously wins this struggle was named by Connell as Hegemonic Masculinity. Throughout Brazilian history, historical and structural imbalances favoured hegemonic masculinity with periods of more or less space for disagreement. These spaces for disagreement seem to have shortened with Jair Bolsonaro’s election as the President of Brazil in 2018, as he pursues a conservative agenda and is in charge of a government marked by its far-right inclination. Thus, this article’s hypothesis is that Brazil, under Bolsonaro’s rule, is going through a phase of strengthening of masculinity ideology. In this context, the room for dissent in the hegemonic struggle is curbed. In order to test this hypothesis, I will analyse Bolsonaro’s self-projected persona through a semiotic analysis of the pictures in his official Facebook account. As Bolsonaro is the head of the state and the government, the ideology behind his self-portrayal is indicative of the underlying ideology of his rule.

The research questions guiding this work are twofold: 1. Is there a consistent intention of projecting masculinity ideology through Bolsonaro’s pictures? 2. If so, is this effort coherent with the strengthening of the process of hegemonic masculinity? In order to answer these questions, first I will describe the ontology, epistemology and methodology employed in this work. Then I will briefly explain the working definitions of ideology, hegemony and masculinity, which are the concepts underpinning my analysis. Finally, I will proceed to the case study applying a critical semiotic analysis to Bolsonaro’s Facebook pictures. Based on the results of this analysis, I will conclude that there is a

2 Connell and Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’.
3 Chagas and Chagas, ‘A posição da mulher em diferentes épocas e a herança social do machismo no brasil’.
4 For a contextualization of the elections and the Brazilian far-right turn, see Hunter and Power, ‘Bolsonaro and Brazil’s Iliberal Backlash’.
consistent intention of projecting masculinity ideology, and that this effort is indeed coherent with the strengthening of hegemonic masculinity in Brazil.

The relevance of this study comes from the fact that it presents an innovative way to point out the presence of hegemonic masculinity in politics. Similar studies mingling critical semiotics and politics are few, and none addresses the subject through a gendered lens. Additionally, this study also aims to connect institutionalised hegemonic masculinity with human security, bringing to light how the privileging of masculinity ideology leads to the silencing of dissenting voices and the neglect of non-hegemonic insecurities, such as those lived by women and non-hegemonic men.

Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

The goal of this article is to study through a feminist and interpretivist approach whether President Jair Bolsonaro embodies the strengthening of masculinity ideology in the hegemonic process in Brazil, and what it means for the security of women and non-hegemonic men in the country. Before going in detail about such theoretical concepts, however, I will first expose the ontology and epistemology underpinning this work, as well as the methodological aspects behind my application of semiotics in the empirical section of this article.

The ontological approaches guiding this piece are that of subjectivism and relativism, meaning that there is no objective reality. Reality, instead, is constructed through the interaction between language and the world, which does not exist independently from our knowledge of it. As gender is a social construct and a role, and as it

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6 Scotland, 'Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research', 11.
does not exist prior to social interaction, I will use an interpretivist epistemology to analyse the components of masculinity ideology in Bolsonaro’s self-representation in social media. This will allow for an expanded understanding of hegemonic masculinity, as the socially constructed nature of the embattling ideologies are highlighted.

The methodology applied is that of critical semiotic analysis, which aims to interpret meaning through the analysis of signs and their relations of signifier and signified through the intertextuality and interaction between the text, society, history and ideology. There is no neutral sign, as their aim is to persuade as well as to refer. Thus, signs work to perpetuate ideology, and critical semiotic analysis also involves ideology analysis. Due to limitations of time and scope, I will limit the empirical study to the most recent pictures published in Bolsonaro’s official Facebook page. Due to this temporality constraint, the scope will be restricted to the last fifty pictures that had been published before the time of collection (the 23rd of January 2020, from 00:39 BRT to 01:07 BRT). Due to the high frequency and volume of posts, this level of preciseness becomes necessary. Moreover, as the focus of this article is on the imagetic projections of masculinity ideology, I will not analyse the texts published along with the images, focusing exclusively on visual data on the form of photographic representation.

As aforementioned, the empirical analysis will address two main questions: 1. Is there a consistent intention of projecting masculinity ideology through the pictures? 2. If so, is this effort coherent with the strengthening of the process of hegemonic masculinity? In order to do answer these questions, I will analyse the pictures through frequency counting of hegemonic masculinity signs according to the following criteria: 1. Which are the representations of traditional masculinity present in the pictures? 2. Are there strategic choices of design, production, framing and styling in order to project

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8 Godard, ‘Feminism and Semiotics’, 2.
traditional masculinity? 3. Do the images reinforce stereotypical gender roles? Upon the conclusion of the case study, I will subject the findings to scrutiny and analyse how and if it affects the security of women and non-hegemonic men in Brazil.

In the next section, I will provide theoretical clarification on the concepts that are at the base of this work: Ideology, Hegemony and Masculinity. I will explain how they interact and give rise to Hegemonic Masculinity. I will also clarify how masculinity ideology, in a context of globalisation, originates idiosyncratic hegemonic masculinities, and what it means in the case of Brazil.

**Ideology, Hegemony and Masculinity**

In this section, I will analyse and draw the relation between Ideology, Hegemony and Hegemonic Masculinity through a gendered point of view. For starters, one must acknowledge that ideology is a contested concept. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I will adhere to the Marxist understanding of the term. Marx and Engels define ideology as the conventions and culture that make up the dominant ideas of society. Ideology encompasses politics, laws, morality and religion, to name a few, and aims to signify the world. As ideology uses signs to naturalise and reinforce notions and maintain the myths and connoted values of the culture, it is not neutral and works as an instrument to perpetuate power. Gramsci, who was also a Marxist, adds that ideology is likewise a struggle between stability – or the status-quo – and resistance. Hegemony, therefore, is the process of continuously winning this struggle and obtaining, through ideology, the acquiescence of the majority.

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10 Questions inspired by the ones presented in Pimenta and Natividade, ‘The Semiotic Construction of Masculinity and Affect’.
Marx, Engels and Gramsci had the struggle between classes in mind when they hypothesised about ideology and hegemony. These concepts, however, are also useful in interpreting how gender relations underpin social life. The study of masculinity as an ideology emerged in the early 1990s and analyses the cultural beliefs and norms regarding men’s roles. It refers to how historical and structural power imbalances led to the social dominance of masculinity over femininity, which is traditionally but not necessarily associated with men and women. In general terms, the masculinity ideology conveys that power is defined by physical force and control, that the male body should represent this force, and that men should (financially and in status) succeed in the capitalist society. The ideology also assumes traditional masculinity as white, heterosexual and patriarchal, and enforces that men should dominate over women and children, not be feminine and show no weakness. Furthermore, men are also encouraged to seek out adventure and risk, accepting violence if necessary.

This idealised definition of traditional masculinity constrains men and women in roles to be performed according to their gender and is exalted by churches, mass media and the state. Dissenting varieties of masculinity, such as homosexual masculinity or non-white masculinity, are taken as hierarchically inferior to the idealised one. Furthermore, masculinity is not sustained and enacted only by individuals, but also by groups and institutions aiming to perpetuate or to conform to power. Masculinity ideology, thus, is a set of conventions and beliefs whose goal is to sustain and promote the

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15 Levant and Wong, *The Psychology of Men and Masculinities*, 47.
dominant social position of men and the subordinate social position of women across all spheres of society.\textsuperscript{21}

In politics and international relations, the preponderance of masculinity ideology means the hierarchy of men over women, of masculinity over femininity, the privileging of aggressiveness over coordination and negotiation, and the neglect of insecurities associated with women and non-hegemonic men. Borrowing from the Gramscian understanding of ideology as a struggle and of hegemony as continuously winning that struggle, Raewyn Connell coined the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity. It refers to the continuous victory of masculinity ideology over other resisting ideologies, such as feminism.\textsuperscript{22}

The state, international relations, international trade and global markets are all spaces of gender formation and politics, making for a world gender order of hegemonic masculinity.\textsuperscript{23} Due to globalisation, the establishment of this world gender order also means the spread of western concepts of masculinity around the world. These concepts displaced as well as mingled with the local signs and values, transforming post/neo-colonial societies’ hegemonic masculinities into a mix between local and global cultures.\textsuperscript{24} As the goal of this article is to analyse the figure of Jair Bolsonaro in regard to hegemonic masculinity in Brazil, it is relevant to examine the idiosyncrasies of the masculinity ideology in the country.

Brazil appropriates some signs of traditional masculinity from western cultures, such as heteropatriarchal family structures, the privileging of white men with Western-European traits, the use of suits – or as Connell puts it, the western businessmen uniform\textsuperscript{25} - as a symbol of male power, the cultivation of physical strength, group

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Levant and Wong, \textit{The Psychology of Men and Masculinities}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Connell, ‘Masculinities and Globalization’; Connell, ‘Understanding Men’; Connell and Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Connell, 8–9.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Connell, 11.
\end{itemize}
sports and drinking as acts of masculinity, and, to some extent, the idealisation of the military masculinity. As a post-colonial society, however, the power of the local elites depends on their relations with “metropolitan” powers,\(^{26}\) which is translated in the perceived superiority of western men over locals,\(^{27}\) and the strive for foreign validation\(^{28}\) in politics as well as in business.

Yamada and Rocha-Coutinho’s interviews with young middle-class Brazilian men on how they perceive masculinity sheds light on this post-colonial interrelationship. When asked what it means to be a man, the answers highlighted aspects such as being a leader, being the “head of the house,” protecting and guiding the wife and the children, being strong and commanding, being free and, interestingly enough, playing football.\(^{29}\) The association of football and masculinity, as well as the worship of male football players, is particularly strong in Brazil.

As aforementioned, the goal of this article is to study through a feminist and critical semiotic analysis whether President Jair Bolsonaro embodies the strengthening of masculinity ideology in the hegemonic process in Brazil. In the next section, I will proceed with the case study on the President’s self-projected image through the semiotic analysis of the pictures posted on his official Facebook page.

**Case Study: Bolsonaro and the embodiment of the hegemonic masculinity project**

Semiotics is the study of signs in its two inseparable components: the signifier, which is the marking of the sign itself, and the signified, which is the concept or idea behind the sign. The signified is understood through an underlying system of conventions, which is taken as the structure.\(^{30}\) Critical semiotics, however, is post-structuralist as it

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\(^{26}\) Connell, 9.
\(^{27}\) Blanchette, “Fariseus” e “gringos bons”: masculinidade e turismo sexual em Copacabana’.
\(^{28}\) Marques de Souza, ‘O Complexo de Vira-Lata e o Vira-Lata Complexo’.
\(^{29}\) Yamada and Rocha-Coutinho, “Novas” formas de masculinidade?’
\(^{30}\) EB Editors, ‘Semiotics’.
questions the assumptions, or ideology, making up the structure. It also sees the relationship between sign and signified not only as a way to convey meaning but also to enact change. In this sense, ideology produces meaning through the use of signs, while signs, through ideology, reinforce the myths and connoted values they depict.

As aforesaid, masculinity ideology projects specific signs to naturalise and enforce gender roles and ideals that are consistent with hegemonic masculinity. In this section, I will critically analyse these signs in fifty pictures of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, aiming to understand if 1. Is there a consistent intention of projecting masculinity ideology through the pictures?; 2. If so, is this effort coherent with the strengthening of the process of hegemonic masculinity? In order to guide my inquiry, I will use the following criteria: 1. Which are the representations of traditional masculinity present in the pictures? 2. Are there strategic choices of design, production, framing and styling in order to project traditional masculinity? 3. Do the images reinforce stereotypical gender roles? As all communication and meaning have a socio-political dimension that cannot be fully understood outside of their social context, the fact that I am a social scientist from Brazil will prove useful for this work.

The criteria for selecting the pictures was that they were posted on Jair Bolsonaro’s official Facebook page, and that they were the last fifty ones posted at the time of collection (the 23rd of January 2020, from 00:39 BRT to 01:07 BRT). The pictures studied encompass a period slightly over two months, with the first one posted on the 16th of November 2019, and the last, on the 23rd of January 2020. As the focus of this article is on the imagetic projections of masculinity ideology, I will not analyse the texts published along with the images, even though they might carry masculinity signs themselves. The full set of images can be found in the Appendix section of this article but

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31 Godard, ‘Feminism and Semiotics’, 2,12.  
33 Correa, 186.
will not be presented in the length of this work for reasons of relevance and scope.

The semiotic analysis will consist of two parts. First, I will present a frequency counting of the most prominent masculinity signs, measured by the incidence of the keywords I associated with each image. The complete list of keywords and frequency can be found in Table 1. The second part of the study will be a critical interpretation of those signs and what they convey in terms of masculinity ideology and hegemonic masculinity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Football; São Paulo Team; Frontal Angle; Sport; No Frills;</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Suit; Leader; Employees; Indian Garb; Careless Screensahot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mother; Kitchen; Family;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Informal Wear; Football; Football jersey; Strong Posture; Angle from Below; Sport; Home; No Frills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Suit; Frontal Angle; Sport; Frontal Angle; Brazilian Flag;</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Suit; Angle From Above; Football; Flamengo Team; Sport;</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Suit; Rain; Strong Posture; No Frills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Suit; Frontal Angle; Smile; Strong Posture; Wife’s Support; Formal; TGR; TV Celebrity; Disabilities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Military; Brazilian Flag;</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nuclear; Central Position; Leader; Suit; Military; Strong Posture; Employees;</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Indian Garb; Brazilian Flag; Formal;</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Police Officer;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Suit; Young People; Disabilities; Brazilian Flag; Trophy;</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Informal Wear; Children; Caregiver; Family; No Frills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Suit; Wife’s Support; Angle from Below; Leader; Smile; Family; TGR; (Traditional Gender Role);</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Informal Wear; Sport; Strong posture; Home; No Frills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Suit; Leader; Cat; Dog; Smile; Employees; No Frills;</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
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<td>Book;</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Informal Wear; Football Jersey; Sport; No Frills; Football;</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Navy Ship; Military;</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Suit; Wife’s Support; Frontal Angle; Sad; Family; TGR;</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Newspaper; Suit; Trump; Post-colonial masculinity; Smiley;</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Suit; Daughter; Family; Caregiver; TGR;</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Suit; Angle from Below; Beets Johnson; Post-colonial masculinity; Careless Screensahot;</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Suit; Trump; Brazilian Flag; USA Flag; Handshake; Smile; Post-colonial masculinity;</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Young; Military; Strong posture; Leader; No Frills;</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Suit; Employees; Children; Hug; Christmass; Caregiver;</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Caregiver; Leader; Military;</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Suit; Angle From Below; Leader; Strong Posture; Public Speaking;</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Suit; Netanyahu; Brazilian Flag; Israel Flag; Handshaker; Post-colonial masculinity; Careless Screensahot; Newspaper;</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Leader; Home; No frills;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. Keyword Association

<table>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Suit; TV Celebrity; Leader;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong posture;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Angle from Below;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Suit; Brazils; Angle from Below;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Power Walk; Strong posture;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Newspaper;</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Suit; Trophy; Brazilian flag;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leader; Strong posture;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the 50 pictures analysed, 17 were screenshots of newspaper pages. As the goal of this work is not to analyse Bolsonaro’s strategic disqualification of the press, all but two of those pictures were scrapped. The two taken in consideration, figures 22 and 42, were included due to the prominence of Bolsonaro’s photo in them. From the 35 pictures remaining, 20 figured Bolsonaro in a suit, symbol of western power and hegemonic masculinity; 11 figured him exerting a strong and assertive body posture, conveying leadership; 9 depicted a crude or “no-frills” personality, in opposition to care for details and presentation, which are not masculine traits; 6 were low-angle shots, which make the subject look “strong, powerful and imposing”; 6 depicted his ties to the military, and another 6, his interest for sports, most prominently (4 pictures) football.

The pictures analysed also depicted Bolsonaro as a caregiver and family leader (figs. 11, 17, 18, 27 and 35), with the portrayal of traditional gender roles such as the supportive wife by her husband’s side (fig. 11 and fig. 17), who mimics Bolsonaro’s facial expressions while remaining subdued; or the mother in the kitchen (fig. 27), who gives a ‘thumbs-up’ to the camera in a supportive gesture to her son. The mother’s content facial expression and casual wear shows that she is at ease in that scenario, reflecting her compliance with the gender

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34 Barry and Weiner, ‘Suited for Success?’
35 Hellerman, ‘Low Angle Shot Definition and Usage with Excellent Examples’.
36 Masculinity signs with more than five pictures attached to them do not have the referring pictures exhaustively listed in the body of the work due to reasons of relevance and scope. For a detailed list of which pictures are associated with each of the features mentioned in this paragraph, please refer to the spreadsheet attached in the Appendix.
expectations and roles of a woman her age. Moreover, the depiction of her kitchen, with its commonplace tiling, plastic chair, simple and colourful tablecloth, and coffee presented in a glass cup - a very traditional Brazilian sign - aim to convey her - and her son’s - simplicity, building Bolsonaro’s persona as a common and traditional masculine man.

Signs specific to Brazilian masculinity were also present. In the period of two months, Bolsonaro emphasised his ties to Western world-leaders also recognised for being “strongmen” four times. His pictures with United States’ President Donald Trump (fig. 19 and fig. 42), United Kingdom’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson (fig. 43) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (fig. 22) aim to depict Western support, and even friendship, signalling foreign validation as a status symbol. Moreover, it is no coincidence that, from all of his connections to world leaders, Bolsonaro chose to highlight his ties to those that also build their personas around embodying the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. As such, Bolsonaro seeks a subservient legitimisation but also reflects a broader trend in world politics – the rise of authoritarian populism, and their alliance built around the shared ideology of hegemonic masculinity.

Bolsonaro also strongly emphasised his military ties (figs. 7, 8, 23, 44 and 45), which reflects both an abstract appeal to the masculine idealisation of the military, but also a nod to his support for the violent military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. As a legacy from this dictatorship, the military is still hugely influential in Brazilian politics and gained even more power during Bolsonaro’s tenure. This increase in the military’s profile and influence showcases how the President’s ideological build-up of the military through masculinity ideology translates into real life policies that have an impact on democracy. Moreover, Bolsonaro also emphasized his passion for another tenet of Brazilian masculinity ideology, football, by posting

37 As shown by the President’s decision to more than double the number of military personnel in civilian roles in the government. Lis, ‘Governo Bolsonaro mais que dobra número de militares em cargos civis, aponta TCU’.

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pictures of himself while wearing football jerseys (fig. 28 and fig. 39), as well as celebrating victories in championships (fig. 1 and fig. 5). The key aspect of this strategy, however, is that he is always supporting different football teams, which is a sign not of his passion for the sport, but his strategic use of it to garner sympathy and build his masculine façade.

The persona Bolsonaro portrays in the pictures analysed depict a man that carelessly (as evidenced by the intentional simplicity of some of the pictures, such as figs. 28, 35 and 47) embodies the signs of traditional masculinity. He is a strong man, a leader and a patriarch. He abides by traditional values and is the head of his household, where the members behave according to specific – and hegemonic masculinity complacent – gender roles. He is a man from military roots and a sportsman. As a Brazilian and as a dominant masculine man, he rejoices in football. Bolsonaro is also encircled and supported by other strongmen, as he is often surrounded by white men wearing suits or military uniforms. He also enjoys the support of Western leaders, strongmen as himself, which he showcases as a legitimising factor. Even though powerful, Bolsonaro enforces that he never lost his humility, and portrays crudeness as an endearing masculine factor.

I based this critical analysis on the set of criteria which I now will answer directly. 1. Which are the representations of traditional masculinity present in the pictures? The representations of traditional masculinity are suits; military and police symbols; sport symbols, particularly football; depiction of traditional family structures; absence of women, which are mostly restricted to family members; and intentional association with western strongmen. 2. Are there strategic choices of design, production, framing and styling in order to project traditional masculinity? Yes, those are low-angle shots; body posture that conveys strength; presence of the wife as support to the husband; intentional low production of shots to signal crudeness (especially relevant in fig. 47 where Bolsonaro showcases the setting of his electoral campaign); and supposedly candid family pictures to convey effortlessness in abiding to traditional family structures. 3. Do the images reinforce stereotypical gender roles? Yes. Whether
the men in the pictures are either depicting power, strength or crudeness, the women are in delicate poses or performing a supporting role. The women in his family are portrayed playing stereotypical gender roles, such as the supporting wife (fig. 11 and fig. 17) and daughter (fig. 18) and approving mother in the kitchen (fig. 27).

Based on these findings, I will conclude by answering the main research questions of this paper. 1. Is there a consistent intention of projecting masculinity ideology through the pictures? Yes, the quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the masculinity signs and the strategic choices in depicting them indicate that their presence is consistent, deliberate and blatant. 2. If so, is this effort coherent with the strengthening of the process of hegemonic masculinity? Yes. Hegemonic Masculinity is the process of winning the ideological struggle for preponderance. The factor that a President, which in the Brazilian case is both the head of state and the head of government, is consistently, deliberately and blatantly building his public persona as the embodiment of traditional masculinity indicates the high pervasiveness of masculinity ideology in the state. This, in consequence, is indicative that in the hegemonic struggle, hegemonic masculinity is thriving in Brazil.

Throughout Brazilian history, masculinity ideology has consistently been the winner of the hegemonic struggle. However, the current official institutional support for masculinity ideology, embodied in the public persona of the President, is a sign of the strengthening of this process. In consequence, those who do not live according to the dominant values and roles established by the hegemonic order are neglected and insecure. With regard to high politics, the strengthening of hegemonic masculinity renders women and non-hegemonic men invisible, obliging them to either conform to the status quo and assume masculine traits or to keep silent. This

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38 Chagas and Chagas, ‘A posição da mulher em diferentes épocas e a herança social do machismo no brasil’.
39 Congressman Joice Hasselmann, former Bolsonaro supporter who was personally attacked by the president’s family, and congressman Jean Wyllys, who had to flee Brazil due to threats to his life and his family, are examples of such
translates into public policies that are “masculine,” with a focus on policing and aggression.  

As the naturalisation of masculinity ideology spreads through society and finds formal institutional support, violence against non-hegemonic groups increases, as well as violent and acritical socialisation. Sexual violence, the objectification of women, the cult of motherhood, inadequate health care, sexual harassment, sex-segregated wages, rights and resources, homophobia and other sex and gender subordinate insecurities are relegated, widening the gap between dominant and dominated. In the first semester of 2020 alone, the rate of women victims of homicide has risen 2%, accounting for 1.890 losses, while Brazil also ranked as the world’s deadliest country for the trans community in 2019.

While the president is worried about eliminating the word “gender” from the Brazilian public discourse, episodes such as censorship of artistic works with LGBTQ themes, public displays of hate speech and homophobia, and censorship of school curricula on consequences. For details of the cases, please see Redação VEJA, ‘Joice chora na tribuna, cita filho e diz que denunciará Eduardo Bolsonaro’; Barros, ‘Com Medo de Ameaças, Jean Wyllys, Do PSOL, Desiste de Mandato e Deixa o Brasil’.

Examples of such policies and their consequences can be found in Pierre, ‘Veja o Que Se Sabe Sobre a Ação Do Exército Que Matou Músico e Deixou 2 Feridos No Rio | Rio de Janeiro | G1’; Jornal Nacional, ‘Veja o Que Mudou Sobre Posse e Porte de Armas Após 7 Decretos Do Governo’.


Velasco, Grandin, and Reis, ‘Assassinatos de mulheres sobem no 1º semestre no Brasil, mas agressões e estupros caem; especialistas apontam subnotificação durante pandemia’.

Benevides and Bonfim Nogueira, ‘Dossiê - Assassinatos e Violência Contra Travestis e Transexuais Brasileiras Em 2019’.

O Globo, ‘Governo Bolsonaro inclui família e elimina menções a gênero, pobreza e tortura em candidatura na ONU - Jornal O Globo’.

Barbosa, ‘A Intolerância Empoderada’.

Barbosa, ‘A Intolerância Empoderada’.
themes related to sexuality have become commonplace. Hence, by refusing to acknowledge the specific educational, health and employment challenges that the subordinate groups face, the state acts to enforce inequality and the privilege of the dominant men, protecting the status quo.

**Conclusion**

Hegemonic Masculinity constrains men and women in roles to be performed according to their sex and gender, oppressing dissent. The analysis of the pictures posted by Bolsonaro in his official Facebook page attest to his desire to depict himself as the embodiment of traditional masculinity, thus strengthening Hegemonic Masculinity. This translates to the neglect and oppression of those who do not perform according to the hegemonic ideology, perpetuating historical and structural imbalances that favour the Hegemonic Man. In consequence, the specific insecurities of women and non-hegemonic men are relegated to the domestic sphere or neglected.

Ideology produces meaning through the use of signs, while signs, through ideology, reinforce the myths and connoted values they depict. This self-perpetuating cycle of ideology means that it is a powerful tool both for oppression and emancipation. By applying critical semiotics to analyse President Bolsonaro’s online persona, this study offered an innovative way to shed light on the presence – and strengthening - of hegemonic masculinity ideology in politics. Hence, it contributes to the body of work that uses semiotics to highlight gender dynamics in the struggle for ideological hegemony, expanding our understanding on hegemonic masculinity in the global south.

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47 Teodoro, ‘Bolsonaro determina censura ao ensino sobre gênero no ensino fundamental | Revista Fórum’.
48 Redação ISTOÉ, ‘Começa Em Fevereiro Campanha Do Governo Federal Pela Abstinência Sexual’; G1, “Cada Vez Mais, o Índio é Um Ser Humano Igual a Nós”, Diz Bolsonaro Em Transmissão Nas Redes Sociais | Política; Braziliense and Braziliense, ‘Bolsonaro diz que vai proibir “ideologia de gênero” nas escolas’.
Moreover, this study also connected institutionalised hegemonic masculinity with human security, bringing to light how the privileging of masculinity ideology leads to oppression through the silencing of dissenting voices and the neglect of non-hegemonic insecurities, such as those lived by women and non-hegemonic men. By highlighting the connection between the rise of hegemonic masculinity in Brazil and its consequences in enforcing violence against non-hegemonic groups, this work also denounces the impunity with which these violences are met and, as such, aims to serve as a tool to further human security and emancipation.
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Chagas, Letícia, and Arnaldo Toni Chagas. ‘A posição da mulher em diferentes épocas e a herança social do machismo no brasil’, 2017, 8.


Appendix

Figure 9: “42 native brothers [...]” Date: 30-Nov-19. Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/168545694337345/

Figure 10: “In 16:11 the female def. fatal team [...]” Date: 02-Dec-19
Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/1688230158328329/

Figure 11: “Great Day!” Date: 04-Dec-19. Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/1698443324495890/

Figure 12: “Mission accomplished in the MERCOSUR summit.” Date: 05-Dec-19. Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/169307310841788/

Figure 13: “Ministry for Economy from Argentina [...]” Date: 06-Dec-19
Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/169840021068938/

Figure 14: “Another lie, now from the newspaper O Estado de São Paulo.” Date: 11-Dec-19. Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/170021352796293/

Figure 15: “The Ministry for Defence informed [...]” Date: 11-Dec-19
Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/1701367293343583/

Figure 16: “THE SURRENDER OF THE PRESS.” Date: 13-Dec-19
Accessed: 01-Dec BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jarnueias.bolsonaro/photos/a_2305677717588
83/1705856126610003/
Tofoli revê própria decisão e restabelece valor mais baixo do DPVAT

Presidente do Supremo atende pleito da União, que pediu urgência no caso porque o seguro começa a vencer hoje.

Figure 33. “Dreams of the action of Minister André Mendonça […]”
Date: 09-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:53 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
8317444118930416

Figure 34. “FEDERAL HIGHWAY POLICE (CONDOLENCES).”
Date: 16-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:52 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
8317434334593836

Figure 35. “Nothing like a candid smile from a child.”
Date: 11-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:51 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
831743443453064

Figure 36. “Brothers Umberto Brito and Valdir Brito […]”
Date: 17-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:51 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
831743453453064

Figure 37. “WHAT FANTASTIC NEWS.”
Date: 12-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:51 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
831743443453064

Figure 38. “Are they dumb, scoundrels or both?”
Date: 12-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:50 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
831743543453064

Figure 39. “Yesterday I had lunch […]”
Date: 13-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:50 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
831743443453064

Figure 40. “WHAT IS YOUR OPED.COM?”
Date: 13-Jan-20
Accessed: 00:49 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250677717588
8317444118930416

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Figure 41. “The press is an embarrassment.” Date: 14-Jan-20. Accessed: 09:47 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/1758656366752895/46/89146366752895

Figure 42. “Wednesday, 15th of January.” Date: 15-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:47 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/175866992189646/

Figure 43. “Today I chatted with Prime Minister Boris Johnson […]” Date: 16-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:46 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/178749442059701/

Figure 44. “Good morning to all.” Date: 19-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:45 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/175158683583532/

Figure 45. “I visited our eternal commander, General Villas Bocas.” Date: 19-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:45 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/175189818837493/

Figure 46. “Laughter” Date: 20-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:45 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/175202510284786/

Figure 47. “This is the ‘FUNDÃO’ that got me elected […]” Date: 20-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:40 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/175276319139460/

Figure 48. “We had an excellent talk […]” Date: 20-Jan-20. Accessed: 00:49 BRT, 23-Jan-20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758833/1753200726482890/
Figures in higher resolution and with clickable URLs:

Figure 49. “In 2019 Brazil occupied the fourth biggest [...]” Date: 20-Jan.20. Accessed: 00:39 BRT, 23-Jan.20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessiasbolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758883/1753314058159906/

Figure 50. “Alexander Garcia, Regina’s son, PR and Gen Ramos.” Date: 23-Jan.20. Accessed: 00:39 BRT, 23-Jan.20
URL: www.facebook.com/jairmessiasbolsonaro/photos/a_250567771758883/1759908801224777/

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