

“The Rascals’ Paradise”

Brazilian National Identity in 2010¹

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Abstract. In an interpretive discourse analysis of a range of widely read texts in Brazil in 2010—including speeches, history textbooks, newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, movies, and novels—different national identity discourses emerge. The predominant discourse describes Brazil as a rascals’ paradise, riddled with corruption and opportunism. The range of Brazilian identities that year also includes, in order of salience: limited democracy, incompetent government, divided society, peaceful leader, and developing country. While these identities suggest a limited commitment to liberal democracy, there are no counter-hegemonic discourses. The implications of Brazilian identity for the persistence of Western hegemony are therefore mixed.

¹ In *Making Identity Count*, eds. Ted Hopf and Bentley Allan. New York: Oxford University Press (forthcoming).

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I. Text Selection

The sample includes elite and mass texts selected for their wide reach.² The category of presidential speeches that draw large audiences would traditionally include the speech delivered on the national holiday, but President Lula da Silva did not speak then. Therefore, I selected two other speeches: the Presidential Message to Congress³ and the first speech by president-elect Dilma Rousseff.⁴ I selected two high school textbooks covering Brazilian history in the 20th century: *General History and History of Brazil*,⁵ and *History of Brazil in the Context of Western History*.⁶ Both were among the textbooks most frequently adopted by private schools in Belo Horizonte, one of Brazil's largest cities.⁷

I selected the two highest-circulating newspapers that publish editorials: *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP) and *O Globo* (OG) – which had average circulations of 294,498 and 262,435 in 2010.⁸ The sample includes all the op-eds and letters to the editor published on the 15th of every month, in a total of 46 editorials and 350 letters. I also selected the novels *The Battle of the Apocalypse*⁹ and *Elite Squad 2*,¹⁰ which spent the most number of weeks on the bestsellers list published by the magazine *Veja* in 2010.¹¹ Few Brazilian novels feature on the list, where translations of American bestsellers such as *The Shack* predominate. Finally, I selected the first and fourth highest-grossing movies in 2010: *Elite Squad 2*¹² and *Our Home*,¹³ with respectively 11 million and 4 million viewers.¹⁴ *Elite Squad 2* was especially successful in the box office: it broke a 34-year attendance record for national movies. Only three Brazilian movies feature on the list of the twenty

² All texts are originally in Portuguese; citations were translated by the author. A more detailed explanation of the criteria used to select texts is presented in XX.

³ L. I. Lula da Silva, "Mensagem Ao Congresso Nacional, 2010: 4ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária Da 53ª Legislatura" (Speech, Brasília, February 2, 2010), <http://www2.planalto.gov.br/acompanhe-o-planalto/mensagem-ao-congresso/mensagem-ao-congresso-nacional-2010>.

⁴ Dilma Rousseff, "Dilma Rousseff: Primeiro Pronunciamento" (Speech, Brasília, October 31, 2010), <http://www.brasil.gov.br/governo/2010/11/dilma-rousseff-primeiro-pronunciamento>.

⁵ Claudio Vicentino and Gianpaolo Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil* (São Paulo: Scipione, 2010).

⁶ Luiz Koshiba and Denise Manzi Frayze Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental* (São Paulo: Atual, 2003).

⁷ I could not have access to lists of textbooks adopted by public schools.

⁸ Associação Nacional de Jornais, "Os Maiores Jornais Do Brasil de Circulação Paga, Ano 2010," accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.anj.org.br/maiores-jornais-do-brasil>.

⁹ Eduardo Spohr, *A Batalha Do Apocalipse: Da Queda Dos Anjos Ao Crepúsculo Do Mundo* (Verus Editora, 2010).

¹⁰ Luiz Eduardo Soares et al., *Elite Da Tropa 2* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2010).

¹¹ I used this method because there is not a reliable annual list of best-selling books in Brazil.

¹² José Padilha, *Tropa de Elite 2: O Inimigo Agora É Outro* (Zazen Produções, 2010).

¹³ Wagner de Assis, *Nosso Lar* (Fox Filmes, 2010).

¹⁴ Agência Nacional do Cinema, *Informe de Acompanhamento de Mercado, 2010*, accessed December 30, 2013, http://www.ancine.gov.br/media/SAM/Informes/2010/Informe_Anuar_2010.pdf.

most-attended movies, which is otherwise comprised of American movies.

II. Brazilian Identities in 2010

I used interpretive discourse analysis to recover identities from the sample.¹⁵ I first read the texts to catalogue identity categories, and then identified categories that dealt with related aspects. It was possible to see that the categories addressed one of the following aspects: domestic politics; government; socioeconomic aspects; economic position in the world; and political role in the world. Finally, I aggregated categories dealing with each aspect into a cluster. From this process emerged five identity clusters that represent Brazilian identities in 2010: limited democracy, incompetent government, divided society, developing country, and peaceful leader. Table 1 shows the raw counts for each category. In this section, I present the categories that form each cluster, and examine how they inform each other.

A Limited Democracy

Democracy is a core part of Brazilian identity. The categories that directly or indirectly describe Brazilian democracy make 53% of all counts. Although there are nuances in the way democracy is portrayed, as a group the categories suggest the identity of a limited democracy. There are six categories that explicitly describe Brazilian democracy. According to the first category, **government authoritarianism** constrains democracy. This discourse is present most frequently in textbooks, which consider historical periods when the Executive increased its share of power and/or limited individual liberties. But the newspapers also reveal concerns about government authoritarianism in contemporary politics. Newspapers discuss President's Lula persistent campaigning for the Workers' Party presidential candidate: "[the president] says whatever he pleases, whenever he pleases, wherever he pleases, as if he were beyond reproach. The fact that he mocked the judges after receiving five fines for disrespecting electoral law demonstrates his disdain for the Judiciary" (*FSP* op-ed, August). Editorials argue that, in the process leading to the adoption of the Human Rights National Plan, the Executive not only overstepped its powers but also ignored civil society inputs. For example: "the authoritarian nature of the project is evident in the way it was imposed on society" (*OG*, May).

¹⁵ The method is described in more detail in XX.

Table 1.1 Raw identity counts

Top categories, with valence	Total	S	T	E	L	M	N
Corrupt/impunity/opportunism (-)	72		15	11	39	4	3
Government incompetent/irresponsible/weak (-)	29			7	15	2	5
Revolt/coup d'état/regime change	22		22				
Social inequality (-)	22	3	12		2	3	2
Government authoritarianism (-)	21		12	5	3		1
Received influences from Europe/US (8-, 7/, 6+)	21		21				
Exploitation of the lower classes by the elite (-)	19		17				2
Exploitation by economic elites (-)	16		16				
Political repression (-)	16		16				
Voters manipulated/populism/paternalism (-)	15		12		3		
Political exclusion (-)	12		7			3	2
Participation of the military in politics (9/, 1-)	10		10				
International leader (+)	9	6	3				
State intervention in the economy (4+, 4-)	8		8				
Whole society is corrupt/responsible	7				2	2	3
Agricultural exporter (-)	6		6				
Competent government (aspirational, +)	6	4	2				
Becoming modern (+)	5		4	1			
Good economic conditions (vs. North) (+)	5	3	2				
Neutral (West vs. East) (+)	5						5
Total	321	16	185	24	64	14	18

Note: The letters at the top of each column indicate the sources, from left to right: speeches, textbooks, editorials, letters to the editor, movies, and novels. Aspirational categories are described as such between parentheses; all others are perceived as current identity categories. The signs after each category indicate whether the category is perceived as positive (+), negative (-), or neutral (/ or no sign); for categories whose valence varies, the numbers between parentheses indicate the valence distribution.

Table 1.2 Raw identity counts by cluster

	Categories, with valence	S	T	E	L	M	N	Total	
	Government authoritarianism (-)		12	5	3		1	21	
	Voters manipulated/populism/paternalism (-)		12		3			15	
	Political exclusion (-)		7			3	2	12	
	Advances in democracy (+)	2	2					4	
	Young/fragile democracy (2/, 1-)	1	1		1			3	
	Advanced democracy (aspirational, +)	3						3	
Limited Democracy	Corrupt/impunity/opportunism (-)		15	11	39	4	3	72	
	Whole society is corrupt/responsible (-)				2	2	3	7	
	Not a serious/decent country (-)						2	2	
	Revolt/coup d'état/regime change		22					22	
	Political repression (-)		16					16	
	At war with organized crime					3	1	4	
	Participation of the military in politics (9/, 1-)		10					10	
	State intervention in the economy (4+, 4-)		8					8	
	Incompetent Government	Incompetent/irresponsible/weak (-)			7	15	2	5	29
		Competent (aspirational, +)	4	2					6
Responsible (fiscal/economic terms) (+)		3						3	
Divided Society	Social inequality (-)	3	12		2	3	2	22	
	Exploitation of the lower classes by the elite (-)		17				2	19	
	Social equality (aspirational, +)	2	2					4	
	Improving conditions for the poor (+)	4						4	
	Improving conditions for the poor (aspirational, +)	4						4	
	Work is not valued/respected (-)		1		2			3	
	National unity (aspirational, +)	2						2	
	National unity (+)	1						1	
Developing	Exploitation by economic elites (national/international) (-)		16					16	
	Agricultural exporter (-)		6					6	
	Becoming modern (+)		4	1				5	
	Poor						2	2	
	Maintaining economic growth (aspirational, +)	1		1				2	
	Clean spiritually (despite being poor) (+)						1	1	
	Soccer nation (2-, 1+)				3			3	
Peaceful Leader	Received influences from Europe/US (8-, 7/, 6+)		21					21	
	Leader (+)	6	3					9	
	Neutral (West vs. East) (+)						5	5	
	Good economic conditions (vs. North) (+)	3	2					5	
	Great nation (+)				2			2	
	Great power, myth (-)		2					2	
	South/Latin American	1					1	2	
	Total	40	19	25	72	17	30	377	

Note: The letters at the top of each column indicate the sources, from left to right: speeches, textbooks, editorials, letters to the editor, movies, and novels. Aspirational categories are described as such between parentheses; all others are perceived as current identity categories.

The second category suggests that Brazil possesses only a low level of democracy due to the **manipulation of voters, populism, or paternalism**. This category is highly concentrated in textbooks that describe populist or paternalist practices adopted by previous presidents. Moreover, it is present in letters to *O Globo* that see the government as intentionally maintaining low levels of education. For example: “The more ignorant the people, the bigger the odds that the powerful will manipulate it. In a country with no education and culture, democracy is the same as despotism” (September).

The third category involves another constraint on democracy: **political exclusion**. It is found in textbooks that describe how large portions of the population did not have a right to vote or had no political influence due to the concentration of power in the hands of economic and military elites. References to political exclusion also appear in *Elite Squad*. The movie describes the poor as being subject to police violence and a merciless application of the law, which does not touch the rich. The *Elite Squad* novel posits that the state is absent from the slums in Rio: “[Journalists] were mistaken to believe that the slum belonged to the nation and was regulated by the Federal Constitution and the democratic rule of law.”¹⁶

The fourth and fifth categories have a more optimistic tone, stressing achieved or desired **advances** in democracy. This discourse is concentrated in speeches and textbooks, and therefore has a statist character. An example is found in Rousseff’s speech: “My election demonstrates the advance of democracy in Brazil: for the first time, a woman will be president... Equality in opportunities for men and women is an essential democratic principle.” Finally, a couple of texts mention the incipient nature of democracy in Brazil. Among these, only the letter to the editor has a negative connotation: “our democracy still has much to improve” (*FSP*, August).

The remaining categories in the cluster deal with political aspects related to democracy: corruption, the use of violence, the participation of the military in politics, and state intervention in the economy. Each of them emphasizes problems and therefore reinforces the identity of limited democracy.

Corruption is by far the most salient identity discourse in Brazil. The three categories dealing with it make 21% of all counts, which is the highest count across all categories. References to corruption are absent from speeches and concentrated at the “mass” end of the spectrum. At the “elite” end, textbooks describe practices such as clientelism and electoral fraud, which were common at the beginning of the century; political campaigns based at least in part on claims to fight corruption; or the corruption scandal involving President Collor. However, it is in letters to the editor that references to corruption and opportunism abound: “corruption is endemic in Brazil, and it involves all levels and powers of the government” (*OG*, February); “is our vote merely a ticket to power?” (*FSP*, May). In *Elite Squad*, corruption is especially salient in parts that discuss incestuous relationships among drug traffickers, the police, and politicians.¹⁷

¹⁶ Soares et al., *Elite Da Tropa* 2, 180.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11, 12, 17.

Most discourses see corruption as a problem that afflicts only the political class, rather than the entire country. A few texts at the “mass” end of the spectrum see the whole society as corrupt or responsible for what happens in politics: “Brazil, the rascals’ paradise. You turn a blind eye to what I do, and I turn a blind eye to what you do. And everything works itself out.”¹⁸ Yet, the vast majority paints the picture of the Brazilian politician who has corruption basically written in their genes: “every politician is equally bad, and the only thing that changes is the [party] label” (OG, June). Connected with this perception is the notion that Brazil is not a serious country: “In more decent parts of the world, only the prisoners are subject to body [cavity] searches; those visiting them in prison only have to go through detection machines.”¹⁹

Another group of identity categories deals with the use of **violence**. Although Brazilian history is marked by violently repressed revolts, coup d’états, and unconstitutional regime changes, these events do not reflect on national identity. The first two categories – **revolt/coup d’état/regime change**, and **political repression** – show up in textbooks but are completely absent from the other texts. The use of violence appears only in *Elite Squad*, which characterizes Brazil as a country at war with organized crime.²⁰

The last two categories in the cluster refer to the participation of the military in politics and the intervention of the state in the economy, which were frequent in the 20th century. Taken together, these categories indicate a limited commitment to liberal democracy. The **participation of the military in politics** assumes a negative valence only 10% of the time, when it refers to the military dictatorship. Most references have a neutral valence, indicating the involvement of the military in politics is not rejected in essence – which contradicts democratic principles. Similarly, there seems to be a limited commitment to neoliberal principles. To textbooks, the state was the only actor that could bear the burden of investment necessary for development. Import substitution policies are not inefficient in and of themselves; they just stopped working at a certain point. **State intervention** in the economy thus assumes a negative or positive valence in equal proportions.

An Incompetent Government

In this cluster, mass and elite, statist texts are neatly divided: while newspapers and popular culture see the government as **incompetent, irresponsible** or **weak**, speeches and textbooks emphasize government competence and responsibility. Claims to competence and responsibility are especially salient in Rousseff’s speech. They are directed at domestic audiences: “We will focus on improving the quality of public spending, on tax reform, and on the improvement of public services,” and also at foreign investors: “Brazil is a generous nation that gives back twice as much as what is invested in it... We will take care of our economy responsibly.” In textbooks, claims to effectively represent the people come from past presidential candidates.

However, such claims do not seem to gain traction. Editorials point to incompetence

¹⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹⁹ Ibid., 202.

²⁰ Ibid., 261.

and irresponsibility: “we witness a squandering of human lives and a spectacle of [government] incompetence and cynicism every rain season (*FSP*, April); “the management of public funds seemed to be entering the realm of irresponsibility” (*FSP*, May). A similar discourse is present in letters to the editor, especially in *O Globo*: “The Judiciary is clearly incompetent... the Executive, be it at the municipal, state, or federal levels, neglects the population” (*OG*, April).

The image of incompetence is perhaps best illustrated in the narrator’s frustrated reaction in *Elite Squad* when a federal police agent’s cell phone does not work during an operation: “Brazil!”²¹ In both novel and movie, the government seems ill equipped to combat crime: “It is pointless to arrest criminals, because the system produces new ones to replace them;”²² “There is always the problem of witness intimidation [by criminals]. Were this a serious country, we would not rely so much on witnesses [to investigate crimes].”²³ Even *The Battle of the Apocalypse*, which is less politically engaged, describes organized crime as a parallel power.²⁴

A Divided Society

The third cluster describes a society divided along economic lines. In this cluster, discourses are concentrated at the “elite” end of the spectrum, and appear less frequently in mass texts. The cluster comprises two discourses that emphasize divisions: social inequality, and the exploitation of the lower classes by the elite. The social inequality discourse is present in three categories: (i) **social inequality** itself is the only category in the cluster to be mentioned in most genres; (ii) **social equality as an aspiration** appears in speeches and textbooks; and (iii) **improving conditions for the poor** shows up in speeches, as an affirmation or aspiration: “The opportunities for a better present and future are being shared.”²⁵

The exploitation of the lower classes by the elite is a recurring image especially in textbooks, which emphasize the lack of legal protection to workers, and even compare industry workers to slaves. This script also appears in *Elite Squad*, which describes police officers as earning little and sacrificing their safety, while politicians take credit for their work.²⁶ Connected to this notion are claims that work is not valued/respected – found in letters, and also a textbook according to which part of slavery’s legacy is that work is seen as an activity only suited to inferior beings.²⁷

In contrast to texts that emphasize economic division, speeches mention **national unity** as a fact or an aspiration: “The entire Brazilian society mobilized itself to face the [financial] crisis;”²⁸ “now is the time to be united; united for education, united for development, united for the country.”²⁹

²¹ Ibid., 65–66.

²² Padilha, *Tropa de Elite 2: O Inimigo Agora É Outro*.

²³ Ibid., 99.

²⁴ Spohr, *A Batalha Do Apocalipse: Da Queda Dos Anjos Ao Crepúsculo Do Mundo*, 432.

²⁵ Rousseff, “Dilma Rousseff: Primeiro Pronunciamento.”

²⁶ Soares et al., *Elite Da Tropa 2*, 11, 13.

²⁷ Koshiba and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 428.

²⁸ da Silva, “Mensagem Ao Congresso Nacional, 2010: 4ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária Da 53ª Legislatura.”

²⁹ Rousseff, “Dilma Rousseff: Primeiro Pronunciamento.”

A Developing Country

In the categories that describe Brazil's economic position in the world, three aspects are combined to form the identity of a developing country. First, there is a perception that developed countries have exploited Brazil. According to textbooks, Brazil is connected to the world economy via the exportation of primary goods, which is a type of economic **exploitation**. Beginning with colonization, Brazil became trapped in a cycle of exploitation: it provides wealthy countries with cheap goods, while not receiving technology transfers or being more closely integrated into the world market. Both national and international elites stand to gain in this situation, while the country remains poor. In this view, development is equated with industrialization and urbanization, which would put Brazil on a par with the wealthy countries.

Second, Brazil is described as **poor** alongside African and Latin American countries,³⁰ while an aspiration for economic growth is present both in Lula's speech and in an editorial (FSP, February). Finally, Brazil is perceived as having abilities that are usually associated with the poor, such as spiritual virtue and physical prowess. In *The Battle of the Apocalypse*, Rio is described as a place where "the spiritual world was clean,"³¹ while war took over the globe. Furthermore, the depiction of Brazil as a "soccer nation" appears in three letters to the editor. This image is rejected by two of the letters: "Despite what our diplomacy thinks, Brazil will not be respected internationally because of its soccer, carnival or natural beauty; our country will be respected for its economy, culture, welfare, honesty, for its people's labor, for its technological development and scientific achievements" (OG, April). However, a third letter takes pride of the depiction: "The national team's jersey is a patrimony of the Brazilian people, which has reached inestimable value and is loved by people from the four corners of the world" (OG, April).

A Peaceful Leader

The categories describing Brazil's role in international politics reveal a couple of aspects. First, the significant others in the discourses are mostly Western developed countries – rather than the country's neighbors, which are strikingly absent. In all texts, Brazil is described as South/Latin American only twice.³² Textbooks do not address relations with South/Latin America in the history of Brazil. Moreover, most of world history revolves around Europe, Russia, the US, and to a lesser extent China; only one of the textbooks has a short world history section that deals with Latin America.

Significant others appear most frequently in textbooks, which mention political and cultural **influences received from Europe and the US**. European influence assumes a negative valence in a minority of cases, for example in the assertion that the Brazilian modernist movement denounced submission to European cultural trends.³³ Textbooks posit that anarchism gained prominence in Brazil with the arrival of Europe-

³⁰ Spohr, *A Batalha Do Apocalipse: Da Queda Dos Anjos Ao Crepúsculo Do Mundo*, 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³² da Silva, "Mensagem Ao Congresso Nacional, 2010: 4ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária Da 53ª Legislatura"; Spohr, *A Batalha Do Apocalipse: Da Queda Dos Anjos Ao Crepúsculo Do Mundo*, 42.

³³ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 606.

an immigrants,³⁴ who played a key role in industrialization.³⁵ The adoption of labor laws was part of a “global trend” in Europe,³⁶ as was the creation of communist and fascist parties,³⁷ and the ideological polarization in the 1930s.³⁸ Moreover, the 1937 Constitution was modeled after Italian and Polish constitutions.³⁹ World War I spurred industrial development⁴⁰ and led to the decline of anarchism,⁴¹ while World War II made a democratic transition “inevitable.”⁴²

In contrast, American influence assumes a positive or neutral valence only a couple of times, when textbooks compare Brazilian democracy with the “American model,”⁴³ or describe alignment with the US as a central part of domestic politics debates.⁴⁴ Most references have a negative valence: Brazil adhered to American-based consumerism,⁴⁵ and was “flooded with non-durable products (...) from the United States;”⁴⁶ the military dictatorship resulted from American efforts to avoid revolutions such as the one in Cuba;⁴⁷ Brazil unfortunately adopted the American doctrine of national security in the 1970s,⁴⁸ as well as neoliberalism, the “Anglo-American model,” in the 1990s.⁴⁹ Second, although there is some variation in terms of how Brazil’s status is perceived, the role of leader shows up frequently. Statist texts emphasize Brazilian leadership. President Lula represents Brazil as a leader that invests in regional integration, provides support to Haiti, and actively participates in multilateral forums to fight economic protectionism and promote sustainable development. The country is also a regional **leader**: “We earned the right to be the first South American nation to host the Olympic games.”⁵⁰ A similar discourse appears in one of the textbooks, which depicts Brazilian diplomacy as increasingly active.⁵¹ References to leadership are less frequent in Rousseff’s speech, but still present as she promises to lead efforts to regulate the international financial market. Moreover, statist texts describe Brazil as practically immune to the financial crisis, in contrast to developed countries: “While unemployment and economic stagnation took their toll in the North, we kept creating employment, investing in infrastructure and industry.”⁵²

The depiction of the country as a **great power** finds echoes in two letters in *O Globo*. While one letter describes Brazil as a continent (May), another calls for a bigger in-

³⁴ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 563; Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 343.

³⁵ Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 403.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 446.

³⁸ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 630.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 634.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 600.

⁴¹ Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 347.

⁴² Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 639; Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 460.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 555.

⁴⁴ Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 469, 494.

⁴⁵ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 671.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 675.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 734–735; Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 473.

⁴⁸ Koshiha and Pereira, *História Do Brasil No Contexto Da História Ocidental*, 515.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁵⁰ da Silva, “Mensagem Ao Congresso Nacional, 2010: 4ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária Da 53ª Legislatura.”

⁵¹ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 807–808.

⁵² da Silva, “Mensagem Ao Congresso Nacional, 2010: 4ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária Da 53ª Legislatura.”

volvement in Haiti: “If Brazil wants to occupy a leadership position in the UN, it has to act like a great nation. We should send our aircraft carrier to Haiti (...). The United States is already doing that. We should not be stingy. We have the money” (January). Yet, not all discourses grant Brazil the status of a traditional great power. The notion of “great power myth” appears in a textbook to describe official propaganda during the military dictatorship.⁵³ *The Battle of the Apocalypse* tells a story about a world war in which Brazil remains neutral and plays only the role of receiving refugees.⁵⁴

Although views regarding Brazil’s leadership role differ somewhat across texts, there is consensus that Brazil’s engagement with other countries is **cooperative**. Across texts, Brazil’s actions involve promoting regional integration, participating in multilateral forums, providing aid, or receiving refugees. In combination with the other categories in the cluster, this discourse suggests the identity of a peaceful leader.

III. The Topography of Brazilian Identity in 2010

There seems to be a widespread view that corruption is endemic in Brazil. Corruption is by far the most salient, consensual identity category. It is mentioned in all genres except speeches, and its average percentage across genres – which is an overall measure of category salience – is the highest of any category, at 23%. Corruption is very present in history and contemporary politics, and is often treated as a problem that is typically Brazilian, rather than existing in other countries and resulting from specific institutional arrangements: “it is about time we give the opportunity to another president to show that Brazil can be fixed... fighting corruption and bad politicians is the public’s duty” (letter in *OG*, June).

References to corruption reflect popular discontent, which marked the political scene in 2010.⁵⁵ Discontent is also expressed in the very popularity achieved by *Elite Squad*, as both novel and movie deal with the problems of organized crime, violence and corruption in Rio de Janeiro. However, references to corruption should not be interpreted as a mea culpa on the part of Brazilians. Most discourses see corruption as a problem that afflicts only the political class, rather than the entire society. The country itself is usually not seen as corrupt, but rather its politicians are.

⁵³ Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 743.

⁵⁴ Spohr, *A Batalha Do Apocalipse: Da Queda Dos Anjos Ao Crepúsculo Do Mundo*, 42, 128, 194, 343, 355.

⁵⁵ While manifestations followed corruption scandals, the clown-turned-candidate Tiririca, with the campaign slogan “It can’t get any worse,” was the most voted state representative nationally with 1.3 million votes.

Table 2. Brazilian Identity Topography

Categories		S	T	E	L	M	N
Limited Democracy	Government authoritarianism		--	----	-		-
	Voters manipulated/populism/paternalism		--		-		
	Political exclusion		-			----	--
	Advances in democracy (+)	++	+				
	Young/fragile democracy	+	+		-		
	Advanced democracy (aspirational, +)	+++					
	Corruption/impunity/opportunism		---	----	----	----	---
	Whole society is corrupt/responsible				-	----	---
	Not a serious/decent country						--
	Revolt/coup d'état/regime change		////				
	Political repression		---				
	At war with organized crime					/////	/
	Participation of the military in politics		++				
State intervention in the economy		~					
Incompetent Government	Incompetent/irresponsible/weak			----	----	----	----
	Competent (aspirational)	+++	+				
	Responsible (fiscal/economic terms)	+++					
Divided Society	Social inequality	---	--		-	----	--
	Exploitation of the lower classes by the elite		---				--
	Social equality (aspirational)	++	+				
	Improving conditions for the poor	+++					
	Improving conditions for the poor (aspirational)	+++					
	Work is not valued/respected		-		-		
National unity (aspirational)	++						
Developing	Exploitation by economic elites		---				
	Agricultural exporter		-				
	Becoming modern		+	+			
	Poor						//
	Marinating economic growth (aspirational)	+		+			
	Clean spiritually (despite being poor)						+
Soccer nation				~			
Peaceful Leader	Received influences from Europe/US		-- / +				
	Leader	+++ ++	+				
	Neutral (West vs. East)						/////
	Good economic conditions (vs. North)	+++	+				
	South/Latin American	/					/

Note: The letters at the top of each column indicate the sources, from left to right: speeches, textbooks, editorials, letters to the editor, movies, and novels. Aspirational categories are described as such between parentheses; all others are perceived as current identity categories. The last column indicates the average of category occurrence, weighted across all sources; categories with an average below 1% were omitted.

In general, there is a clear division between statist and non-statist discourses, with the former emphasizing positive representations of Brazil, while the latter overwhelmingly contain negative representations. Most of the salient categories in speeches have a positive valence, but textbooks are usually the only other genre where these categories are mentioned. Textbooks are the genre that overlaps with speeches the most, especially for categories that have a positive valence – e.g., *advances in democracy*, and *good economic conditions*. Textbooks also overlap with the other genres, except for discourses criticizing the current government. In contrast, the most salient categories both in newspapers and popular culture are generally critical of the government. Therefore, while textbooks are statist, the other genres are not.

Overall, there are four main areas of elite-mass contention. First, although there is consensus about the constrained nature of Brazilian democracy, the sources of constraint differ across elite and mass texts. Statist discourses seem to attribute limitations to Brazil's relative lack of historical experience as a democracy, and therefore portray advances as a matter of time. In contrast, newspapers and popular culture attribute problems to an insufficient commitment to democratic principles on the part of elites, which is more resilient to change.

After *corruption*, the second most salient category overall is *incompetent government*, with an average percentage of 13%. Mass and statist texts are clearly divided in their descriptions of the government. Although speeches and textbooks emphasize government competence and responsibility, newspapers and popular culture see the government as incompetent, irresponsible or weak. The next most salient category overall is *social inequality* (7%), in which a similar pattern appears. The frequency distribution of the social inequality discourse along the mass-elite spectrum indicates that, although there is consensus that Brazil is an unequal country, the public does not necessarily recognize the situation as improving. Moreover, the national unity discourse from speeches is the least frequent in this cluster, and does not appear in any other genre.

Finally, there is elite-mass contention in the representations of Brazil's position in the world. Statist discourses emphasize Brazilian leadership; in fact, the most salient category in speeches is *leader*, with an average percentage of 15%. However, this representation does not resonate much with the public. In *The Battle of the Apocalypse*, the war between West and East starts with American expansionism, and intensifies as the US forms an alliance with Europe and Taiwan, which is opposed by China and North Korea. Brazil is described as poor, and its neutrality suggests that it is not on par with Taiwan, China or North Korea. Moreover, in all clusters Brazil's role in relation to its significant other – Western developed countries – is usually a passive one, as the receiver of influences or the exploited periphery.

Notwithstanding the contrast between statist and non-statist texts, there are also some areas of elite-mass consensus. There is agreement about the constrained nature of Brazilian democracy, which appears across all genres. Similarly, there seems to be a consensus that Brazil is an unequal country: *social inequality* is the third most salient category overall (7%), and appears in most genres. And while class divisions are acknowledged explicitly and rejected, race and gender divisions are generally not ques-

tioned. Race and gender inequalities are practically absent from discourse,⁵⁶ although fictional characters and their creators are disproportionately white males.

Moreover, in all of the identity clusters, whenever the significant other is another country, it is usually a European country or the US. There is a saying according to which Brazil is always looking towards the North Atlantic, with its back turned to South America – and that seems to apply to the texts examined here. Finally, there is consensus that Brazil's engagement with other countries is cooperative. This discourse suggests a peaceful identity, especially if analyzed in combination with other categories. The general absence of references to violence indicates that Brazilians see themselves (or their leaders) as corrupt but not violent; the image that comes to mind is indeed of rascal, or a malicious yet likable con artist. Likewise, Brazil's alleged spiritual virtue reinforces the quality of peacefulness.

Conclusion

In an interpretive discourse analysis of a range of widely-read texts – including speeches, history textbooks, newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, movies, and novels – five clusters of Brazilian identity in 2010 emerged. The first cluster describes Brazil as a limited democracy, due to government authoritarianism, the manipulation of voters, political exclusion, corruption, state use of violence, the participation of the military in politics, and state intervention in the economy. The second cluster portrays an incompetent government, while the third cluster describes a society divided along economic lines. The fourth cluster depicts a developing country – which is poor, connects to the world economy via the exportation of primary goods, and has spiritual virtue and physical prowess. The fifth cluster suggests the identity of a peaceful leader. Despite some variation in terms of how Brazil's status is perceived, the role of leader appears frequently, and there is a consensus that Brazil will use peaceful means to perform its role. Overall, *corruption* is the most salient category; the predominant identity discourse thus describes a rascals' paradise.

The implications of Brazilian identity for the persistence of Western hegemony are mixed. On the one hand, discourses about domestic politics suggest the identity of a limited democracy. According to the texts, the Executive oversteps its powers and limits individual liberties, while citizens lack the tools for an informed vote and a share of the population is excluded from the political process. Moreover, neutral or positive evaluations of the participation of the military in politics and the intervention of the state in the economy indicate a limited commitment to liberal democracy. The abundant references to corruption suggest that the democratic system of checks and balances does not work properly, while the use of force by the government signals a limited ability to solve problems using the regular political process.

In addition, there is resistance to neoliberalism coming from the perception that, as a developing country, Brazil is at a disadvantage in the world economy. More specifically, the texts suggest a limited faith in the market to solve problems, as well as a mostly

⁵⁶ There is one mention of sexism in Soares et al., *Elite Da Tropa 2*, 208; and one mention of racism in Vicentino and Dorigo, *História Geral E Do Brasil*, 563–564.

positive view of state intervention in the economy. Other key features of neoliberalism – such as a positive attitude toward liberal policies and reforms, individualism, and the attribution of a positive value to competitiveness – are absent from discourse. Although criticism of the government is frequent, it does not originate from neoliberal views. None of the texts call for a reduction in the government’s responsibilities in favor of the market. Instead, they represent an expectation that the government will improve its performance in the tasks under its responsibility.

However, there are no counterhegemonic discourses on the horizon. The predominant discourses represent a strong aspiration for advances in democracy, while references to alternative political regimes are absent. Democracy is taken for granted, and neoliberalism is not rejected altogether. Moreover, Brazil sees itself as Western, or at least aspires to be part of the West. The significant others in the discourses are mostly Western developed countries. The overall positive valence of references to Europe indicates that Brazil is proud of its European heritage, although views of the US tend to be negative. The findings thus bolster democratic neoliberalism, even if slightly adapting it.

Appendix

Sources

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