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From beacon to siren: the transformation of Brazil from racial utopia to racist/ antisemitic dystopia

Do farol ao canto da sereia: a transformação do Brasil de utopia racial a distopia racista/antisemita

Del faro al canto de la sirena: la transformación del Brasil de utopía a una distopía racista/antisemita

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Resumo
Neste artigo, oferecemos reflexões sobre o significado dos usos de símbolos judaicos, israelenses e sionistas no contexto político contemporâneo brasileiro. Nesse contexto pretendemos também explorar os significados do aparecimento destes símbolos em protestos da "nova direita" brasileira a partir das manifestações de massa realizadas no país durante a segunda década do século vinte. Pretendemos aqui entender as relações de tais símbolos com grupos conservadores no país. É nossa intenção também discutir as relações dialéticas de ruptura e continuidade ocorridas no interior das instituições judaicas brasileiras, onde definições tradicionais de pertencimento e fronteiras são desafiadas quando setores da comunidade judaica apoiam efusivamente uma candidatura da extrema direita nas eleições de 2018, produzindo tensionamentos antes inimagináveis com grupos progressistas e de esquerda. Por fim, também buscamos aqui refletir sobre as mudanças de significado no conceito de raça no Brasil após a realização da Conferência de Durban em 2001 e seus ecos nas relações entre as populações judaicas e afrodescendentes no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Raça. Nova direita. Judeus. Sntissemitismo. Israel.

Abstract
In this article, we offer reflections on the meaning of the use of Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist symbols in the contemporary political context of Brazil. In this context, we also explore the meanings of the appearance of these symbols at protests by the Brazilian "New Right" beginning with the mass demonstrations during the second

decade of the twentieth century. Here we seek to understand the relations between these symbols and conservative groups in the country. We also discuss the dialectic between rupture and continuity within Jewish Brazilian institutions where traditional definitions of belonging and boundaries were challenged when sectors of the Jewish community enthusiastically supported the candidate from the extreme right in the 2018 elections, resulting in previously unimaginable tensions with progressive and leftist groups. We also reflect on the changes in the meaning of the concept of race in Brazil following the Durban Conference in 2001 and its echoes in the relations between Jewish and Afro-descendant populations in Brazil.

Keywords: Race. New Right. Jews. Antisemitism. Israel.

Resumen
En esto artículo, oferecemos reflexiones sobre el sentido de los usos de símbolos judíos, Israelíes y Sionistas en el contexto político contemporaneo de Brasil. En esto contexto tenemos la intención también de explorar los sentidos de la aparopriacion de estes símbolos en las protestas de la "nueva Derecha" brasileña. Hacemos nesto a partir de las manifestaciones massivas realizadas en el país durante la segunda década del siglo veinte. Tenemos la intención aquí de entender las relaciones de tales símbolos con grupos conservadores del país. Es nuestra intención discutir también las relaciones dialécticas de ruptura y continuidad que ocurriran en el interior de las instituciones judías brasileñas donde definiciones tradicionales de pertenecimiento y fronteras son desafiadas cuando sectores de la comunidad judia apoyan efusivamente un candidato de la Derecha extrema en las elecciones de 2018, produciendo tensiones antes inimaginables con grupos progresistas y de izquierda de la propria comunida. Por fin, también buscamos aqui discutir los cambios en el sentido en el concepto de raza en el Brasil después de la realización de la Conferencia de Durban en 2001 y sus ecos en las relaciones entre las poblaciones judias y descendientes afro en el Brasil.

Palabras clave: Raza. Nueva derecha. Judíos. Antisemitismo. Israel.

1 THAT NIGHT

On the evening of April 3, 2017, the fates of Brazil and Brazilian Jews were linked. It would be more accurate to say that their fates were already linked, and perhaps had always been so. Regardless, that evening has had powerful repercussions both within and outside the Jewish community that nobody present could have anticipated. It all revolved around a speech at a private club by a politician who had just announced his presidential candidacy. The location was the Hebraica Club, a Jewish social club in the neighborhood of Laranjeiras in Rio de Janeiro, and the politician was none other than Jair Bolsonaro, now the president of Brazil.

Another speaker at another location would likely have occurred without incident. Even the same speaker at another location would not have drawn as much attention. However, the events leading up to that evening, and the ensuing fallout, not to mention Bolsonaro's subsequent election, have transformed that speech and the response to it into a definitive moment now referred to in the community as *aquela noite* ("that night").

That night has also had strong reverberations well beyond the limits of the small Jewish community in Rio de Janeiro, in part because the audio and video recordings of Bolsonaro's speech have been circulated widely, including by the candidate himself, and the most odious quotes from that night have appeared in print. All this has linked the then candidate/now President of the Republic with the Hebraica Club, and therefore with the Jewish community. Furthermore, there were ramifications resulting from the protest outside the club during Bolsonaro's speech that night, and the fact that it was a (nearly) unprecedented protest by Jews against a Jewish institution *em praça pública*, that is, visible to non-Jews. Significantly, this was also the first public protest against Bolsonaro since he had declared his candidacy for the presidency. So, in fact and in substance, that night brought to a head troubles that had been brewing for a long time and presaged what was to come.

In this paper, we unpack the significance of that night as a key event for understanding the current political moment. We explore the ways in which the shifting concept of race in Brazil sets up what occurred that night, how the Jewish community has positioned itself (and been positioned by others) in relation to how race is understood and deployed in Brazil, and the implications of the association of Bolsonaro and the rise of the New Right with Jews, the Jewish community, and Israel. These implications are for the Jewish community and Jewish identity on the one hand, and the consolidation of Brazilian right-wing politics on the other. These intersecting elements help us understand how the Brazil of today is practically unrecognizable in relation to the long-standing earlier vision of the nation, in particular how the image of Brazil has dramatically transformed from an anti-racist beacon of hope to a dystopian racist morass. Drawing on a "history of the present" and ethnographic fieldwork, we offer an explanation for how Brazil got lured onto the rocks of racial hatred and how the twin cultural constructions of Jews and antisemitism are key to understanding this transformation.

In this article we present one part of our larger collaboration, an interdisciplinary project that draws on our methodologies and perspectives as an anthropologist and a historian, respectively, who work on Jewish themes in the context of Brazilian society. This means that in our research we endeavor to connect themes related to Judaism and Jewish identity to the social, political, and economic reality of Brazil, and vice versa. As such, we study the Brazilian Jewish community within a broader perspective, one that is integral to, rather than disconnected from, the national issues that affect both non-Jews and Jews. Thus, Brazilian issues affect local Jewish experiences, just as they do other groups and communities. However, we wish to go further and suggest that a perspective drawing on the identities and experiences of Brazilian Jews is also important for understanding the national landscape and has proven to be key to understanding Brazil's current political moment.

We also reflect on the significance of Jewish symbols and meaning making in the contemporary political context of the country, including the changing meaning of race in Brazil. We explore the meanings behind the appearance of Israeli flags and Jewish symbols at demonstrations and other activities linked to the Brazilian New Right.[1] Our interest, therefore, is in the political uses that this diverse group makes of Jewish and Israeli symbols within the reemergence of the political relevance of conservative forces in the country.

Finally, we consider the following questions: How do the shifting meanings of race and the emergent acknowledgments of systemic and institutionalized racism in Brazil affect Brazilian Jewish identity and the functioning of the Jewish community?[2] How are we to understand symbols that are meaningful within the borders of Brazilian Jewish identity when they are appropriated by groups that are ostensibly outside these borders? How might we understand the ideological and political identities that have gained space in relation to the traditional ethno-cultural identities of diverse Jewish groups in the country? Finally, what bearing do these apparently Jewish issues have on the emergent national political scenario? We begin with a brief discussion of the history of the Jewish community in Brazil, the Jewish relationship with Brazilian concepts of race, and the effects of the debate about racism on their identity.

2 JEWS AND JEWISHNESS IN THE "COUNTRY OF THE FUTURE"

For a variety of reasons, there is increased interest in the colonial-era arrival of Portuguese Jews in what became Brazil. Forced to convert to Christianity in 1497, they were marked as *cristãos novos*, or New Christians, but eventually this moniker disappeared, and their descendants were absorbed into the general population in both Portugal and its colonies (Novinsky 2015). There is also increasing evidence that these descendants of *b'nei anusim* ("children of the forced converts") and of Jews who arrived during the seventeenth-century Dutch occupation of Brazil's Northeast may

1 Here we follow the more general use of the term "New Right," as proposed by Vera Alves Capêda (2018), to refer to the process of building the newly consolidated conservative political identity that has emerged in recent years in Brazil. Capêda describes a conservative political space within which distinct right-wing groups have coexisted for some time, ranging from those at the more liberal end of the spectrum to those that flirt with fascism. The Brazilian New Right has created a "political community" that attacks *petismo* (the ideologies associated with the PT, the Workers' Party) and more generally fights against an "imaginary Left." Through their various relations to power, political culture, liberalism, and democracy, there are radical right-, extreme right-, and liberal right-wing groups that have survived particular moments of Brazil's national political history. Over time, certain groups have achieved hegemony while others have collapsed. This Brazilian New Right carries many and contradictory meanings and serves as an initial ideological frontier.

2 The literature on the cultural construction of race is enormous, and Brazil occupies a prominent place in these analyses, especially among the North American scholars of Brazil. We will be addressing this literature in our ongoing work, but for our present purposes a few points of reference include Eakin (2017), Schwarcz and Queiroz (1996), Schwarcz and Gomes (2018), Skidmore (1993), Degler (1971), and Telles (2004).

well represent a significant, though unproven and unprovable, portion of the Brazilian population. The vast majority of these descendants are unaware of their Jewish ancestry, or have only the vaguest awareness of it, and are not practicing Jews nor are they considered as such. We speculate that part of the current interest in Brazil's Jewish past stems from contemporary political framings that seek to recast Brazil's Catholic past in favor of a guilt-free past inhabited by *cristãos novos* and Protestants.[3]

In contrast to these many possible Jewish descendants, when we talk about the Brazilian Jewish community, whether as a loose collectivity or as a formally organized entity, we are mostly concerned with the descendants of those who legally immigrated to Brazil *as Jews*, beginning in the nineteenth century during the Rubber Boom, and mostly in the twentieth century, especially between the World Wars and after World War II. Although the numbers are approximate, with roughly 120,000 Jews, Brazil is home to the second largest Jewish population in Latin America (after Argentina). This population is concentrated in three southeastern and southern cities: São Paulo (with approximately 60,000), Rio de Janeiro (with 35,000), and Porto Alegre (with 10,000). With an overall population of over 200 million, 10% of whom live in the city of São Paulo, we are reminded that in this enormous country, Jews make up less than one half of 1% (< .1%) of the total population. This demographic information is an important point of departure since it cannot be said that Jewish political participation or the cultural or political importance of Jews can be explained in terms of the absolute size of the community relative to the nation. Instead, their significance is symbolic, though, as with all symbols (as we will discuss further below), this significance derives from context, and the meanings of the symbols shift with the changing cultural and political landscape.

For much of the twentieth century, Brazil represented a beacon of hope for Jews and others escaping persecution in Europe and elsewhere. This hope derived from more than providing a safe harbor during a time when other countries closed their doors to refugees at the height of the war; significantly, Brazil also appeared to have overcome the racial categorizations that divided other nations, or at least, this was how foreigners perceived race relations in Brazil. This perception was canonized

3 With Iberian Jewry as a growing national point of reference, in some contexts the Inquisition comes to replace the Holocaust as a focus of collective tragedy. Similarly, the formerly key idea of the country without a past (or as it is more popularly formulated, "the country of the future") is transformed, whereby the history of slavery and exclusion is replaced by a Jewish past, one that absolves the imagined vast population of Jewish descendants of the crimes of the Inquisition and other colonial-era collaborations between the Catholic Church and the State. Upon their rapprochement with Judaism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, "Marranos" or "new Jews" (imagined descendants of "New Christians") acquire this new past and with it, new possibilities for the future. The "new Jew" that emerges does not arise from a rejection of Christianity but rather by a reinterpretation of specific forms of Christianity (Gherman and Klein 2019). In this context, one in which growing interest in a collective Jewish history dovetails with the rise of the evangelical right and its particular brand of philosemitism, Brazil's past is reinscribed as Jewish, employing familiar symbols and grammars, but to new ends. In this new, inverted Jewish temporality, Jewish modernity is supplanted by a remote and mythical past.

by the widely read and multiply translated book *Brazil: Country of the Future* (1941), by Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, who took refuge from the war in Brazil. While eugenicist objections to racial mixing had taken hold in Europe and North America, Brazilian Modernist intellectuals celebrated the obvious racial mixing of the population as the foundation for a new society (Veloso and Madeira 1999). Although it was recognized as having mythical qualities, this mixing of "three races" was codified in the notion of Brazil as a "racial democracy," a country free of racial prejudice, a light in the darkness of racial strife, a beacon for the world (Freyre 1933; DuBois 1999 [1935]). While this is consecrated and familiar history to all Brazilians, the importance of the idea of racial democracy for Jewish Brazilians is less well known. The idea of Brazil as a racial utopia meant that the country was not only a place to which Jews could escape the horrors of genocide and other forms of racialized violence,[4] but one where Jews could settle and fully participate in society.

In the racial grammar of the twentieth century, all Brazilians shared a mixed heritage, culturally if not ancestrally.[5] Indigenous languages and foodways were adopted into national practices even as Indigenous people were relocated, forcibly assimilated, ignored, and excluded. The influences of African cultural practices were appropriated as elements of national patrimony, including the national dish of *feijoada*, the dancing martial art of *capoeira*, and multiple Afro-Brazilian religions including *candomblé*, while the history of slavery that produced these practices was erased (Ortiz 1985). Ethnically distinct cultural practices were usurped and transformed into points of national pride and shared national traits. Not only did this undermine efforts to assert the distinct histories, cultures, and rights of minoritized populations to organize on their own behalf, but it also meant that anyone could participate in these cultural practices regardless of their own racial and cultural origins without being accused of appropriation (what in the U.S. would be accusations of being "culture vultures," or poaching other people's cultural patrimony). As such, apparently White people with no demonstrable African ancestry not only participate in *candomblé* but take up positions of leadership within the religion. Laying claim to a shared Indigenous cultural ancestry contributes to the plethora of *carnaval* costumes that reference a pastiche of Indigenous cultures while making it difficult to challenge these uses. This

4 Jews escaped to many other countries, including elsewhere in the Americas, but did not always think of these countries as places to stay. See Spitzer (1998).

5 The shift from race to culture was part of Gilberto Freyre's formulation of "racial democracy," a framing that drew on cultural and racial mixing as the foundation for the new Republic and a new society, and a direct repudiation of the eugenicist ideals of racial purity that had gained popularity in Europe and North America, an ideology that asserted that "miscegenation" would weaken the human race and bring about the downfall of civilization. Throughout the Americas (with the United States being a significant exception), in the aftermath of nineteenth-century independence movements, Modernist intellectuals seized upon the idea of mixing as a positive attribute of these new societies and elevated it to an ideal in such concepts as "the cosmic race" in Mexico (Vasconcelos 1925) and the "three races" concept in Brazil (Freyre 1933).

understanding of shared cultural practices also means that a youth of Korean ancestry can excel at Israeli folk dancing, as observed in São Paulo in 1999 (Klein 2012). All cultural practices are dumped into the great mixing pot of Brazilian culture, available to any and all.

For recently arrived Jews escaping the horrors of antisemitic violence and the wars in Europe, this "cordiality," this apparent harmony of racial mixing, signified the possibility of acceptance, and Jews enthusiastically embraced the ideology of "racial democracy" and used it to explain not only their own increasingly comfortable place within Brazilian society but their own communal organization (Sorj 1997; Klein 2012). In spite of origins in over sixty different countries, with great variations in language, food, and cultural practices that extended far beyond the distinctions between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi Jews,[6] Jewish communal organizations have been inclusive of these cultural, quasi-racialized groups. Although in the first moments after immigration some organizations were formalized around countries or regions of origin, these rapidly became inclusive of other Jews so that eventually these differences were overlooked via a process attributed to the Brazilian valorization of mixing, or "the Brazil Effect" (Klein 2012).

Of course, ideology is never perfectly implemented, not even when codified in law. While espousing "racial mixing" (socially and bodily), Brazil gained infamy as the most unequal country in the world. Explained away in terms of class, race undeniably maps onto class such that the darker one's skin, the more likely one is at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy, and the lighter one's skin, the more likely one is toward the top of that hierarchy. There have been just enough exceptions to allow deniability, supported by popular notions such as "money whitens." By the mid-twentieth century, the aspiration of a color-blind society was widely embraced and codified into, among other things, a national anti-racist law (*Lei Afonso Arinos*, no. 1390/51, 1951). Similarly, whatever latent expressions of antisemitism remained (largely rooted in Church teachings about Jews being responsible for the death of Christ), these were more abstractions than expressions of any deeply held beliefs and rarely took the form of anti-Jewish hate or violence. Eventually, and in spite of no history of organized antisemitism (and little general knowledge about Jews, Israel, or Zionism), antisemitism was incorporated into the national anti-racist statute in 2003.

This racial framing for Jewishness, despite repeated assertions by anthropologists and others that Jews do not constitute a race, allows Jews to be placed alongside other racial and racialized groups. Because of the conflation of Jews with Zionism, this poses a direct and uneasy challenge to the framing of Zionism as a

6 These are the primary cultural distinctions among Jews, corresponding to the primary regions where Jews settled (however temporarily) after the fall of the Second Temple and the Diaspora, that is, the dispersal of Jews from ancient Israel to points all over the globe: Central and Eastern Europe (Ashkenaz), Iberia (known as Sefarad in Hebrew), and the Middle East.

form of racism and racial discrimination, as declared in 1975 by the United Nations in General Assembly Resolution 3379. On the one hand, Jews are considered a race, one that can suffer from racist discrimination, exclusion, and violence, one that is worthy of protection under the law (in Brazil), while on the other hand, Zionism (one of several key symbols of Jewishness) is a form of racism that Jews perpetrate against excluded others (in Israel/Palestine). However, this contradiction had little traction in Brazil, where the majority of the population knew little and thought little about Jews, Israel, or Zionism for most of the twentieth century.

3 AFTER DURBAN

This all took a dramatic turn at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In spite of (the apparent need for) the anti-racist statute, decades of organizing and consciousness-raising efforts by the *Movimento Negro* (the Black Movement) (on the history of the *Movimento Negro,* see Santos [1994]; Pereira [2008]; Nascimento [2011]), and a lurking awareness of deep structural inequalities and half a century of scholarly research demonstrating a clear pattern of racial discrimination that undergirded Brazil's infamous inequality (i.e., Fernandez 1969), the nation still clung firmly to the ideal that Brazil was a racial paradise and a model for a global future free of racism. Immigrant and refugee Jewish artists and intellectuals exuberantly embraced this powerful ideology and promoted Brazil to itself and the world as an example of the celebration of diversity (i.e., Zweig 1941). Public assertions about existing and entrenched racial inequality drew accusations of being un-Brazilian, including from Freyre himself. Jews and Israel did not figure much in this twentieth-century formulation, although, echoing Zweig, the Jewish community firmly embraced this ideology as explanation for their acceptance and success in the country.

Then, on the leading edge of the twenty-first century, the United Nations sponsored the World Congress against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in 2001 in Durban, South Africa. There were 173 countries represented by 16,000 participants, including 42 delegates from Brazil. The Brazilian delegation was made up of leaders of the *Movimento Negro,* as well as diplomats and state- and federal-level politicians. The delegates participated in a watershed international discussion of racism and colonialism, including controversial issues such as contemporary reparations for slavery. One of the outcomes of the Durban conference was the formal declaration that "slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity." The Brazilian delegates returned from Durban with a formal acknowledgment of the country's historical and structural racial inequalities, and with concrete proposals for addressing racial inequality on a national scale.

The effects in Brazil were immediate. In response, the Cardoso government created the SEPPIR (Secretaria Especial de Promoção e Protecção da Igualdade Racial, or the Special Agency for the Promotion and Protection of Racial Equality). Within two years, under the Lula government, this entity was upgraded to the Ministry for the Promotion and Protection of Racial Equality. Among the most controversial and far-reaching proposals to be implemented was the creation of a quota system for students of color in higher education, beginning at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, and quickly implemented throughout the prestigious Federal University system and federal employment. The quota program was widely criticized as importing foreign ideas of race (Riserio 2019), such as those in South Africa and the United States, echoing Freyre's earlier critiques. Critics claimed that quotas would not make sense in Brazil's schema of fluid racial categories. However, the quota plan recognized a different sort of racial construct: rather than a White/Black binary, they employed a White/not-White binary. The system also accounted for Indigenous Brazilians, especially in the North and Center-West regions, where there are significant Indigenous populations.[7]

Another part of the public discussion that followed the Durban conference related to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, as the Second Intifada was just beginning at the time of the conference. At the conference, the Palestinian contingent wanted the delegates to collectively denounce Israel as an apartheid state, and the Zionist movement as fundamentally racist (echoing the UN's 1975 declaration). The Israeli, U.S., and Western European delegations left the conference in protest, and among international Jewish entities, "Durban" became synonymous with organized antisemitism. Unfortunately, the departure of these delegations effectively reproduced the very unequal North/South, colonizer/colonized pattern to which the Palestinian delegates sought to draw attention. Furthermore, as a result of the early departure of the delegations from the Global North, these did not participate in the important declaration of slavery as a crime against humanity. Although the remaining delegates did not end up voting on the Israel and Zionism question, they did vote on policy recommendations for the implementation of racial quotas and reparations. Consequently, the Israeli delegation (and those that left the conference with them) failed to vote on the significant question of quotas, a critical issue for the Brazilian delegation.

7 Among the ways that the quota system is distinct from its counterparts in the U.S. is that the public universities in Brazil are free and highly sought after. Those with access to resources pay for expensive private schools and preparatory courses (*cursinhos*) to succeed on the highly competitive entrance exams (*vestibular*), resulting in a higher proportion of privileged and White students in the free public universities. Quotas have sought to level the playing field so that those who have attended public high schools and have not been able to afford the preparatory courses for the entrance exams have a chance of being able to take advantage of public resources in higher education. Race/color and socioeconomic class quotas are subsets of the public-school quotas. While worthy of a much deeper discussion, we must turn our attention from this well-documented policy to the political repercussions of this approach and to its implications for the conception of race and how this reverberates culturally, including for other racial/ethnic groups, Jews in particular.

After the delegation returned to Brazil, these events created tension between Afro-descendant activists and Jewish activists.[8] For Afro-Brazilians, this moment set up a new configuration of the racial question in Brazil. Flipping a long-held point of pride on its head, those who continued to embrace the notion of racial democracy were no longer seen as anti-racists but rather as apologists for the established order of profound racial inequality (Carneiro 2000; Henriques 2001; Telles 2003). Furthermore, as a direct consequence of the North/South break at the conference, Israelis, and by extension all Jews, were problematically recast as indisputably "White" and therefore aligned with the colonial legacy of Europe, regardless of ancestry or the complicated global history of the Jewish Diaspora.

As long as the ideological experiment of racial democracy was unchallenged, Jews were one more group folded into the Brazilian nation, Brazilian like everyone else, participating as equals. However, when White and Black no longer represented colors along a spectrum but came to be understood as clearly defined racial categories, the implications for Jews, perennially non-White Whites, had to be negotiated, and Jews came to be seen as the very definition of Whiteness: European, upper class, and politically and socially conservative.

It is important to emphasize here that as Brazilians, Jews respond to and participate in the changing national cultural landscape. Whether embracing the concept of racial democracy to explain the acceptance of their community within the Brazilian plurality or using it to explain the cohesion of their own multicultural community, they are engaging Brazilian cultural understandings, *qua* Brazilians. Similarly, in the present moment, as these understandings are undergoing radical revision, there are repercussions within the Jewish community that shape Jewish identity, the community as a whole, and political participation. Since the mainstream Jewish community continued to embrace the ideal of racial democracy in the post-Durban era, in large part because it is how they have understood their acceptance into Brazilian society, this stance reinforced the characterization of Jews as White and European, in both the Brazilian context and internationally. In this, there was a preexisting transnational discourse that conflates Jews with Israel, and Israel with settler colonialism (Amoruso et al. 2019), which circulates widely among both activists and academics. Brazilian activists easily tapped into this discourse despite there being no history of such ideas circulating in Brazil or organized antisemitism.

Among Jews in Brazil, the responses to these changes engendered by the Durban conference and resulting policy implementations were multiple and contradictory. While the mainstream, formal Jewish community represented by official organizations continued to support Israel uncritically, they also did not resist this characterization of

8 The ramifications for activism on the Left have been far-reaching and is a theme we explore in this ongoing research.

themselves as "White" in the new racial economy of Brazil. Being pro-Israel and White went together seamlessly. However, for those Jews who were not formally connected to the organized Jewish community, including many leftist activists, this new racial economy challenged their ability to act in solidarity, having been cast as belonging to a racial group with a new valence. To have a voice in this new economy they employed the language of race. As Jews and now as White with new meaning, they sought to distance themselves further from Israeli state policy (and consequently from the formal Jewish community). For this group, accepting the new racial economy signified solidarity with Black people in Brazil. Another group of activists sought to position themselves differently within this racial discourse by emphasizing the Holocaust as a point of connection with Black suffering and in so doing embraced a perspective of the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish phenomenon (Bauer 2001). They asserted that the Holocaust represented the greatest suffering because it was a system of extermination based on racial prejudice. In the new racial economy, these Brazilian Jews deployed the Holocaust as a political resource and a point of reference, which made it possible for Jews to be included as a racial group in the new federal agency dedicated to combating racial prejudice.

In other words, the new racial economy made it possible to address antisemitism as another form of not just prejudice but *racial* prejudice. The connections being made were based on parallel experiences of racial exclusion and suffering.[9] These tensions between exceptionalism and universalism, between the national and the transnational, between naturalized categories and historically contingent understandings, all inform the present moment in Brazil. We cannot understand what is unfolding in Brazil without engaging these transnational flows of ideas. Neither can we understand it without looking deeply at Brazilian history, including the particular racial constructions that make Brazil unique, however much of a gap there has been between the ideal and the experiential.

The transformations in the national discourse that have unfolded in the aftermath of the Durban conference have not only reinscribed national understandings of race but have also unfortunately contributed to a backlash against both the new policies and a host of other social justice agendas. This is not because racial or racist ideas have been imported, as defenders of the "racial democracy" ideal have claimed, but because of the wholesale rejection of attempts to rectify entrenched inequities on the part of those social sectors that benefit from them. Rather than being seen as steps toward approximating the desired racially equal society, these endeavors have been dismissed and mocked as those higher on the socioeconomic ladder entwine multiple discourses of exclusion into their rhetoric.

9 This new racial economy also draws on renewed interest in the biological bases of racial difference, and the accompanying proliferation of DNA tests for origins that prioritize biological descent over culture and social relations. This intersecting discourse is something we will explore further in our evolving research.

4 JEWS AND THE BRAZILIAN NEW RIGHT

These historical transformations in the nationally held concept of race and the place of Jews within the nation are necessary background for understanding the political, ideological, social, and cultural transformations that have occurred in Brazil since 2013. While the turn to the right is evident, what is less obvious are the effects on the Jewish community and the role of Jews in the political transformations that have transpired since then.

Among the changes that have been visible over the past decade, flags from other countries have appeared at rightwing demonstrations in Brazil. Among these, one stands out: the flag of Israel. Given that the Jewish population in Brazil represents a very small portion of the overall population, the appearance of this flag cannot be explained by a large presence of Jews at such events, nor is waving the Israeli flag a sign of "dual loyalties," according to the logic of the antisemitic accusation so often levied against "cosmopolitan" (or in today's vernacular, "globalist") Jews. On the contrary, the Israeli flag at these demonstrations does not represent nationalist support for the "Jewish state," but something else entirely. There are other meanings at work that denote certain key ideologies in Brazil's new political context, and here we offer interpretations of this multivalent deployment of symbols in order to shed light on the current moment.

Specifically, the widespread use of these symbols arose during the large demonstrations that took place in major Brazilian cities in June 2013.[10] Although these massive protests began with very specific and modest goals, targeting the cost of public transportation services, they soon expanded to large events in which multitudes gathered to protest the then leftist government in the broadest sense. On the occasions of these and subsequent protests, conservative and far-right groups made use of apparently "Jewish" symbols to express ideological positions, positions that transform what are no longer simply Jewish symbols into "political artifacts" (Winner 1986). For these groups, Israel, Zionism, and Jews (as a people and as individuals) are all signifiers of a kind of ultraconservatism or radical right-wing politics that is reestablishing itself on the Brazilian political map.

In this conservative grammar, the blue and white flag with the Star of David has come to represent the professed values of the New Right. As with any other nation-state, modern Israel is viewed with suspicion by far-right movements in Brazil; however, the use of the Israeli flag at right-wing events foregrounds the conservative values espoused by the Israeli right wing. Israel (and by extension Jews and Judaism) is viewed as the civilizing barrier against barbarity and as a symbol of the West against

10 See Gherman and Klein (2019); Espirito Santo (2016); and Diniz and Ribeiro (2016).

the expansion of Islam (or of the left).[11] Deployed in this way, symbols such as the Star of David (known in Portuguese as the *escudo*, or shield, of David, making the military association more explicit) allude more to the ancient Kingdom of Solomon than to the modern State of Israel. In other words, this grammar of symbols connotes a certain pseudo-historical "Judeo-Christian" civilizing ethic rather than a more complex modern political entity. Clearly, the Israeli flag is meaningful, but it holds deeply different meanings for different constituencies.

It is important to note that among the groups wielding Israeli flags and Jewish symbols at these protests, there were virtually no Jewish people (in the most traditional and broad sense of the word[12]), at least not initially.[13] Eventually, this gave way to a consolidated conservative Judaism and the gradual involvement of loosely organized groups of Jews that have allied themselves with the Brazilian far right. This right-wing Judaism appears to have emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century and has adopted the use of Jewish symbols in ways that are similar to those of the Brazilian New Right. Flags of Israel, which were already at the demonstrations, have been carried by more and more members of Jewish communities, who may feel quite comfortable alongside familiar symbols.

The June 2013 mass demonstrations in major cities became a foundational moment for the emergence of the New Right in Brazil[14] and initiated a challenge to the national political scene. Emboldened by these protests and the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, a strictly conservative "neo-Pentecostalism" emerged among the far right (Freston 1994; Oro 1996; Mariano 1999) with a strong, religious orientation that is putting increasing pressure on the relevant political and social agenda of the conservative parties. This process gained momentum in the lead up to the 2018 election of Jair Messias[15] Bolsonaro, a clear representative of the conservative agendas articulated in the protests.

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11 In an interview, anthropologist Adriana Dias makes a similar observation: https://tab.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2020/05/10/afinal-o-que-e-ser-judeu-no-brasil-de-hoje.htm.

12 Although the definition of who is a Jew has been contested historically and anthropologically, here we refer to the ethical and cultural perspectives that defined the Jewish people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Loosely speaking, they are members of larger communities, with a common (albeit imaginary) origin, and belonging to or being recognized as eligible for belonging to community institutions. In other words, this definition rests on both self-identification and (the possibility of) social-community identification. See Sorj (2010) and Klein (2012).

13 As these demonstrations gained momentum in subsequent years, Jewish participation increased. Our sources confirm that there were no Jewish activists in conservative leaderships, at least not in the early years of these demonstrations. See https://blogs.oglobo.globo.com/ancelmo/post/federacao-israelita-diz-que-associacao-de-abaixo-assinado-pro-bolsonaro-nao-tem-legitimidade.html.

14 In our research, we are considering the complex dynamics of the consolidation of conservative groups in the country whose political articulation predates the 2013 protests by many years. For our purposes, we are interested in understanding the reactions to the processes of racialization in Brazilian society, specifically the reactions of the radical right to the changes in Brazil following the 2001 World Congress against Racism in Durban.

15 It should be noted that Bolsonaro's assumed middle name, Messias, means Messiah, a point we will take up in our subsequent work with regard to political messianism and the alliance between evangelicals and the New Right in Brazil.

The Brazilian middle classes have taken a turn to the right by adopting economically liberal but socially conservative positions.[16] Considering the social and demographic breakdown of the electorate, in very general terms, those who had the highest income and those who were White, male, and residents of the most exclusive neighborhoods in large Brazilian cities were the president's most faithful and decisive voters in 2018.[17] Take, for example, the upper middle class in the city of São Paulo. Among Bolsonaro's voters there were more White than Black people, more Christians than Muslims (or other non-Christian groups, of course), and more of those with higher levels of education than with lower levels of education. In this broad socioeconomic group, there are certainly shared behaviors and practices, especially those related to consumption (O'Dougherty 2002), the cultivation of conservative values, and a new political identity.

Thus, in spite of generalized ethno-racial categorizations indicating that more White people voted for Bolsonaro than did Black people, it is also true that upper-middle-class Black people voted more for Bolsonaro in the 2018 election than did poor Black people. Surveys of religion and social class point to the same trend among middle-class Muslim voters (in spite of Bolsonaro's Islamophobic speech[18]), and even among urban upper middle-class practitioners of the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*.[19] Thus, taking into account the intersections of religious and socioeconomic class, we note that the wealthiest segment of any religious or cultural group voted more for the extreme-right candidate than for any of the other candidates on the ballot in 2018.

Similarly, when we consider certain segments of the Jewish community, we see a parallel pattern in relation to social categories. In terms of electoral participation, the largely urban middle-class Jewish electorate reproduced the same processes and dynamics as seen among the non-Jewish Brazilian right, voting with other White, middle- and upper-class, urban, educated Brazilians in favor of the right-

16 This formulation was offered by one of the pre-candidates to the presidency of the Republic from the Brazilian New Right: João Amoêdo. See https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/eleicoes,joao-amoedo-se-diz-liberal-na-economia-mas-conservador-nos-costumes,70002318886 (accessed on July 21, 2018).

17 According to research by the Datafolha Institute, the intention to vote among White, urban voters with income above the minimum wage went 62% for Bolsonaro and 31% for the Workers' Party's candidate Fernando Haddad in the second round of 2018. See https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2018/eleicao-em-numeros/noticia/2018/10/26/datafolha-de-25-de-outubro-para-presidente-por-sexo-idade-escolaridade-renda-regiao-religiao-e-orientacao-sexual.ghtml.

18 The debate over the move of the Brazilian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as well as statements about Palestinian terrorism, divide Muslim support for Bolsonaro in Brazil. See https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/11/apoio-a-bolsonaro-divide-comunidade-islamica-no-brasil.shtml.

19 According to the Datafolha survey cited above, *candomblé* practitioners generally voted against Bolsonaro in the 2018 elections.

wing candidate.[20] Shifting the focus to the intersection of socioeconomic class and race/color, again we see that broad segments of the Jewish community reproduced within community institutions the same phenomenon as their non-Jewish neighbors. Jews joined in the broader complex processes of identity re-creation, whereas the middle classes abandoned their long-standing orientation toward compromise and negotiation, typical of what had been a well-established notion of "Brazilianness," and instead turned toward promoting rupture and confrontation (Sorj 2010, 5-6). In this new political grammar, the patina of Brazilian "cordiality" has been replaced by a type of intensified rudeness. This shift saw forms of both verbal and physical violence spread throughout every stratum of Brazilian society. Mistrust, intolerance, and betrayal have become qualities exalted by the New Right, which instead cultivates a form of "sincerity," or "sincericide" (Iaconelli 2019)[21], that is, abandoning a commitment to cordiality while legitimating racism, homophobia, and other forms of hate in the name of speaking what they see as the "truth." The much-vaunted Brazilian cordiality[22] has been discarded and replaced by a "brutal sociability" (Mbembe 2018). Accordingly, debates become confrontations, otherness is transformed into exclusion, and political differences take on a quality of perennial enmity.

For the groups on the Brazilian New Right, the time has come to formulate a new kind of "political community," one that would no longer be supported by an "inclusive and non-hierarchical sociability" (Sorj 2010) but instead by constant tests of loyalty and the exclusion of specific groups. Leftists, gays, communists, and various other social categories have been prevented from entering this new community, one that has emerged from a dystopian notion of social cleansing promoted by the Brazilian New Right. The idea of Brazil as the "country of the future," in which the past and specific identities are of little importance, has been replaced by forms of "radical regressivism,"[23] in which the return to a sort of idealized past seems to be the core ideological foundation of these groups.

As noted above, the Brazilian New Right flirts with supposedly Jewish symbols and values. Bolsonarist discourse makes constant use of Israeli flags, Jewish religious symbols, and strongly "Zionist" ideology. These flirtations have seduced segments of the Jewish community who have been drawn into the radical Brazilian New Right and,

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20 The 2018 Datafolha survey confirmed that the Jewish vote in 2018 was similar to that of members of the non-Jewish urban middle classes.

21 The sincerity that kills, advocated by Bolsonarism.

22 It must be recognized that this "cordiality" functioned as a veneer for a kind of endemic violence.

23 We have chosen to use the term *regressivism* instead of *reactionary*. In Brazilian Portuguese, the term *regressista* was used during the Regency Period (1831–1840), when the Regressista Party sought greater centralization of power and fought against the supposed anarchy of the provinces. In our view, this term better describes the desire for "return" (revert to or restore a former era; *regresso*, in Portuguese) as an alternative to "progress" expressed by the Brazilian New Right. See Mattos (1987).

in turn, to Jair Bolsonaro's candidacy. So, for some segments of the Brazilian Jewish community, Bolsonarism was compelling not only because of class and color affinities, as discussed above, but also because they see Bolsonaro as an unprecedented, supposed "supporter of Israel." Aside from issues central to the Jewish experience, such as the use of symbols and language drawn from Judaism, these symbols also carry profound meaning for non-Jewish Brazilians who interpret this support for Israel in relation to their valorization of "roots" Christianity and Western civilization.

In some senses, Jewish Bolsonarist voters are experimenting with their long-desired participation in the larger Brazilian society. When they see non-Jewish neighbors waving the Israeli flag, using Jewish religious symbols (such as the menorah and shofar), and wearing T-shirts representing the Israeli army and secret service,[24] they see the dominant society employing political discourse and symbols that are relevant to them. In the imagination of the "Bolsonarist Jew," these groups speak the same language and use the same political idioms.

From the perspective of these Jews, through a process of identity transformation they not only became Bolsonarists, but Bolsonarists became quasi-Jewish. This powerful dialectic that created "new Jews" and "new Bolsonarists" established an extremely important relationship both during the 2018 election cycle and after Bolsonaro's victory. Entwining politics with identity, we see a double conversion process, of right-wing Jews becoming Bolsonarists and Bolsonarists incorporating Jewishness into their political identities.

In this collective process in which Bolsonarism embraces an "imaginary Judaism," a new theological-political community of Bolsonarist Jews has emerged. In this new political scenario, left-wing, liberal, and pluralist groups cannot fit in this emergent community and must be excluded. Thus, in the political imaginary of the New Right, being Jewish and being left wing are antagonistic and mutually exclusive identities. The values espoused by Jewish Bolsonarists do not harmonize with anything that could be considered progressive or left wing. Gatekeepers, in the form of community representatives, have emerged to maintain these identity borders.

If on the one hand, right-wing Jews effectively sanitize Bolsonaro, by their support contributing to making Bolsonaro palatable to those who might otherwise be uneasy with his hateful and exclusionary discourse, on the other hand, Bolsonarism seeks to internally cleanse left-wing elements from the "Jewish community," protecting it from those who would supposedly threaten community harmony, in a process we call

24 Most famously, two of Bolsonaro's sons, Eduardo and Flávio, have been photographed repeatedly wearing T-shirts of the Mossad (Israel's secret service) and the IDF (Israeli Defense Force). It is worth contemplating the significance of the children of the president of the country, who are themselves elected officials, wearing symbols of the armed forces of another nation.

"disconversion" (which we discuss further below).[25] Bolsonaro's frequent statements praising Hitler and Nazism and dismissing the Holocaust have brought accusations that he is a Nazi sympathizer from both left-wing parties and the media. In his defense, Bolsonaro uses the support of segments of the Jewish community and his supposed sympathy for Israel and Zionism to "prove" that these accusations are false. Thus, this form of sanitization of Bolsonarism is made possible by Jews whose support has the effect of "cleansing" Bolsonaro's image.[26]

Thus, in this new political-ideological community, evangelicals, neo-Pentecostals, and pro-gun activists are welcome, but pro-Palestinian Jews and left-wing and liberal Zionists are not. In a parallel sense, an imaginary and homogeneous Israel without contradictions and ruptures excludes the real contemporary Israel, full of contradictions and conflicts. In what follows, we discuss this phenomenon from the vantage of a specific event in the Jewish community of Rio de Janeiro that has revealed this process of political and ideological conversion and "disconversion": Bolsonaro's lecture at Rio's Hebraica Club in April 2017.

5 CONVERSIONS AND DISCONVERSIONS: THE HEBRAICA CASE

These processes of conversion and disconversion in relation to this new political and ideological community were consolidated at an event that took place at a Jewish club, the Hebraica, a social club in decline that offers limited community events. The club has reemerged in the Jewish life of the city precisely because it was at the center of a political controversy instigated by the invitation to Jair Messias Bolsonaro, to give a lecture at the club. At the time of the invitation, Bolsonaro was a federal congressman and precandidate for the presidency representing the burgeoning extreme right in Brazil.

Significantly, the lecture at the club in Rio de Janeiro was originally meant to have taken place months before at a club of the same name in the city of São Paulo. Unlike the homonymous club in Rio, the Hebraica Club in São Paulo is an active focal point for local community life. Considered one of the largest clubs in the country (and the largest Jewish social and athletic club in the world), it has a significant membership (at times representing roughly half of the Jewish population in São Paulo) and a full schedule of popular events and activities. In February 2017, when plans to bring the congressman to give a lecture at the Hebraica in São Paulo were announced, members of that city's Jewish community protested the invitation. Petitions and posts on social media forced the president of the club to cancel the lecture, which, according to him,

25 Here we opt for the English form "disconversion" rather than "deconversion" to distinguish between the meaning of the latter, which refers to a theological loss of faith, while we intend the former to index a political/ideological expulsion.

26 https://jornalhoraextra.com.br/politica/9831-associacao-de-judeus-sai-em-defesa-de-jair-bolsonaro/.

had been the "result of an initiative by individual club members."[27]

When the active and full club in São Paulo turned down the event with the far-right congressman, the inactive and empty club in Rio stepped in with an invitation "in the name of the community." Since Rio's Hebraica Club had a small membership, the president of the association could act to host and promote the lecture, despite the pressures from a social media campaign by segments of the Jewish community.

On the evening of the lecture, a "political spectacle" (Débord 2007 [1967]) unfolded on the sidewalk in front of the club in the Rio neighborhood of Laranjeiras. Outside the club, hundreds of activists, bearing Israeli flags and shirts with texts in Hebrew, protested the guests, who also bore Israeli flags as they arrived for the lecture. That evening—marked by shouts of "fascists!" from the protesters and "traitors!" from those entering the club to hear the lecture—has emerged as one of the most traumatic experiences for Jews in the city of Rio de Janeiro.[28]

The following day, internal communications from the Jewish Federation of the State of Rio de Janeiro and the Israeli Consulate in Rio de Janeiro reported on the protest with alarm. Without qualification and employing the term used by those who attended the lecture, they declared that a "pogrom"[29] had occurred at a Jewish club, equating the protest with organized, targeted, government-sponsored massacres by forces hostile to the Jewish community, by extension suggesting that those who participated in the protest were not members of the community. In one sense, this event publicly exposed the contradictions of the previously apparently harmonious and unified community. However, this is only part of what the event and its aftermath revealed.

If the "pogrom at the Hebraica" (also referred to as the "pogrom of Laranjeiras") serves as an inflection point of the rupture within the Brazilian Jewish community in the face of the phenomenon of Bolsonarism, we wish to be clear that it represents merely the apex of a longer, more complex process of rapprochement between segments of the Jewish community and groups of the Brazilian New Right, mediated by the consistent use of Israel and Jewish symbols. In addition, Bolsonaro's use of racist epithets (among the offensive things he said that evening), and the cheering approval he received from the audience, inserted Jews—specifically Jews as White—into the debate about acceptable political speech. Out of a desire for political ascendancy, the long-held rejection of racist speech has given way to a politically expedient dismissal, even mockery, of concerns with racial justice. Racist scapegoating is the siren call of populist politics, as we have seen both historically and now with horrifying recognition, not only in Brazil but in the United States and elsewhere.

27 https://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/politica/2017-02-28/jair-bolsonaro.html.

28 In their coverage of the event, newspapers spoke of a rupture within the community over support for Bolsonaro. See https://projetocolabora.com.br/ods9/comunidade-judaica-racha-no-apoio-a-bolsonaro/.

29 This term refers to the massacres of Jewish communities organized by the czarist authorities in imperial Russia. See https://jornalhoraextra.com.br/politica/12443-nao-em-nosso-nome-parte-de-comunidade-judaica-critica-apoio-de-conib-a-geraldo-alckmin/.

This right-wing political vanguard seeks to transform Brazil's cultural and political identity, replacing the universalistic grammar of the collapsed model of "racial democracy" with a new model of political community (Baumann 2003). Conceived as a moral community (Durkheim 2008 [1906]; Alonso 2019), this radical New Right locates its mythical origins in Israel, albeit an imaginary Israel, making it—and by extension, the "imaginary Jew" (Finkielkraut 1994 [1980])—central elements of this new political theology. This imaginary Israel undergirds the new popular political identity. The incident at Rio's Hebraica Club ratified a new community made up of Jews and non-Jews based on ideological rather than ethnic premises. At that point of inflection, conservatives (both Jews and non-Jews) were in, while progressives (both Jews and non-Jews) were out.

The challenge for us here is the inverse of what Isaac Deutscher (1981) proposed when he spoke of nineteenth-century European Judaism. Deutscher argued that Jewish culture was emerging from the ghetto of religion and tradition, resulting in the advent of a revolutionary and secular Jew, or what he called a "non-Jewish Jew" (people who are ethnically Jewish but no longer religiously Jewish). In contrast, in Brazil today, there are groups that lay claim to Jewish culture (specifically, one that is conservative, religious, and traditional) without necessarily being Jewish, giving rise to the phenomenon of "Jewish non-Jews" (people who are ethnically non-Jewish who espouse ideological Jewishness). Here we see one part of the process of conversion and disconversion. As part of this inversion, Bolsonaro embraces Israel while Jews, including participants in some Zionist youth movements, criticize Israel and the Occupation. Evangelicals speak of the importance of unifying Jerusalem, while excluded Jews speak of the need to divide that city. In terms of social values, activists on the extreme right denounce the "left-wing conspiracy" that tries to impose "gender ideology" in the schools, while the leftist youth of the community are members of feminist groups and defend the right to abortion and sexual diversity.

From the perspective of the new community imagined[30] by the extreme right, evangelical and conservative activists were in, while liberal and progressive Jews were out. The former (including members of the government) have undergone a process of conversion to Jewishness, while the latter have experienced a sort of *disconversion*, being ideologically defined as outside of the formal community or, rather, effectively transformed into *non-Jewish Jews*. Our use of the term is distinct from Deutscher's use, as these are ethnic Jews who have been expelled from the formal community as opposed to their rejecting a religious identity; furthermore, this disconversion is largely at the hands of non-Jews who have positioned themselves as arbiters of who is inside or outside this newly reconfigured community. The former (Jewish non-Jews)

30 Here we are extending Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community" (2008) from the level of the nation to subnational sociopolitical groups.

are cast as protecting both the identity and physical safety of the Jewish community, while the latter (non-Jewish Jews) are deemed a threat to it. Only through this process of disconversion is it possible to conceive of Jews as a threat to the Jewish community and justify referring to a peaceful protest as a pogrom. As such, we can see how Bolsonaro's visit to the Hebraica Club served as a key moment and accompanying rite of passage for the participants in these new processes of conversion and disconversion.

In the contemporary political climate of Rio de Janeiro, Jews (or at least, philosemitically imagined Jews) may undergo a "conversion" (MacIntyre 2007) to the moral order of neo-Pentecostalism. However, other Jews, those who embraced the process of racial transformation, including many community activists, undergo a type of social *dis*conversion; they do not share in the view of Brazil as a racial democracy nor in the vision of a homogenous imaginary Israel and are therefore explicitly excluded *qua* Jews from the new moral community.

In this new political landscape, Brazil's multicultural experiment is challenged by pseudo-universalistic rhetoric. According to this logic, social privileges accrue according to an ahistorical meritocracy. Reasserting the ideology that Brazilian society is not responsible for slavery and rejecting the notion of structural racism, the current regime makes poor, Black, Indigenous, and other minoritized populations responsible for their own diminished social status. In this inverted political environment, concern with human rights is perversely reframed as a threat to the dream of a free and open society (Mbembe 2018). From this perspective, the White population clamors for protection from supposedly anticivilizational forces, such as anti-Christian values and secularism. Here, the imaginary Jew serves as an important ally and symbol; rather than the modern Jew (Baumann 2003), the kingdom of the ancient Israelites is deployed to support the right-wing promotion of a highly organized, hierarchical, and theocratic society. As such, an examination of the role and place of Jews and the rise of new (and old) forms of antisemitism offer key insights into the emerging new discourses on race in Brazil and the ways this discourse feeds anti-democratic tendencies.

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