

The Ontological Refoundation of Brazilian Foreign Policy: Anti-Globalism and Far-Right Discourses

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The article analyzes the foreign policy of Jair Bolsonaro's government, focusing on Ernesto Araújo's tenure as Foreign Minister (2019–2021), in order to understand how his discourse sought to redefine the ontological foundations of Brazilian Foreign Policy. The article examines how Brazilian foreign policy identity was rearticulated through a populist grammar of cultural warfare inspired by the New Right. Grounded in the theoretical contributions of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as well as in critical Foreign Policy Analysis, the study explores the production of antagonisms, the formation of political identities, and the circulation of illiberal discourses. Although Araújo mobilized “globalism” as a constitutive outside through which Brazilian Foreign Policy was discursively reframed, his project failed to consolidate a durable hegemonic reconfiguration of Brazil's international insertion. Bolsonaro's foreign policy under Araújo is thus interpreted as a frustrated hegemonic project that contributed to diplomatic isolation while symbolically connecting Brazil to broader transnational right-wing discursive networks.

Este artículo analiza la política exterior del gobierno de Jair Bolsonaro, centrándose en el mandato de Ernesto Araújo como ministro de asuntos exteriores (2019–2021), con el fin de entender cómo su discurso buscó redefinir los fundamentos ontológicos de la política exterior brasileña. El artículo analiza cómo la identidad de la política exterior brasileña se rearticuló a través de una gramática populista de guerra cultural inspirada en la nueva derecha. El artículo se basa en las contribuciones teóricas de Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe, así como en el Análisis Crítico de Política Exterior, lo que nos permite estudiar la producción de antagonismos, la formación de identidades políticas y la circulación de discursos iliberales. Aunque Araújo movilizó el «globalismo» como un elemento exterior constitutivo a través del cual la política exterior brasileña fue reformulada discursivamente, su proyecto no logró consolidar una reconfiguración hegemónica duradera de la inserción internacional de Brasil. La política exterior de Bolsonaro durante el mandato de Araújo se interpreta, de esta manera, como un proyecto hegemónico frustrado que contribuyó al aislamiento diplomático de Brasil, mientras conectaba, de manera simbólica, a Brasil con redes discursivas más amplias de derecha transnacionales.

En se concentrant sur le mandat d'Ernesto Araújo en tant que ministre des Affaires étrangères (2019–2021), cet article analyse la politique étrangère du gouvernement de Jair Bolsonaro afin de comprendre comment son discours a cherché à redéfinir les fondements ontologiques de la politique étrangère brésilienne. L'article examine comment l'identité de la politique étrangère brésilienne a été réarticulée à travers une grammaire populiste de la guerre culturelle inspirée par la Nouvelle Droite. S'appuyant sur les contributions théoriques d'Ernesto Laclau et de Chantal Mouffe, ainsi que sur l'analyse critique de la politique étrangère, l'étude explore la production d'antagonismes, la formation d'identités politiques et la circulation de discours illibéraux. Bien qu'Araújo ait mobilisé le « mondialisme » comme un extérieur constitutif à travers lequel la politique étrangère brésilienne a été recadrée sur le plan discursif, son projet n'a pas réussi à consolider une reconfiguration hégémonique durable de l'insertion internationale du Brésil. La politique étrangère de Bolsonaro sous Araújo est ainsi interprétée comme un projet hégémonique frustré qui a contribué à l'isolement diplomatique tout en reliant symboliquement le Brésil à des réseaux discursifs transnationaux de droite plus larges.

Keywords: ontological refoundation; brazilian foreign policy; far-right; populism; globalism.

Introduction

This article examines how a populist logic of articulation, understood through Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2014) and Ernesto Laclau (2013, 2014) discourse of theory and political subjectivity and inflected by far-right repertoires, attempted to reconfigure the symbolic and institutional foundations of Brazilian Foreign Policy (BFP) during the far-right administration of Jair Bolsonaro. Approaching populism not as an ideology but as a political logic that constructs identities and antagonisms, we explore how, under Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo (2019–2021), analyzed as an extended case study,¹ Brazilian diplomacy became a cen-

tral arena for the articulation of an anti-globalist project informed by discourses and symbolic repertoires circulating across the contemporary global far-right, reflecting broader disputes and transformations within the Brazilian diplomatic field. By foregrounding the struggles over meaning that enable specific political actions, the article argues that “globalism” functioned as a constitutive outside—a field of negativity that allowed Araújo to attempt an ontological refoundation of Brazil's international role.

In doing so, this study contributes to emerging debates on the international dimensions of the far-right and the growing relevance of discourse-analytical approaches in Foreign Pol-

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¹Drawing on the proposal by Lai and Roccu (2019), we understand the extended case study as a critical and reflexivist approach. This implies that the case Belfi, Lucca Giannini Palermo Moreno et al. (2026) The Ontological Refoundation of Brazilian Foreign Policy: Anti-Globalism and Far-Right Discourses. *Global Studies Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksag085>

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is not merely selected, but constructed through a dynamic interaction with theory. Such a dynamic makes it possible to analyze the world in its complexity and non-linearity, taking context and positionality seriously, and generating explicitly political and emancipatory knowledge.

icy Analysis (FPA)². Situated alongside the interpretations advanced by [Barbosa Jr and Casarões \(2023\)](#), [Iamamoto, Mano, and Summa \(2023\)](#), and [Domingos Neto and Guerreiro Moreira \(2023\)](#), it argues that Ernesto Araújo's mobilization of a populist grammar of cultural warfare³ functioned as the surface expression of a deeper structural project. The article's central contribution is the concept of "ontological refoundation" to explain the Araújo tenure. While much of the literature emphasizes ideological rupture, this study examines how populist discourse sought to reconfigure the diplomatic identity of Brazil itself. Based on Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) logic of the constitutive outside, it maps how "globalism" enabled an attempted reengineering of state identity that, although not institutionally sedimented, reshaped the horizons of the sayable and the intelligible in BFP.

Underpinned by a post-structuralist approach, the "ontological refoundation" is understood as a discursive operation that aims to redefine the conditions of possibility for foreign policy through the rearticulation of state identity ([Laclau and Mouffe 2014](#)). Since identity is performatively constituted ([Doty 1993](#); [Campbell 1998](#); [Laclau and Mouffe 2014](#)), Araújo's project sought to displace a diplomatic ethos framed as "globalist." In its place, he attempted to institute a new symbolic order aligned with the grammar of a New Right ([De Orellana and Michelsen 2019](#)), shifting BFP toward a civilizational and culturalist logic.

To investigate this issue, the article poses the following research question: How did Ernesto Araújo's anti-globalist discourse configure an attempt at the "ontological refoundation" of BFP? Adopting a post-structuralist discourse-analytical approach ([Shapiro 1988](#); [Nabers 2015](#)), we reconstruct the emergence and consolidation of Ernesto Araújo's foreign policy by analyzing anti-globalist discourse as part of a broader international far-right semantic repertoire, appropriated and rearticulated within BFP. Accordingly, we focus on seven key documents: Araújo's 2017 essay "Trump e o Ocidente"; his 2019 inaugural speech; the 2020 Aula Magna at the Rio Branco Institute; his 2021 retrospective published in *Metapolítica 17*; the article "Liberdade religiosa, religião libertadora" (*Metapolítica 17*, 2019); "Mandato popular na política externa" (*Gazeta do Povo*, 2018); and "Now We Do" (*The New Criterion*, 2019).

The selection follows methodological criteria designed to capture the coherence of Araújo's worldview across different audiences and communicative settings. The corpus includes diverse textual genres—such as official diplomatic publica-

tions, speeches, lectures, articles in conservative outlets, and posts from his personal blog *Metapolítica 17*—enabling the identification of recurrent discursive patterns. This diversity is analytically important because it reveals a relatively stable ideological grammar across distinct forms of expression. Substantively, the selected texts articulate central themes of the New Right lexicon and provide access to Araújo's broader ontological and political imagination, particularly his effort to redefine BFP through moral, spiritual, and civilizational categories grounded in God, nation, family, and religion.

Building on this analytical and methodological architecture, the diversity of primary sources aligns with the article's post-positivist and discursive framework. These discourses constitute the empirical corpus of the study and are examined across four sections, each addressing a different dimension through which this hegemonic project was articulated. First, we situate Bolsonarism within the New Right with an emphasis on "Discourses of Circulation," analyzing how these discursive practices propagate and consolidate transnationally. Next, we reflect on BFP as a site of signification, examining the emergence of a new political landscape marked by ideational and symbolic changes. In the third section, we discuss "Discourse as Constitutive Practice: Ernesto Araújo Between Theory and Practice," highlighting the political implications derived from Laclau and Mouffe's theories for Brazilian diplomatic practice. Finally, we address the role of anti-globalism in the ontological refoundation of BFP, evaluating how this stance influences both policy formulation and the configuration of the country's institutional horizon.

Discourses in Circulation: The New Right's Grammar in Contemporary Politics

Multidisciplinary studies on the contemporary global far-right span diverse analytical approaches and, to date, lack a clear consensus. Debates on the New Right unfold across disciplinary boundaries and, within International Relations, encompass heterogeneous analytical traditions that vary in their empirical focus and theoretical depth ([Teitelbaum 2020](#); [Campos 2023](#); [Anievas and Saul 2023](#)). Despite their differences, these perspectives aim to rethink the far-right ontologically and epistemologically. Yet they face important limits, particularly Western-centrism and the insufficient incorporation of Global South experiences. This gap becomes clearer when examining cases beyond the Euro-Atlantic core. In Brazil, as part of the Global South, the far-right has operated within colonial and postcolonial structures, sustaining enduring links with white Christian nationalism ([Barbosa Jr and Casarões 2023](#); [Domingos Neto and Guerreiro Moreira 2023](#)). In its contemporary form, this interface materializes through Bolsonarism, especially in political and religious projects of a NeoPentecostal branch. In the Global South, postcolonial dynamics shape the New Right both present and latent, with inherited legacies of "race," "religion," and "nation" as its primary political expressions. These legacies shape socioeconomic behavior, collective attitudes, and the implicit hierarchies within international institutions, influencing the diverse ideological and material trajectories of the far right across the Global South ([Campos 2023](#); [Pinheiro-Machado and Vargas Maia 2023](#)).

A key reference in the field is [Cas Mudde's \(2022\)](#) definition of the radical right as combining nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. While highly influential, this model privileges party-centered dynamics and risks reducing far-right politics to a fixed typology, overlooking its discursive plasticity and historical heterogeneity. Though conceptually

²We draw on contributions from critical FPA to broaden and complexify the onto-epistemological foundations that inform the field. In doing so, we seek to demonstrate how different methodologies and analytical approaches situated within post-positivist, reflexivist, and interpretivist traditions offer alternative pathways for understanding the production of meanings, practices, and rationalities in foreign policy. This orientation enables us to unsettle dominant analytical assumptions, question established knowledge hierarchies, and explore the heterogeneity of discourses and forms of agency that constitute diplomatic practice ([Shapiro 1988](#); [Doty 1993](#); [Campbell 1998](#); [Hansen 2006](#); [Klaus 2022](#); [Victor Fontes and de Lamara França 2024](#); [Siman et al. 2025a, 2025b](#)).

³Cultural war can be understood as an onto-epistemic formation grounded in a particular interpretation of postmodernism and cultural Marxism, aimed at constructing a narrative about the deconstruction of the West. It emerges from what is considered a misinterpretation of postmodern thought—namely, the claim that it rejects Enlightenment ideas that prioritize objective natural reality, thereby endorsing anti-realism. In place of experience and reason, it allegedly promotes sociolinguistic subjectivism; s. Within this framework, cultural war unfolds through political and social conflict over values, norms, and beliefs, in which opposing groups: conservatives (including reactionaries) and progressives—struggle for cultural hegemony. More broadly, as mobilized by reactionary groups, the concept draws on domains such as customs, the arts, education, and religion, seeking to intensify political polarization through social networks and media platforms ([Hicks 2011](#)).

clear, it tends toward reification when contrasted with more relational and processual approaches. More critical perspectives challenge this fixity. [Abrahamsen et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that the far-right is not a stable ideological core but a contingent formation sustained by relational and discursive practices that construct antagonisms, exclusions, and transnational solidarities. Analysis thus shifts from listing defining traits to examining how far-right actors articulate themselves through global flows of ideas, narratives, and strategies. Similarly, [Drolet and Williams \(2018\)](#) contend that liberal-normative readings obscure the creative, hybrid, and contradictory character of far-right politics, proposing instead that it should be understood as a field of struggle over meaning that generates alternative political grammars beyond liberal modernity.

This transnational turn is further developed by [De Orellana and Michelsen's \(2019\)](#) perspective of "Reactionary Internationalism," which reveals how contemporary far-right movements actively engage in global networks of cooperation and intellectual exchange while rhetorically affirming nationalism and sovereignty. This paradox highlights the far-right's ambition to reshape the international order through shared discursive grammars and illiberal universalism. The New Right represents a historical continuity and strategic adaptation. What appears as nationalist resurgence is a reconfiguration of a persistent reactionary challenge to liberal universalism. As [De Orellana and Michelsen \(2019, 2\)](#) argue, the New Right constitutes "the latest iteration" of opposition to human universality grounded in claims of "natural" inequality, advancing its own internationalism by linking nationalist movements to reshape international norms. This dissolves the false opposition between nationalism and internationalism: reactionary projects have long cultivated transnational solidarities to transform global order.

The New Right revives projects centered on hierarchy, inequality, and identity-based stratification. Its core features include repudiation of Enlightenment universalism, critique of materialism, and skepticism toward globalization. These orientations legitimate hierarchy, revalorize religious worldviews, and frame modernity as civilizational decline, often invoking an idealized past. Figures such as Aleksandr Dugin, Olavo de Carvalho, and Steve Bannon have diffused these ideas, drawing on thinkers like Oswald Spengler, René Guénon, Julius Evola, and Carl Schmitt ([Sanahuja and López Burian 2020](#)).

Geopolitically, this agenda is visible in the programs of Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Viktor Orbán, Vladimir Putin, and in debates surrounding Brexit. European parties such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Vox, Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), Sweden Democrats, Law and Justice (PiS), and Fidesz institutionalize transnationally circulating repertoires while foregrounding national particularism. Despite heterogeneity, these cases converge in skepticism toward multilateralism, critique of human rights universalism, defense of sovereignty, and civilizational framings of political community. Their coherence is organized through the notion of globalism, a constitutive outside that condenses opposition to supranational governance, transnational elites, migration, and pluralism into a unified explanatory framework, enabling the transnational circulation of far-right ideas.

The contributions of [Abrahamsen et al. \(2024\)](#), [Drolet and Williams \(2018\)](#), and [De Orellana and Michelsen \(2019\)](#), therefore, encourage approaching the far-right as a mutable political field continually reconfigured to exploit contingent crises and social anxieties. The analytical focus shifts to how these actors construct common enemies—in this case,

the forces of "globalism"—and connect across borders. In this sense, the far-right's transnational dimension is constitutive: their narratives become powerful precisely through continuous reinsertion into a global ecosystem of mutual reinforcement.

The Brazilian extended case shows especially clearly how far-right discourses travel and are reworked: Bolsonarism emerges as a hybrid articulation that draws on long-standing authoritarian repertoires while mobilizing a populist grammar, and then reframes foreign policy as a privileged site for projecting this rearticulated horizon outward. In Brazil, as part of the Global South, the far-right operates within enduring colonial structures and maintains ties to white Christian nationalism as part of a broader civilizational project⁴. Historically rooted in Catholic integralism, the Integralist⁵ movement, and later in Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP) and "olavism"⁶ ([Gonçalves and Neto 2020](#); [Wink 2023](#)), this reactionary lineage persisted across the twentieth century and adapted to the digital, moral, and neoliberal dynamics of the present.

Its contemporary expression is articulated through Bolsonarism, especially through political and NeoPentecostal religious projects ([Campos 2023](#); [Domingos Neto and Guerreiro Moreira 2023](#); [Pinheiro-Machado and Vargas Maia 2023](#)). Bolsonarism expresses a discursive articulation that mobilizes empty signifiers—such as God, family, freedom, and homeland—to produce a morally homogeneous "people" invested with affects such as fear, resentment, and anxiety ([Maitino 2020](#); [Tanscheit 2023](#); [Silva 2024](#)). Its political discourses are articulated through the construction of alterities as an expression of the far-right spectrum ([Connolly 1991](#); [Salgado, Casarões and Zarakol 2023](#)). In line with this perspective, the article refuses the epistemological separation between outside-in (transnational influence on Brazil) and inside-out (Brazil projecting discourse internationally) dynamics. Grounded in post-structuralist approaches, we understand such distinctions as analytically constructed. The domestic and the International⁷ are treated as relational, porous, and historically situated. Consequently, we analyze

⁴The European far-right consolidates a nationalism centered on a "being European" imaginary, where immigrants and refugees figure as the "constitutive outside" ([Cooper 2015](#); [Fassin 2017](#); [Brown 2019](#)). Amidst this broader post-multiculturalist landscape ([Taylor 1994](#))—defined by the rejection of pluralist norms—the Brazilian far-right rearticulates this exclusionary logic against domestic minorities and dissenting groups. While the European case emphasizes a purist nation-state, the Brazilian discourse relativizes sovereignty through strategic alignment with Western powers ([Casarões 2022](#)). Thus, the underlying grammar remains globally articulated, even as its ontic contents mutate according to local historical trajectories ([Souza and Leirner 2024](#); [Bauer, Lotta, and Holanda Schmidt 2025](#); [Amorim Neto and Acácio 2025](#)).

⁵Integralism was a Brazilian far-right movement created in 1932 by Plínio Salgado. Organized through the party *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB), it combined militant anticommunism, Catholic-inspired moral conservatism, ultranationalism, and a corporatist, anti-democratic political model. Although it adopted fascist-style symbols—such as the uniformed "green shirts"—its ideological core was rooted in Catholic integralism from Portugal and Spain. The movement reached mass scale, attempted a coup in 1938, and was dissolved in 1937, but its ideas persisted in later neointegralist groups ([Gonçalves and Neto 2020](#); [Wink 2023](#)).

⁶"Olavism" refers to Olavo de Carvalho (1947–2022), a key far-right intellectual in Brazil and ideological mentor to the Bolsonaro administration ([Lynch and Cassimiro 2022](#)). This worldview frames politics as a cultural war against "cultural Marxism" and "globalism," advancing a radical critique of modernity and secular institutions. As [Georg Wink \(2024\)](#) argues, this project draws on the reactionary lineage of Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira and the TFP. Olavism reworks the TFP's moral and civilizational antagonism, translating its Catholic integralism into a broader far-right vocabulary suited to the digital age, which informed Ernesto Araújo's "ontological refoundation" of BFP.

⁷The use of "International" with an initial capital follows R. B. J. Walker's critique (1993). Rather than denoting an empirical domain of interstate relations, the International works as an analytical category shaped by a modern political gram-

these processes as co-constituted (Anievas and Saull 2023; Campos 2023; Abrahamsen et al. 2024).

Besides that, drawing on the notion of the constitutive outside, we argue that political identities are formed through their differentiation from, and opposition to, what they exclude. The “people” invoked by Bolsonarism emerges through the construction of antagonistic others, such as communism, “gender ideology,” quilombola and indigenous rights, or corrupt elites, whose exclusion stabilizes, albeit contingently, the unity of the collective subject. In this sense, the international is not external to the domestic sphere, but functions as a constitutive outside that enables and sustains its very articulation. Within this constellation, Ernesto Araújo occupies a paradigmatic role. Influenced by Olavo de Carvalho and shaped by anti-Enlightenment and anti-globalist readings of the 2013 protests (Dieguez 2019; Rosenblum and Muirhead 2019; Miguel 2021), he translated the far right’s antagonistic worldview into foreign policy. His appointment to Itamaraty marked Brazil’s insertion into a global ecosystem of illiberal discourses, defined by hostility to multilateralism, the politicization of environmental and human-rights agendas, and ideological alignments such as with Donald Trump (Batista 2019; Saraiva and Silva 2019; Gonçalves and Teixeira 2020; Casarões and Farias 2021; Lopes et al. 2022; Summa and Herz 2024; Buarque de Hollanda et al. 2024).

Araújo’s foreign policy can be interpreted as an attempt to inscribe Brazil within the New Right’s grammar, displacing its long-standing diplomatic tradition of multilateral engagement seeking to ontologically refound BFP. To situate this argument within the Brazilian literature, the next section examines how FPA has approached BFP, highlighting the marginality of discourse as an analytical category and underscoring the need for a post-structuralist approach.

BFP as a Site of Signification

Historically, BFP has been associated with a relatively stable diplomatic grammar structured around multilateralism, universalism, autonomy, and the professionalized ethos of Itamaraty—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although these principles have been interpreted and operationalized differently across governments and historical periods, the literature frequently identifies the persistence of certain organizing assumptions within Brazilian diplomacy: the search for diversified international partnerships, the valorization of negotiated solutions, the defense of sovereignty through multilateral institutions, and the relative insulation of foreign policy from overt ideological polarization (Cervo and Bueno 2015; Pinheiro 2000; Lima 2005).

This diplomatic tradition was also historically connected to developmentalist concerns and to the construction of Brazil’s international identity as a mediating, consensus-oriented, and globally engaged actor, particularly within the Global South (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007; Milani and Pinheiro 2013). While these elements never constituted a fixed or homogeneous consensus, they helped sediment a relatively stable horizon of intelligibility regarding what could be recognized as legitimate diplomatic conduct within the BFP field.

mar that separates the “inside” (sovereign, domestic) from the “outside” (anarchic, global). As Walker argues, it operates as a constitutive boundary of modern politics, structuring how political space and authority are imagined. Writing it with a capital letter underscores its conceptual and normative weight. In his later work, Walker (2006) further emphasizes the International as a contested space in which projects of order, sovereignty, and subjectivity are continuously negotiated and rearticulated.

From this perspective, Ernesto Araújo’s discourse represented an attempt to displace the symbolic and normative foundations through which Brazilian diplomacy had traditionally been articulated. His anti-globalist rhetoric challenged multilateralism, recast diplomatic moderation as ideological submission, and redefined foreign policy as a terrain of civilizational and moral struggle. It is precisely this attempt to rearticulate the meaning and purpose of BFP that this article conceptualizes as an “ontological refoundation.”

Araújo’s reorientation sharply contrasts with the mainstream rationalist frameworks that have shaped Brazilian FPA over the past four decades. While traditional FPA emphasized decision-making within domestic contexts and the centrality of agency (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin 1962; Hill 2003; Neack 2003; Hudson 2007), it also consolidated foreign policy as a politicized form of public policy, structured around debates over ideas, interests, bureaucratic arenas, and social participation (Milani and Pinheiro 2013). Processes of horizontalization linked to participatory democratization further broadened both policy agendas and theoretical perspectives (Farias and Ramanzini Júnior 2015; Farias, Casarões, and Magalhães 2022). In this context, Araújo’s approach represents a deliberate departure, embedding Brazil within a transnational far-right grammar and challenging the multilateralist foundations that historically guided BFP and, as a consequence, the field of FPA in Brazil.

Remarkable developments expanded the analytical scope of the field of Brazilian FPA, which has incorporated broader epistemological debates and greater engagement with practices, discourses, and non-state actors (de Jesus 2010). Despite this expansion, much of the field remains anchored in a neopositivist orientation focused on case studies, causal inference, and generalization (Ramanzini Júnior and Farias 2021). This limits reflection on the political-ethical dimensions of knowledge production and constrains engagement with semi-peripheral theorizing (Gonçalves and Pinheiro 2020). More recently, however, Brazilian FPA has undergone ontological-epistemic shifts, marked by the growing legitimacy of interpretivist approaches and by the Global South as a site of intervention, contestation, and situated theorization (Gonçalves and Pinheiro 2020; Ramanzini Junior and de Souza Farias 2021).

The works of Resende, Sandrin, and Solomon (2023), Drumond and Rebelo (2023), Guzzini, Siman, and Salgado (2024), Vieira de Jesus (2025), Siman et al. (2025a, 2025b), and Neves Júnior and Zanella (2025), informed by critical constructivism, poststructuralist perspectives, studies on emotions, affects and ontological (in)security, gender, and sexuality studies, aesthetic and technology-oriented approaches, as well as postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, have challenged traditional assumptions and contributed to a critically situated reformulation of the field. To that end, and inspired by Doty (1993), Campbell (1998), and Hansen (2006), these authors adopt the premise that foreign policy is not merely the outcome of rational choices but a site of signification where identities, threats, and boundaries are continuously produced.

This entails a shift from explaining what states do to examining how certain forms of action become possible and legitimate, while others are excluded. As Hansen (2006) notes, rationalist conceptions naturalize categories such as “national interest,” “security,” and “threat,” treating them as given rather than discursively constituted. Here, contributions such as those of Campbell (1998) are crucial. By defining what is “inside” and “outside,” who is an ally and who is an enemy, foreign policy operates as a practice of security, iden-

tity formation, and the production of difference⁸. Campbell (1998), Weldes (1999), and Laffey and Weldes (2008) show that “national interest” is inseparable from narratives that constitute boundaries between “us” and “them,” rendering threats and crises intelligible within specific discursive formations.

Critical approaches emerged precisely as a reaction to the traditional FPA field’s inability to problematize these categories⁹. They examine how particular identities and interests become thinkable and legitimate in specific historical contexts (Doty 1993). From a post-structuralist approach, discourses and practices of BFP actors are mutually constitutive processes. From this perspective, BFP constitutes the very terrain upon which interests, identities, and threats are discursively constructed and contested (Drumond and Rebelo 2023; Resende, Sandrin, and Solomon 2023; Guzzini, Siman, and Salgado 2024; Vieira de Jesus 2025; Siman et al. 2025a, 2025b). It is within these critical and interpretivist horizons that this paper is situated. We analyze BFP under Ernesto Araújo by mobilizing analytical tools attentive to the discourses that structured his political and diplomatic practices. Drawing upon the far-right grammar, Araújo sought to ontologically re-signify Brazil’s international engagement by displacing the hegemonic epistemic foundations of a consolidated diplomatic tradition and proposing new assumptions regarding the meaning and purpose of foreign policy.

Analytically, the focus on Araújo derives from the institutional position he occupied. As Foreign Minister, he operated within a privileged site of discursive production where reactionary principles could be formalized as state doctrine, projected internationally, and embedded in diplomatic practice. His discourse is thus better understood as an expression of the transnational circulation of far-right ideas. The conceptual vocabulary, antagonistic binaries, and civilizational narratives in his speeches resonate with interpretive grammars across multiple New Right formations. In this sense, Araújo’s rhetoric is articulated with a global ideological conflict that lies at the center of Brazil’s international insertion.

It is precisely this articulation between institutional location, discursive production, and global ideological circulation that justifies approaching Araújo as an extended case study. As an expression of BFP under the government of Jair Bolsonaro, Araújo is understood here not merely as an individual policymaker, but as a constructed analytical site through which broader struggles over meaning and hegemony become visible. The extended case constitutes an analytical construction rather than a simple empirical selection, enabling theoretically oriented, contextually rich, situated knowledge, self-reflexive and potentially emancipatory knowledge production (Lai and Roccu 2019, 6). Based on the Brazilian experience as an extended case study, we problematize homogeneous, linear, and/or unidirectional understandings of BFP hegemonic discourses. In this context, we argue that Araújo sought to rearticulate the identity of the BFP by aligning it with the far-right grammar and, thereby repositioning BFP in accordance with transnational far-right

agendas. In analyzing the BFP through the extended case study approach, we emphasize constitutive relations, power dynamics, and social forces that progressively contribute to societal transformation—particularly with regard to disputes over far-right hegemonic projects at the International (Lai and Roccu 2019, 2–3; Lai 2024). In light of the extended case methodology and Araújo’s pivotal role within the empirical analysis, the passage below makes this articulation clear:

Then comes another cliché, too, of “it is none of our business”: “Middle East, Israel, Palestine is none of our business.” *Everything is our business* [...] *The ideas that are there in shock, in flux in the world are determinant for our region too* [...], above all the great debates of ideas, above all the debate between nationalism and anti-nationalism. If we do not place ourselves, do not participate in this, we are letting ourselves be influenced.” (Araújo 2020, 150, our translation)

The excerpt above, taken from a lecture (Aula Magna) delivered to the new class of Brazilian diplomats at the Rio Branco Institute in 2020, is analytically curious when read through this critical FPA perspective because it exposes the constitutive work performed by foreign policy discourse. By rejecting the traditional diplomatic neutrality—labeled as the cliché of “none of our business”—and explicitly positioning Brazil in the “debate between nationalism and anti-nationalism,” he aligns the country with a specific side of the global cultural war.

Although Araújo framed his discourse as profoundly nationalist, anchored in the idea of rescuing Brazil’s “essence” and fighting “globalism,” his rhetoric and practices revealed a deep entanglement within transnational far-right networks. The automatic alignment with the Trump administration (Gonçalves and Teixeira 2020; Magalhães and Thomaz 2021), dialogue with sectors of the US alt-right, rapprochement with governments such as Viktor Orbán’s Hungary and Benjamin Netanyahu’s Israel (Casarões and Feldberg 2021), and the mobilization of categories like “Christianophobia” all demonstrate that BFP under Bolsonaro and Araújo operated as part of a global reactionary constellation. As an example, The Brazilian and US Foreign Ministries coordinated efforts to build an anti-abortion coalition, forging a geopolitical alliance between ultra-conservative Christian and Islamic actors—the so-called Geneva Consensus Declaration of 2020 (International Women’s Health Coalition 2025). The initiative can be seen as a practice that draws moral and political boundaries at the International. Thus, the Declaration helps to construct a particular idea of “Brazil” in opposition to liberal multilateral norms on gender and reproductive rights.

This theoretical move allows us to preserve the empirical specificity of Ernesto Araújo’s discourse while situating it within a broader conceptual framework. As he declared, “We are not here to work for the global order. This is Brazil. (. . .) Itamaraty exists for Brazil; it does not exist for the global order. (. . .) Itamaraty returns to the bosom of the beloved homeland. Itamaraty has returned because Brazil has returned.” (Araújo 2019a, 7 our translation). By opposing “Brazil” to the “global order,” Araújo actively reinscribes what it means to “be Brazil” and which practices become conceivable and legitimate. His discourse produces conditions of possibility in which defending the homeland appears incompatible with multilateral arrangements, thereby rearticulating the boundaries of identity and security in explicitly nationalist terms.

In the terms of Doty (1993), Campbell (1998), Weldes (1999), Hansen (2006), Laffey and Weldes (2008), and Victor Fontes and de Lamare França (2024), foreign policy operates discursively in the production of identity. We call for rethinking its ontological foundations by rejecting the

⁸Campbell (1998) argues that US foreign policy cannot be understood as an objective reaction to external dangers but rather as a discursive process that continually (re)produces the identity of the United States.

⁹Analytical categories should be understood as statements and justifications aimed at co-opting audiences, who evaluate their degree of agreement with the interpretations offered. They often foster intertwined processes of inclusion and exclusion, complicating the boundary between norm and exception. Moreover, such categories discipline audiences by privileging certain worldviews over others. Crucially, they shape not only what is made explicit but also what remains implicit, so that absence itself becomes a form of presence (Alejandro 2021).

view of foreign policy as the external projection of pre-constituted states. Foreign policy should be understood as boundary-producing practices central to the production and reproduction of the identity in whose name they act. This challenges the modern assumption of an intrinsic link between state and political identity. From this perspective, two ontological understandings emerge. The first conceives “foreign policy” as practices of differentiation that constitute the “foreign” through relations of otherness. It extends beyond the state to broader self/other dynamics structured by race, class, gender, ethnicity, or geography. Within the sovereignty paradigm, such practices continuously produce identity across levels, stabilizing meaning in moments of contingency. The second, conventional state-based Foreign Policy, is less constitutive: it reproduces the identity enabled by “foreign policy” and manages challenges to it (Campbell 1998, 68–69).

Understanding foreign policy critically, therefore, requires recognizing that it is constituted through the discourses that make it possible. The foreign policy produces realities by naming threats, defining allies, and mobilizing identities (Shapiro 1988; Doty 1993; Campbell 1998; Weldes 1999; Laffey and Weldes (2008); Solomon 2015; Klaus 2022). From this perspective, BFP is a performative and normatively charged practice that shapes international alignments and domestic hierarchies (Resende, Sandrin, and Solomon 2023; Drumond and Rebelo 2023; Guzzini, Siman, and Salgado 2024; Vieira de Jesus 2025; Siman et al. 2025a, 2025b).

Discourses of security, development, or democracy naturalize distinctions between the internal and the external, the legitimate and the illegitimate, delineating the boundaries of the political community to which foreign policy is addressed. Conceived in this way, foreign policy becomes a field of discursive contestation in which identities and antagonisms are continuously produced and negotiated. This opens analytical space to investigate how certain discourses, by inscribing “us” and “them” into the International, reconfigure both a state’s projected identity and its internal dynamics of belonging and exclusion. To better understand how these dynamics operate discursively, the next section turns to the theoretical contributions of Laclau and Mouffe.

Discourse as Constitutive Practice: Ernesto Araújo between Theory and Practice

By applying the framework of Laclau and Mouffe (2014), we can trace how constructions of “us” and “them” shaped BFP under Bolsonaroism, while simultaneously reordering the “social” and the “International.” This perspective sheds light on internal struggles over belonging, exclusion, and the contingent constitution of identities, subjects, and horizons of action. The Brazilian case provides a valuable basis for examining these dynamics. During the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, particularly under Ernesto Araújo as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2019–2021), foreign policy emerged as a privileged site of symbolic contestation, marked by an effort to discursively reconstitute Brazil’s international position through an anti-globalist framework. Diplomacy was mobilized as an extension of cultural warfare. This is why Araújo’s programmatic writings are central to the analysis. In 2017, in a journal linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he outlined the doctrinal coordinates of his worldview, defining “globalism” in terms that anticipated the political frontier he would later seek to institutionalize within the ministry:

[...] facing a common enemy, *globalism understood as the anti-national and anti-traditional liberal patterns* in social life and the borderless globalized market in economic life (Araújo 2017, 353, our translation).

Although published in 2017, prior to his appointment as Foreign Minister, the text is mobilized because it constitutes the ideological and programmatic blueprint for Araújo’s subsequent tenure. It sketches in advance a grammar of antagonism that would later organize the ministry’s interpretive horizon, situating BFP within a broader transnational repertoire associated with far-right discourses. The text attempts to institute a symbolic order for Brazil through which the “International” becomes intelligible as a moral and civilizational battlefield. What is at stake is how discursive articulations seek to stabilize a field of meaning and thereby shape what can be said, justified, and pursued as foreign policy. Discourse Theory, as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2014), is useful precisely because it conceives the social as marked by radical contingency and lacking any foundational essence (Marchart 2008; Mendonça 2009). What emerges as “order” is the precarious effect of articulatory practices that attempt to fix meaning within an unstable terrain, always exposed to displacement, contestation, and rearticulation.

Following Laclau and Mouffe (2014), political identities take shape through relations of difference and through reference to an outside that simultaneously enables and threatens the formation of a collective “we.” The frontier that separates “us” from “them” is itself an outcome of articulation, and it is through this frontier that heterogeneous elements can be linked in a chain of equivalence. In Laclau’s (2013) formulation, populism names a political logic through which heterogeneous demands can be unified into a collective subject, as they are condensed in signifiers that partially represent an absent fullness. Crucially, this logic presupposes a division of social space, yet antagonism should not be mistaken for a stable ontological ground that “produces” identities in a positive sense. Antagonism marks the limit at which the presence of an other is experienced as blocking the completion of the collective self. It reveals the impossibility of a fully stabilized identity and the constitutive precariousness of any attempt at closure.

This is why it is analytically necessary to distinguish the formal logic of populist articulation from the ideological contents that come to inhabit it. Populism names the operation through which a collective subject is forged, but it does not predetermine whether that subject will be organized in emancipatory, reactionary, left-wing, or far-right terms. This distinction is vital for interpreting Ernesto Araújo’s tenure. His discourse mobilizes the populist logic of frontier-making as a vehicle for a specific far-right project, in which “globalism” operates as the constitutive enemy, the obstacle that allegedly prevents communal fullness.

At the same time, Araújo’s rhetoric does not operate only by naming an enemy. It also articulates a horizon of collective integrity capable of linking heterogeneous demands in an equivalential chain and momentarily suturing them into a common “we.” Within this articulation, values such as truth, freedom, faith, and patriotism operate as contingent elements whose meaning is reconfigured through their placement in the chain and through their opposition to the constitutive outside (globalism). It is this attempt at hegemonic fixation, always precarious and exposed to contestation, that seeks to reframe BFP as a site where questions of identity and moral order are at stake.

In this context, we explore that the “ontological refoundation” of BFP does not imply a transformation of the social’s

ontological structure, understood as the radical contingency and lack of an ultimate foundation that characterizes the dimension of “the political” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). Instead, this refoundation refers to an ontic operation: a specific discursive practice that seeks to rearticulate state identity to the point of redefining its conditions of possibility. While the ontological level concerns the structural impossibility of a final suture, the ontic level comprises the concrete political projects and articulations that attempt to fill this void (Laclau 2013). Thus, Araújo’s project sought an “ontological refoundation”¹⁰ only insofar as it aimed to institute a new horizon of intelligibility, presenting a particular, New Right grammar as the necessary ground (the surrogate foundation) for all legitimate diplomatic action.

This refoundation operates through the logic of hegemony, understood as the political process by which a particular articulation presents itself as the horizon of what is reasonable, legitimate, and sayable—while remaining contingent and contestable (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). Hegemony is not a matter of greater or lesser stability, but an ontic practice¹¹ grounded in the ontological claim that the social lacks an ultimate foundation, precluding full closure. It involves a particular assuming the place of a structurally absent universality, rendering every “suture” provisional, since antagonism is ineliminable (Laclau 2013). “Frustrated hegemony,”¹² therefore, does not denote empirical failure but the constitutive impossibility inscribed in every hegemonic formation: totalization is always partial and precarious. In this process, certain terms function as empty signifiers, whose unifying force lies not in fixed content but in their capacity to stand in for an absent fullness and sustain an equivalential chain (Alves 2010; Laclau 2013; Silva 2024).

¹⁰We use the term “ontological refoundation” to indicate that Ernesto Araújo’s project went beyond pragmatic or administrative change. It targeted the very conditions of possibility of (BFP, seeking to rearticulate state identity and the horizon of intelligibility of the diplomatic field. Within Discourse Theory, hegemonic practice is ontic and contingent, yet its ambition is ontological insofar as it aims to institute a new “common sense” that becomes the sedimented ground of future action. As Laclau (2013) and Laclau and Mouffe (2014) contend, every social order is a contingent “suture” attempting to fill the empty place of foundation. Refoundation is thus “ontological” not because it overcomes radical contingency, but because it seeks to move from a political intervention (the ontic) to a naturalized regime of truth that defines the limits of what is politically “real” and historically “necessary.”

¹¹While hegemony is an ontological category, insofar as it describes the very logic of the social’s constitution through the articulation of identities within a field marked by the absence of an ultimate foundation (Laclau and Mouffe 2014), its concrete existence is always an ontic operation. This means that the ontological function of “filling” the structural vacuum of society is always performed by a particular ontic content (a specific project, ideology, or signifier) that temporarily assumes a universalizing role (Laclau 2013). Therefore, the “refoundation” project analyzed here does not alter the ontological structure of politics (radical contingency) but rather constitutes an ontic practice that aims to occupy the place of the foundation, instituting a new, sedimented horizon of intelligibility.

¹²The term “frustrated hegemony” requires brief clarification, since all hegemonic articulation is ontologically partial and precarious (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). The apparent paradox can be resolved by distinguishing the ontological and ontic dimensions in Ernesto Laclau’s framework. At the ontological level, no hegemonic formation achieves full closure; at the ontic level, however, articulations vary according to their degree of sedimentation (Laclau 1990). Drawing on the distinction between sedimentation and reactivation, Laclau argues that political projects may destabilize established meanings without consolidating themselves as new hegemonic formations (Laclau 1990, 52). By “frustrated hegemony,” we therefore refer to an articulation capable of disrupting a sedimented field and reshaping the horizon of the sayable, yet unable to sediment itself as a durable hegemonic order. This captures Ernesto Araújo’s project: although it challenged the multilateralist tradition of BFP and left discursive traces in the field, it failed to consolidate as a new diplomatic common sense, particularly after the reorientation under Carlos França.

In this sense, as noted above, the recurrent invocation of values such as truth, freedom, faith, and patriotism in Araújo’s discourse works precisely in this way (Mendonça 2012, 2023; Laclau and Mouffe 2014; Nabers 2015; Xavier 2024). Their meaning takes shape in the way they are articulated as moments of a shared horizon of collective integrity. Yet the stabilization of such a horizon also presupposes the concentration of what threatens it in a figure that can organize opposition and intensify equivalence. It is from this point that the centrality of “globalism” becomes intelligible. As Araújo frames it:

One of globalism’s instruments, used to silence those who rise against it, is to spread the idea that to engage in trade and business one must have no ideas and defend no values. We will prove that this is completely false. From now on, Itamaraty will have the highest and most engaged profile it has ever had in promoting agribusiness, trade, investment, and technology. Indeed, by distancing itself from Brazil and the Brazilian people, Itamaraty had also distanced itself from the national productive sector. Now we will stand alongside the productive sector as never before. (Araújo 2019a 13, our translation)

The centrality of “globalism” becomes clearer when read through antagonism and the constitution of political frontiers. As the excerpt suggests, Ernesto Araújo presents globalism as an active force that “silences” opponents and delegitimizes “values,” concentrating what threatens the community’s moral and political coordinates in a single adversarial horizon. When Araújo claims that globalism suppresses values and dissent, he stages a political frontier. On one side, “globalism” becomes the externalized obstacle blocking the fulfilment of a desired community; on the other, Brazil and the “Brazilian people” are invoked as subjects to be reconnected to sovereignty, authenticity, and a value-laden horizon of belonging.

This antagonism marks the point where the other is experienced as preventing the completion of the collective self, exposing the impossibility of closure while enabling equivalential chains. Heterogeneous demands such as anti-leftism, anti-feminism, climate denialism, conservative moralism, religion, opposition to multilateral environmental policy, and anti-communism, can thus be articulated together insofar as they are positioned against the same constructed outside (globalism). Their convergence within a frontier organized around opposition to globalism makes the projected danger central to Araújo’s discourse:

Do not let globalism kill your soul in the name of competitiveness. Do not believe globalism when it says that, to achieve economic efficiency, one must suffocate the heart of the nation and cease to love the homeland. Do not listen to globalism when it says that peace means not fighting. (Araújo 2019a, 16, our translation)

This excerpt clarifies why “homeland” occupies a privileged place in Ernesto Araújo’s rhetoric. When he warns that it must not be “suffocated” in the name of competitiveness, the term as a signifier that condenses an absent fullness, flexible enough to host diverse meanings, yet cohesive enough to organize them within a shared horizon. Economic sovereignty, religious morality, anti-communism, anti-cosmopolitanism, and national integrity are articulated as moments of a single collective identity. In this configuration, “homeland” operates as an empty signifier on the side of the “we,” while “globalism” names the constitutive outside against which that identity is staged. BFP is thus recast as a moral and political battleground where spiritual values and national identity are at stake. Engaging this discourse requires rethinking foreign policy itself. If the social is discursively constituted, there is no pre-given “national interest” to uncover, nor a neutral diplomatic tradition standing outside

political contestation (Doty 1993; Laclau and Mouffe 2014; Nabers 2015).

The International is a field of hegemonic contestation in which projects seek to draw and stabilize the boundaries through which the “national” and the “international” become intelligible (Walker 1993, 2006). In this sense, the constitution of the International is inseparable from constructing a domestic self. Under Jair Bolsonaro, this configuration relied on organized sectors such as agribusiness, business associations, segments of the financial elite, neopentecostal churches¹³, and the military, while also mobilizing heterogeneous groups across the social structure. The political force of Bolsonarism lay in its capacity to organize diffuse frustrations into a moralized narrative of belonging, exclusion, and threat, as well as in coalition-building among established actors.

Furthermore, Bolsonarism appropriated existing party structures and mobilized digital infrastructures to reconfigure political mediation, transforming social media into arenas of permanent engagement, mobilization, and anti-establishment performance (Nobre 2022; Starling 2022; Mattos Luz and Álvares 2025). This reshaping of the domestic sphere was crucial to the circulation and resonance of “globalism.” By constructing a domestic self imagined as morally authentic yet betrayed by traditional intermediaries, Bolsonarism projected the International as an extension of internal antagonisms. “Globalism” thus became a privileged name for an externalized enemy, linking domestic grievances to a transnational horizon allegedly embedded in multilateral institutions, human rights regimes, environmental governance, and cosmopolitan elites (Buarque de Hollanda et al. 2024). Through this move, foreign policy was reframed through culture-war lenses, reinforcing the claim that defending national sovereignty required confronting a global order depicted as hostile to the nation’s moral and spiritual integrity.

International alignments were framed as expressions of identity and moral affinity. The United States under Donald Trump, Israel, and other far-right governments were presented as defenders of Western Christian civilization, while China, the European Union, and the United Nations were depicted as agents of globalist corruption. The project sought to stabilize “globalism” as a constitutive outside through which Brazil’s international role could be narrated, while signifiers of collective integrity condensed an absent fullness and enabled the articulation of a collective subject within the diplomatic field (Lopes et al. 2022).

Under Jair Bolsonaro’s administration, the antagonistic frontier opposing “the people” to a globalist outside redefined what could appear intelligible within Itamaraty, even as this articulation remained unstable and contested across the wider foreign policy field. From this perspective, BFP (2019–2021) is understood as a hegemonic struggle over

how Brazil’s place in the world could be inscribed. The next section explores the concept of ontological refoundation as a discursive/identitary project under Ernesto Araújo, emphasizing the centrality of freedom and religion in its articulation.

The Ontological Refoundation of BFP

Articulated within the struggle over Brazil’s global positioning, Araújo’s inaugural speech on January 2, 2019, operates as a symbolic founding act, seeking to displace established diplomatic norms and establish a new orientation intelligible within the bureaucracy of foreign policy-making. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe (2014), in dialogue with Doty (1993), this section interprets the speech as an effort to reconfigure the terms through which BFP could be ontologically re-founded, while remaining fragile and contested in its capacity to consolidate into a durable diplomatic horizon.

This symbolic founding was immediately marked by a rhetorical rupture, as Araújo invoked the Gospel of John “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32)—to frame Brazil’s foreign policy as both constrained and in need of liberation, asserting that the country was “imprisoned outside of itself” and its foreign policy “imprisoned outside of Brazil” (Araújo 2019a, 16, our translation). This formulation introduced a structuring antagonism between an authentic, national, spiritual Brazil and another Brazil portrayed as captured by a globalist outside. Through this frontier, diplomacy was resignified as an instrument of liberation, tasked with restoring the country’s supposed civilizational essence and realigning it with a transcendent moral order as captured by a globalist outside.

Foreign policy is recoded as a terrain of existential stakes. At the same time, Araújo advances an affirmative pole structured around “truth,” “freedom,” and “Brazil” as nodal points linking moral, religious, and nationalist meanings in a chain of equivalence. These signifiers provide the vocabulary for articulating a collective belonging, while “globalism” concentrates on what is portrayed as threatening it.

This underpins the strategic deployment of a far-right grammar aimed at ontological refoundation—that is, a re-ordering of categories, hierarchies, and principles of legitimacy that seeks to redefine what counts as politically real, morally valid, and historically necessary. Within this operation, “globalism” assumes a decisive role, condensing a broader critique of the liberal international order. The discourse organizes confrontation across multiple registers: the opposition between “the people” and “the elites,” the civilizational cleavage between “the West” and the Global South, and the institutional tension between Itamaraty and the supposed will of the people.

Araújo affirms: “President Bolsonaro is liberating Brazil through truth. We are also going to liberate BFP, we are going to liberate Itamaraty” (Araújo 2019a, 18; our translation). In this formulation, “truth” emerges as one of the central terms through which Araújo organizes the positive pole of a hegemonic project. It operates as an empty signifier insofar as it gathers heterogeneous meanings and momentarily holds them together within a shared moral horizon, allowing religious, patriotic, anti-communist, and nationalist registers to resonate as moments of the same articulation. The result is a chain of equivalences in which the people, Jair Bolsonaro, Itamaraty, and Brazil are articulated as moments of a single process of “liberation,” opposed to the externalized threat of globalism.

As Laclau (2013) argues, equivalence allows heterogeneous demands to converge around a shared antagonism,

¹³Between 1970 and 1980, NeoPentecostalism emerged in Brazil amid the dilemmas of peripheral modernity and a new developmentalist agenda. As a transnational Christian movement, NeoPentecostal churches mobilize large followings and wield influence beyond national borders. Their “Prosperity Theology” expresses a long-silenced privatist ethos shaped by decades of political and legal neglect among Brazil’s most vulnerable populations. These groups have become powerful social actors, seeking to recast state–society relations away from secular liberal frameworks and toward an international order grounded in autonomous ethnoreligious communities defending moral values. Under Jair Bolsonaro’s foreign policy, this project entailed an ontological redefinition of the state, projecting a global “culture war.” Politically, NeoPentecostalism advances a nationalist far-right logic in which religious signifiers structure a populist divide between orthodox and progressive moral worldviews, cutting across class, race, ethnicity, political alignment, and sexuality (Antonio and Lahuerta 2014; Guimarães and Oliveira e Silva 2021; Barbosa Jr. and Casarões 2023).

though the universality it produces remains unstable and contestable. “Truth” condenses this tension: invoked as universal, it is articulated through a Christian, nationalist, and conservative narrative that reveals its particularity. What is at stake, therefore, is the precariousness of hegemonic fixation, always dependent on contingent articulations. Doty (1993) shows how foreign policy is constituted through discursive practices that produce subjects, interests, and horizons of action. The task is not to oppose discourse to material power, but to examine how specific articulations define what can be pursued and legitimized as foreign policy. Araújo makes this explicit by redefining religious freedom as an intrinsic bond between religion and freedom:

The concept of religious freedom should be understood not only as the freedom to practise religions, but also as the intimate connection between religion and freedom, at least in the case of Christianity. [...] *Religious feeling merges with this longing for freedom, which emerged alongside speech and the family and thus forms, together with religion, a triad, a triad that may not be incidental but necessary and indispensable, structured by an intimate correlation among these three elements.* [...] (Araújo 2019b, our translation).

In “Liberdade religiosa, religião libertadora” (2019b), Ernesto Araújo shifts “religious freedom” from a primarily legal category to an ontological one. It is along this path that he binds Christianity and freedom, reinscribing language, family, and religion as a necessary triad of the human, articulated through transcendence. Read through Discourse Theory as developed by Laclau and Mouffe (2014), this move constitutes an act of articulation aimed at fixing a horizon of intelligibility. “Freedom” and “religion” function as nodal points organizing an equivalential chain that links Christianity, freedom, speech, family, and transcendence, with meanings reconfigured through their relational positioning. Within this chain, “freedom” operates as an empty signifier because it condenses heterogeneous registers and stands in for an absent fullness under a single name. Transcendence, in turn, works as an ordering principle that seeks to suture differences and stabilize an image of collective integrity.

Written at two pivotal political moments, Ernesto Araújo considers religion as a constitutive element of the hegemonic project. In “Mandato popular na política externa” (Gazeta do Povo, 2018), published shortly after his appointment and before taking office, he frames foreign policy as reshaped by popular sovereignty, arguing that “the will of the people must penetrate all policies” and presenting his mission as to “liberate Itamaraty” (Araújo 2018, our translation). He casts the stakes in linguistic and moral terms, claiming that “in the language of the UN it is impossible to translate words such as love, faith, and patriotism” (Araújo 2018, our translation). In “Now We Do” (The New Criterion, 2019c), this articulation assumes an explicit religious-national register: Araújo declares that “we can now talk about God in public,” describes a “political and spiritual rebirth,” and concludes, “God is back and the nation is back” (Araújo 2019c, our translation).

The claim that certain words are “untranslatable” within multilateral frameworks signals a struggle over hegemonic fixation, as diplomacy is recentered around empty signifiers that represent absent fullness and sutures grievances into collective integrity. In this register, the ontological rearticulation of religious freedom crystallizes a refoundational grammar that makes spiritualized diplomacy intelligible.

Therefore, foreign policy under Araújo was reimaged as a spiritual crusade through a rearticulation of Brazil’s identity and the terms of diplomatic legitimacy. When he writes that “Aletheia is the overcoming of forgetfulness. Something that is forgotten and hidden and that suddenly resurfaces” (Araújo 2019a, 17 our translation), he casts BFP as an act of

revelation, transforming Itamaraty into guardian of a moral and spiritual horizon said to have been suppressed. Foreign policy thus acquires a redemptive mission, and Brazil is repositioned as a spiritual subject defined against a “globalist” world. Religion, in this sense, operates as a central discursive resource of ontological refoundation, providing the epistemic authority and normative grounding necessary to recast foreign policy as the revealed truth.

Despite its refoundational rhetoric, Araújo’s project failed to stabilize a lasting reconfiguration of Brazil’s international insertion. As noted by Lopes et al. (2022), Casarões and Farias (2021), Herz (2022), Maringoni, Schutte, and Berringer (2021) and Summa and Herz (2024), the anti-globalist agenda advanced within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not stabilize across the broader foreign policy field. While diplomacy was reframed as a break with multilateralism and a struggle against “globalism,” Brazil became increasingly isolated in multilateral forums, lost influence, and faced resistance from key partners, including China, France, and Germany. These dynamics weakened Brazil’s international standing and constrained its agency. Domestically, competing articulatory logics and institutional resistance further limited consolidation of this agenda as a hegemonic orientation (Saraiva and Silva 2019). In his farewell balance sheet, Araújo recast this isolation as a confrontation with the foreign policy “establishment”:

I was not surprised by the hostility of the Brazilian foreign policy “establishment,” formed by retired lobbying Ambassadors, [...] academics and commentators linked directly or indirectly to the great corrupt system [...]. For this group, Itamaraty should be a province of the system, an enclave of the system, within the Bolsonaro government. I never allowed that to be so. (Araújo 2021, 8, our translation)

Ernesto Araújo’s confrontational posture deepened Brazil’s international isolation, as the anti-globalist agenda advanced from Itamaraty generated disputes across multiple arenas. Tensions surfaced first within the very “productive sector” he claimed to defend. Agribusiness reacted early: confrontations with China, the discursive minimization of environmental concerns, and growing criticism over Amazon deforestation threatened access to key export markets and heightened uncertainty among major trade partners. Business associations warned that polarized diplomatic signaling was eroding Brazil’s credibility, deterring investment, and complicating integration into global value chains. These strains intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Jair Bolsonaro’s denialist stance and repeated clashes with scientific guidance and World Health Organization recommendations reinforced perceptions of Brazil as increasingly at odds with prevailing multilateral norms (Farias, Casarões, and Magalhães 2022; Fernández and Santos Silva 2023).

These tensions fragmented Jair Bolsonaro’s support coalition. Actors more exposed to international volatility and reputational risk, agribusiness, major industries, segments of high finance, and parts of the diplomatic establishment, pressed to recalibrate Brazil’s external posture, particularly toward China, the post-Donald Trump United States, and multilateral organizations. Ernesto Araújo faced growing criticism within the government, Congress, and civil society, where his diplomacy was seen as damaging Brazil’s international standing and obstructing cooperation at a critical juncture. Under mounting pressure from the Senate and key economic sectors, he resigned in March 2021, interrupting the hegemonic attempt to rearticulate Brazilian diplomacy around an anti-globalist horizon (Ortiz 2021). His departure signaled the weakening of olavismo as a central ideological pillar of Bolsonaro’s coalition. This erosion can-

not be explained solely by domestic cleavages; it must also be situated within broader transnational dynamics. Trump's electoral defeat, a crucial symbolic and strategic reference for far-right networks, undermined the external anchor that had lent coherence and momentum to anti-globalist alignments.

By embedding foreign policy in cultural warfare and aligning Brazil with a transnational far-right repertoire, Ernesto Araújo sought to recast Itamaraty's role and frame "globalism" as a central adversary in domestic debate. Under Araújo, BFP adopted a moralized and religious antagonistic grammar that portrayed diplomacy as a struggle over identity and civilizational order, challenging rationalist views that treat interests and strategy as given. International politics became a symbolic terrain structured against "globalism." His diplomacy aimed to redefine what counted as responsible foreign policy. Amid mounting pressure to restore credibility and recalibrate Brazil's external posture, Carlos França took office, steering a foreign policy toward a more stabilizing course aligned with institutional routines and multilateral expectations.

Araújo's project did not consolidate as a durable hegemonic configuration. It faced institutional resistance, coalition disputes, and counter-articulations that hindered its sedimentation within the Foreign Policy field. This does not mean, however, that the field remained unchanged. Rather than a fully sedimented ontological refoundation of BFP, what emerged was a disruptive hegemonic rearticulation that temporarily dislocated the horizon of intelligibility of Brazilian diplomacy, inscribing it into the grammar of far-right cultural warfare (Rocha 2023). Even without achieving a stable closure, this articulation exposed the radical contingency of the diplomatic field, demonstrating how its supposedly technical and traditional foundations can be re-signified through an antagonistic logic.

Concluding Remarks

The foreign policy of the Bolsonaro government under Ernesto Araújo can be understood as an attempt at ontological refoundation: a project aimed not merely at adjusting BFP, but at redefining its foundational identity and justificatory horizon. Through a discourse centered on sovereignty, national belonging, and religious-moral truth opposed to a globalist "outside," Araújo reframed diplomacy within an antagonistic grammar linked to transnational culture wars. Yet this ontological dimension has been largely neglected in FPA, which has favored institutional and strategic interpretations.

The article, however, faced strong domestic and international resistance. Institutional constraints and diplomatic contestation limited its consolidation, generating isolation and reputational costs. As a result, it failed to stabilize as a lasting reconfiguration of Brazil's international identity. Its enduring significance lies instead in its discursive impact: by radicalizing diplomatic language and foregrounding civilizational antagonism, Araújo expanded the boundaries of what could be legitimately articulated in foreign policy debates.

More broadly, the case highlights the fragility of refoundational projects that seek hegemonic fixation without sufficient institutional sedimentation. Analyzing it through a relational and iterative approach also reinforces the link between theoretical assumptions and social reality, opening space for comparative research on similar initiatives in other far-right populist governments.

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