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BRAZIL'S AMAZON TO THE WORLD: PRESIDENT BOLSONARO'S DISCOURSE AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AMAZÔNIA DO BRASIL PARA O MUNDO: O DISCURSO DO PRESIDENTE BOLSONARO NA ASSEMBLEIA GERAL DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the discourse on the Amazon of Brazil's president Bolsonaro at the UN General Assembly in 2020. The objective is to observe how the region has been integrated into the federal political agenda and the discursive strategies marked by "disinformation" adopted by Brazil's chief executive. We use the three-dimensional assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis. Brazil's president promoted inaccurate data, made unfounded statements, victimized himself, and kept silent about negative information related to his management. He sought to promote a distorted view on environmental management and on the Amazonian reality, putting the effective protection of the region at risk.

Keywords: Communication and Environment. Discourse. Amazon. UN. Disinformation.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o discurso sobre a Amazônia do presidente Bolsonaro na Assembleia Geral da ONU em 2020. O objetivo é observar como a região tem se integrado à agenda política federal e as estratégias discursivas marcadas pela "desinformação" adotadas pelo chefe do Executivo brasileiro. Utilizamos os pressupostos tridimensionais da Análise Crítica do Discurso. O presidente do Brasil promoveu dados imprecisos, fez declarações infundadas, vitimizou-se e silenciou sobre informações negativas relacionadas à sua gestão. Buscou promover uma visão distorcida sobre a gestão ambiental e sobre a realidade amazônica, colocando em risco a proteção efetiva da região.

Palavras-chave: Memory. Testimony. Place of memory.

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Brazil is one of the founding nations of the UN and, traditionally, the country's head of state is the first to speak at the event. On September 22, 2020, the president of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, made a discourse of approximately 15 minutes. COVID-19, technology, agribusiness, the environment, refugees, religion and politics stood out among the topics he addressed. Regarding the environmental issue, the Amazon occupied more than two minutes of the discourse.

The Amazon is a strategic territory from an ecological, social and economic point of view. It is responsible for several ecosystem services, the main of which are: maintaining carbon stocks that help keep climate change in check, cycling water for rain formation, and maintaining biodiversity, contributing to reserves of genetic material and chemical compounds (FEARNSIDE, 2018). The local social diversity includes indigenous populations, riverine people, farmers, loggers, miners, quilombolas and urban populations, who hold the intellectual and cultural capital that contributes to local preservation (VADJUNEC & SCHMINK, 2014). A part of the Amazon has been transformed into one of the main agricultural frontiers and it is responsible for a significant boost to the Brazilian trade balance (CARVALHO et al., 2016). In addition, the standing forest also has great economic benefits (ABRAMOVAY, 2002).

In 2019 and 2020, the Amazon was featured negatively in the national and international news. Due to the high rates of fire outbreaks and deforestation, it has become one of the symbols of Brazil's environmental crisis. In addition to the environmental problems resulting from deforestation, the degradation has also brought with it uncertainties from the economic point of view for the country, since world leaders, entrepreneurs and investors have become wary about investing in Brazil and acquiring national products from degraded areas (MARCOVITCH & LINKSY, 2020).

The Brazilian President's discourse at the UN had great repercussions in Brazil and the rest of the world. On the one hand, the political class and some businessmen evaluated the stated positioning positively. On the other hand, researchers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and representatives of other segments of society criticized the discourse (ESTADÃO CONTEÚDO, 2020). Faced with this impact, several media outlets around the world, such as the Folha de S. Paulo, Jornal Nacional, Washington Post, The Guardian and BBC, put Bolsonaro's discourse on the news agenda. As such, millions of people had access to the words of the Brazilian head of state.

The general objective of this work is to analyze the discourse on the Amazon of Brazil's president at the UN General Assembly in 2020 so as to reflect on the way it integrated the federal

political agenda and the meanings built around the subject that went around the world. In addition, we will discuss “disinformation” based on Jair Bolsonaro's presidential discourse.

Disinformation is an extension of information. Information is a type of semantic content, that is, it represents a part of the world in a certain way (FLORIDI, 2011). Disinformation is information that has been altered, distorted and manipulated in order to influence the understanding of a subject (FALLIS, 2015). It emerges when information is not properly created, processed, managed and used (FLORIDI, 2011).

There are three main characteristics of disinformation: (1) it is a type of information, that is, of meaning; (2) it is misleading information, since it creates new beliefs about the world, which may have negative consequences; (3) it is information that is not accidentally misleading, but created and transmitted intentionally for the most diverse purposes (FALLIS, 2015).

Disinformation is not a recent phenomenon. It first appeared in the Second World War and it is being used more frequently today, spreading on a large scale due to information technologies and the use of social media (FALLIS, 2015), as is done by Brazil's president (SOLANO, 2018).

THE SUBJECT OF THE DISCOURSE: JAIR BOLSONARO

Jair Messias Bolsonaro is the political subject of the discourse under analysis. He was elected president of the Federative Republic of Brazil in the 2018 elections. With the slogan “*Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos*” (Brazil Above All, God Above Everyone), he promised to transform the country, breaking with the old way of doing politics and the corruption scandals. Although he had no governing plan, his election campaign was based on an anti-PT (PT is the Brazilian Worker's Party) and patriotic discourse, in addition to attacks on his opponents (FERREIRA, 2018). His tenure began in January of the following year, 2019, and the catchphrase of his administration is “*Pátria Amada Brasil*” (Brazil Loved Fatherland), which is the last excerpt of the Brazilian national anthem.

Initially, the president aligned himself radically to the right, defending ideologies aligned with a neoliberal economy, traditional values with regard to family, sexuality and gender, and the appropriation of religious discourse and patriotism (LIMA & LIMA, 2020). However, in order to win over more support in the Brazilian Congress, he labeled himself as being part of the *Centrão* - a large group of political parties with no specific ideological affiliations (CARTA CAPITAL, 2021), although he still maintained the values of the radical right.

Brazil's chief executive knew how to appropriate social media in his favor. In 2021, he had more than 14 million followers on Facebook and almost seven million on Twitter. The president communicates live with his supporters through the use of “short and appealing videos, using memes, the youthful heroic figure of the Bolsonaro myth, irrelevant and even ridiculous lines as communication tools”, employing the resources of new media to make his lines sound attractive (SOLANO, 2018, p. 7). These figures demonstrate that he has considerable popular support and that his publications have significant exposure.

Jair Bolsonaro is a social agent who was elected by Brazilians and he holds the most important political office in the country, as he occupies the bully pulpit that emerges from public office. He is an official source (SCHMITZ, 2011) of information, and whatever he addresses is therefore considered of the utmost significance regarding the governability of the country; it may be controversial, but it cannot be ignored.

The *corpus* of analysis for this article is composed of President Jair Bolsonaro's discourse at the UN General Assembly in 2020. The transcript was accessed in full through the website of the Brazilian Federal Government (BRAZIL, 2020a), and the excerpts dedicated to the Amazon were extracted from the full text of the discourse:

Even so, we are victims of a most brutal disinformation campaign about the Amazon and the Brazilian wetlands. The Brazilian Amazon is known to be immensely rich. That explains the support given by international institutions to this disinformation campaign anchored on shady interests coupled with exploitative and unpatriotic Brazilian associations with the purpose of undermining the Government and Brazil itself. We are leaders when it comes to the conservation of tropical rainforests. We have the world's cleanest and most diversified energy mix. Even as one of the world's ten largest economies, we account for only 3% of carbon emissions worldwide. We provide food security to one sixth of the world's population, even while preserving 66% of our native vegetation and using only 27% of our territory for animal husbandry and agriculture. These are figures that no other country has. Brazil stands out as the world's largest producer of foodstuffs. And for that reason there is such a strong interest in spreading out disinformation about our environment. We are open to the world to offer our very best, i.e., our agricultural products. We have never exported so much. The world increasingly relies on Brazil to feed itself. Ours is a tropical rainforest and as such it does not allow fire to be spread out within it. Fire outbreaks tend to occur virtually at the same places, in the eastern surroundings of the forest, where Brazilians of indigenous ancestry burn their farmlands in search of livelihood in already cleared areas. Criminal fire outbreaks are fought with stringency and determination. I stand by my zero tolerance policy towards environmental crime. Together with Congress, we have sought land regularization with a view to identify the perpetrators of these criminal acts. May I call to mind that the Amazon Region is larger than the whole of Western Europe. Hence, the difficulty of fighting not only fire outbreaks, but also illegal logging and biopiracy. In response, we are currently expanding and enhancing the use of

technology and improving inter-agency operations, which include the engagement of the Armed Forces. (BRAZIL, 2020a).

POLITICAL DISCOURSE FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Political discourse differs from other types of discourse. It is eminently ideological (van Dijk, 1997). It is a practical type of argumentation that positions itself for or against certain forms of action, underpinning the decision-making that will result in changes where political power is in place, but also being reflected in broader contexts (FAIRCLOUGH & FAIRCLOUGH, 2012). This type of discourse considered as the argumentation of actions is carefully developed in the sense of using the power of words to give a practical answer or solution about an event to society.

This discursive genre is “a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1995: 14). Political discourse is attached to specific actors and their context. The political actor can be represented individually (e.g.: president or member of congress) or institutionally (for example: ministry or judiciary) and their legitimacy depends on the body they represents, the context in which they fit and in which they deliver their discourse (FAIRCLOUGH & FAIRCLOUGH, 2012).

The political discourse of Brazil's president at the United Nations General Assembly regarding the Amazon was analyzed through critical discourse analysis. This method is employed to "reveal the discursive nature of many of the contemporary social and cultural changes. Particularly, language [...] as a site of power, of struggle and also as a site where language is apparently transparent” (WODAK, 2004: 230).

The critical discourse analysis model that inspired this study is based on Fairclough's postulates (2001). For this author, it is possible to prioritize some elements over others, although the analysis should encompass textual dimensions of the discursive and social practice.

Textual analysis is descriptive and should be done in conjunction with discursive and social practices: when analyzing texts, questions regarding form and meaning are always examined simultaneously (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001). Textual analysis involves textual structure (organizational properties of the text), cohesion (linking resources between sentences), grammar (multifunctional analysis of sentences) and vocabulary (individual words and their meanings) (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001).

Discursive practice considers the textual production, distribution and consumption processes, which must be analyzed while taking the social processes in which they are inserted into account, regardless of whether they involve political, economic or private institutions (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001). The nature of discursive practice varies between the types of discourse according to social factors. In

addition to these dimensions, the strength of the utterances (types of discourse), the coherence of the texts (necessary connections and inferences and their ideological support), intertextuality (dialogical relations between the text and other texts) and interdiscursivity (relations between discourses) are also part of this phase (RESENDE & RAMALHO, 2006: 187).

Social practice is a mode of action in which discourse not only represents the world, but also gives meaning to it, constituting and constructing social identities, subject positions, social relations between people, and systems of knowledge and belief. In social practice, “language manifests itself as discourse: as an irreducible part of the ways in which we act and interact, we represent and identify ourselves, others and aspects of the world through language” (RESENDE & RAMALHO, 2011: 15). This includes ideological aspects (meanings of reality) and hegemonic aspects (relations of power and domination) (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001).

Politics is an act of power in the sense of fighting for its maintenance or resisting it, or an act of cooperation in which society unites in favor of common interests (MILLER, 1991). This article discusses politics as discursive actions (CHILTON, 2004) that involve persuasion strategies in the sense of using language in the production of authority, legitimacy and consensus effects (MILLER, 1991) through frameworks that represent reality by the enunciator's perspective.

BOLSONARO'S AMAZON AT THE UN

When the president of Brazil addressed the Amazon during this discourse at the UN, his first phrases were:

we are victims of a most brutal disinformation campaign about the Amazon and the Brazilian wetlands. The Brazilian Amazon is known to be immensely rich. That explains the support given by international institutions to this disinformation campaign anchored on shady interests coupled with exploitative and unpatriotic Brazilian associations with the purpose of undermining the Government and Brazil itself. (BRAZIL, 2020a).

In his discourse, Jair Bolsonaro uses the same artifice that he condemns: disinformation. He employs this manipulative strategy to create a kind of framework of reality in order to defend his government against the circulation of facts about the biome. The president states in front of the international community that the information disseminated in Brazil and the world about the Amazon isn't accurate.

But the information circulating about the Amazon involves scientific data on the deforestation and fires that have affected the region, and it comes from bodies that are considered respectable and

ethical. The president has often attacked science for considering it to be left-wing, valuing common sense so as to endorse unsubstantiated opinions as facts. He himself has propagated disinformation, including in the sense of inciting his voters to consider the media as a left-wing instrument used in the promotion of an alleged conspiracy project of Marxist nature (LIMA & LIMA, 2020).

The president used a nationalist discourse to state that there are “exploitative and unpatriotic (...) associations with the purpose of undermining the Government and Brazil itself” (BRAZIL, 2020a). He puts himself in the position of victim and hints at the existence of a conspiracy against his government, but does not name his enemies who would be the perpetrators of the slander against his administration. Based on the assumption that nations have an interest in the degradation of the Amazon so that they can claim the internationalization of the territory, he tries to “shield Brazil” in the sense of closing it off to talks and forms of cooperation that involve the biome, guaranteeing national sovereignty (MARCOVITCH & PINSKY, 2020).

Disinformation has been recurrent in the Brazilian chief executive's performance. Opinions that are critical and contrary to his person, government or positioning are discredited, invalidated and labeled as “fake news”. Disinformation, conspiracies and hidden international interests are constant elements in the president's discourse or messages on social media. He used this same discourse already in 2019 during the Amazon crisis caused by fires and deforestation. According to a survey carried out after 939 days of his presidency, he gave 3490 false or distorted statements on the most diverse topics, including the Amazon (AOS FATOS, 2021).

Following his discourse, some elements can be highlighted that illustrate the use of disinformation:

BRAZIL AN EXAMPLE IN TROPICAL RAINFOREST CONSERVATION?

According to Bolsonaro, “we are leaders when it comes to the conservation of tropical rainforests” (BRAZIL, 2020a). The ranking of the countries with the highest tropical forest losses in 2020 is composed of: Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bolivia, Indonesia, Peru, Colombia, Cameroon, Laos, Malaysia and Mexico (GLOBAL FOREST WATCH, 2021). It should be noted that the Brazilian territory once again occupied first place with the loss of 1.7 million hectares, an amount that corresponds to three times the amount of forests lost by the second-placed country. Tropical forest losses in Brazil increased 25% compared to 2019 and this is due to deforestation for the expansion of commodities (GLOBAL FOREST WATCH, 2021). The Amazon is the most damaged

biome. It lost 1.5 million hectares in 2020, representing a 15% increase over the previous year (GLOBAL FOREST WATCH, 2021).

IS THE ENERGY MIX CLEAN?

The president was categorical in his discourse and stated that in Brazil, “we have the world’s cleanest and most diversified energy mix” (BRAZIL, 2020a). In proportion to the characteristics of each country, Iceland, Mozambique and Norway have a cleaner energy mix than Brazil (INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY - IEA, 2018). The country does in fact have a diverse energy base, but its sustainability is questionable.

In 2019, the Brazilian energy mix was divided into six main sources. Oil (38%), followed by hydroelectricity (29%), gas (10%), biofuel (8%), coal (5%), wind (4%), others (4%) and nuclear (1%) (FGV, 2020). The non-renewable energy source oil occupies the first position in the ranking and is responsible for the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere (FONSECA et al., 2018).

Hydropower comes in second place. Although it is considered by the international community as a source of clean and sustainable energy due to its low carbon emissions, the implementation of this type of venture involves several problems that point to its unsustainability (ANDRADE & MATTEI, 2013). Hydroelectric plants generate population displacements, social conflicts, change in the dynamics of local life and culture, deforestation, loss of ecosystems, extinction of fauna and flora species, damming and changes in the flow of rivers (FEARNSIDE, 2019).

DOES THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION MAKE SENSE?

In his discourse, Bolsonaro states that: “we provide food security to one sixth of the world’s population, even while preserving 66% of our native vegetation and using only 27% of our territory for animal husbandry and agriculture. These are figures that no other country has” (BRAZIL, 2020a).

Brazil has precisely 66.8% of native forest (MAPBIOMAS, 2020). However, through the way the statement is made, the audience receives distorted information. Of the 66% mentioned by the president, 9.3% are secondary forests, that is, areas that have been deforested or have undergone some other anthropogenic intervention, such as burning and logging, and that have been regenerated (MAPBIOMAS, 2020). Highlighting an effort to preserve the environment in relation to other

countries, the president said that 27% of the Brazilian territory is used for agriculture. Currently, about 30% of the country's area serves the aforementioned sector, whose main uses are pasture, soybeans, corn, sugar cane and coffee (IBGE, 2019; O ECO, 2019; EMBRAPA 2020). Suriname, Japan, Sweden, Finland and Congo are examples of nations that have more forests in proportion to their territory than Brazil (WORLD BANK, 2020).

IS BRAZIL AT THE TOP OF AGRIBUSINESS?

Next, in his discourse, the president mentions Brazilian agricultural production, referring to its exports and stating that the world depends on Brazil to feed itself:

Brazil stands out as the world's largest producer of foodstuffs. And for that reason, there is such a strong interest in spreading out disinformation about our environment. We are open to the world to offer our very best, i.e., our agricultural products. We have never exported so much. The world increasingly relies on Brazil to feed itself (BRAZIL, 2020a).

Agribusiness is the sector that has boosted the Brazilian trade balance the most. In 2020, US\$ 209.92 billion was exported, generating a surplus of US\$ 50.99 billion, which was achieved mainly through the production of soybeans, corn, coffee and meats (BRAZIL, 2021). However, the nation has not yet reached first place in food production as the president pointed out. Brazil ranks third, behind China and the United States (BOJANIC, 2021).

The president took the opportunity to make a kind of ad about Brazil to the world, exalting its agricultural potential – an agenda that was also reinforced throughout other excerpts of his discourse. The chief executive once again touches on the issue of disinformation. This time, he insinuates, without providing any proof, that there would be a certain discomfort in the other nations regarding Brazil because the country had a privileged position in the agribusiness sector. In his view, this would motivate them to promote disinformation suggesting that agricultural production was degrading Brazilian forests, thus tarnishing the Brazilian reputation both in terms of the environment and agribusiness.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FIRES IN THE AMAZON?

According to President Jair Bolsonaro's discourse,

Ours is a tropical rainforest and as such it does not allow fire to be spread out within it. Fire outbreaks tend to occur virtually at the same places, in the eastern surroundings of the forest, where Brazilians of indigenous ancestry burn their farmlands in search of livelihood in already cleared areas (BRAZIL, 2020a).

Forest fires in the Amazon practically have no natural causes. The forest is wet, and as such the spontaneous occurrence of fires in the region is not common. Fires are the result of the "fire triangle", which is a combination of: (1) what burns – the presence of combustible material, such as fallen dry leaves and branches and even downed trees; (2) when it burns – dry weather and high temperatures; and (3) ignition – who or what causes the fire (ALENCAR, et al. 2020).

In 2019, 89,176 fire outbreaks were registered in the Amazon Biome; in 2020, this figure rose to 103,161 (INPE, 2021). The heat outbreaks in 2019 were mainly concentrated in private properties (31%) and rural settlements (21%) and deforestation was also massively concentrated in these two land modalities, with each reaching 23% on this indicator (ALENCAR et al., 2020). Indigenous lands, on the other hand, account for 7% of the heat sources and 5% of deforestation, that is, a much lower number compared to rural real estate (ALENCAR et al., 2020). The scientific data, therefore, contradicts the statement of the president, who blamed indigenous people and *caboclos* for the fires in the Amazon rainforest, negatively affecting the image of these traditional peoples.

IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT EFFICIENT?

After mistakenly blaming traditional peoples for the fires in the Amazon, President Jair Bolsonaro said that "criminal fire outbreaks are fought with stringency and determination. I stand by my zero-tolerance policy towards environmental crime" (Brazil, 2020a). However, since the beginning of its mandate, his administration has been dedicated to putting into practice actions contrary to environmental preservation policies and has not acted efficiently in fighting fires and deforestation.

One of the strategies was the "dismantling" of the *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais* (IBAMA, Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources). In 2020, the agency's effectiveness to inspect deforestation fell by 60%, which was facilitated by the firing of the agency's supervisory heads who were laid off after carrying out operations against illegal miners and loggers in the Amazon (BRANT and WATANABE, 2020).

The same IBAMA also had its institutional scope curtailed. Although it is linked to the Ministry of the Environment, the federal government determined that the body would no longer disclose the data regarding the fines imposed on those responsible for deforestation in the Amazon,

claiming that this information would remain in the custody of the vice-presidency (MATTOSON, 2020).

The *Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais* (INPE, National Institute of Space Research), which is recognized for its technology and scientific rigor, even outside Brazil, has been the target of attacks from the government. When it released data on deforestation in the Amazon, the institute was attacked by the administration to take away its credibility and, in 2019, respected scientists were fired, such as Ricardo Galvão, then director of the institute, and the coordinator Lúbia Vinha. When the INPE disclosed that in 2020 the country had reached its highest rate of fires in the last ten years, Brazil's vice president, General Hamilton Mourão, declared that the INPE "had been infiltrated by an enemy of the state who disclosed the information to slander the government" (FERRANTE et al., 2020). However, the data had always been publicly disclosed and the identity of the so-called "enemy" was never revealed.

Based on this narrative, the state considered the possibility of outsourcing the spatial monitoring of tropical forests – although the country is already a world leader in this segment (MARCOVITCH and PINSKY, 2020). A few months before the UN General Assembly, the then Minister of the Environment already had plans for the "dismantling" of the environmental portfolio. In a meeting in the presence of other ministers and the president, he said that the pandemic would be the ideal period to pass an agenda to de-bureaucratize environmental policies and relax standards, since society would be focused on the COVID-19 issue. In the words of then Minister Ricardo Salles, it was an "opportunity" to:

slip through changes in all the rules and simplify the norms [...] by the bucket load [...] we are in this moment of tranquility regarding press coverage because [covid](#) is the only thing everyone talks about [...] the opportunity we have is that the press [...] is giving us a little respite in the other themes [...] and we can pass the infralegal reforms of deregulation (ALESSI, 2020, n. p.).

Still, on the subject of environmental management, President Jair Bolsonaro said in his statement:

Together with Congress, we have sought land regularization with a view to identify the perpetrators of these criminal acts. May I call to mind that the Amazon Region is larger than the whole of Western Europe. Hence, the difficulty of fighting not only fire outbreaks, but also illegal logging and biopiracy. In response, we are currently expanding and enhancing the use of technology and improving inter-agency operations, which include the engagement of the Armed Forces (BRAZIL, 2020a).

The national chief executive turned his attention to the Amazon in 2019 and 2020, when the biome returned to be a negative news item. These environmental events mobilized NGOs, media, scientists, and even political leaders around the world. In 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that the high rates of deforestation in the biome would motivate him to not ratify the trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union (UOL, 2019; ESTADAO CONTEUDO, 2019).

In addition to these episodes, dozens of foreign investors mobilized to no longer inject resources into the country due to the fragility of its environmental policy and to boycott Brazilian products on the international market. In the week leading up to the UN General Assembly in 2020,

ambassadors from eight European countries (Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and Belgium) sent a letter to Vice President Mourão stating that the increasing deforestation of the Amazon makes it difficult to do business with Brazil (MARCOVITCH & PINSKY, 2020, p. 94).

In order to reverse the image of the country in Brazil itself and in the international community, the federal government decided to focus some of its attention on the Amazon through the creation of decrees. The National Council of the Amazon was created in February through Decree 51/2020. The purpose of this council is to coordinate, monitor and implement public policies in the geographical area that corresponds to the legal Amazon (BRAZIL, 2020c). Although it is part of the Ministry of the Environment, the council falls under the responsibility of Brazil's vice-president, General Hamilton Mourão, and it is composed of 19 military men, four chiefs of the Federal Police and not one representative of bodies related to the environment, such as IBAMA or the *Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade* (ICMBio, Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation).

In May, decree 10.341/2020 came into force, authorizing the use of the Armed Forces to guarantee law and order in the Legal Amazon, including in border areas, indigenous lands and conservation units (BRAZIL, 2020b). The objective was to carry out preventive and repressive actions against environmental crimes regarding illegal deforestation and fire outbreaks (Brazil, 2020b). The decree subordinates environmental institutions to the Ministry of Defense. This government action took effect from May to July 2020.

Both decrees were challenged. One of the reasons lies in the fact that the military – who are the social agents responsible for the interventions – does not have the technical knowledge to manage environmental events or to deal with criminals (MARCOVITCH & LINSKY, 2020), which

demonstrates a failure in the structural composition and reinforces the weakening of governmental environmental entities that have come under the management of the military.

Although the Amazon occupies 59% of the Brazilian territory, harboring 775 of its municipalities (IMAZON, 2009), the use of its expanse was a mechanism used by the president to circumvent the poor environmental management of his government. The inspection of Amazonian lands is deficient mainly due to the lack of human resources. In 2020, IBAMA had 693 trained inspectors to combat deforestation, 140 of which were over 60 years old and could not work due to the pandemic and 241 were on leave due to illness. As such, there were 312 inspectors left to act in the Amazon forest, which is the same as one inspector for every 13.5 thousand km² (LEITE, 2020).

The promulgation of the aforementioned decrees was thus not synonymous with effectiveness. The inefficiency of the Ministry of the Environment was attested by the audit carried out by the *Tribunal de Contas da União* (TCU, Brazil's Court of Auditors), which pointed out several government failures regarding the prevention and fighting of illegal deforestation and fires in the Legal Amazon. This entity listed dozens of failures that had to be corrected, such as:

The absence of definitions regarding the responsibilities of the institutions in the national plan for the control of illegal deforestation and recovery of native vegetation. The absence of a media communication strategy for the fight against deforestation. The need for the messages sent by public authorities to be in line with the conservation policy. The extended vacancies in IBAMA's supervisory positions and functions. The reduced mandate of environmental inspectors to carry firearms. Communication (TCU, 2021, n. p.).

Linking the environmental crisis to the territorial extent of the Amazon is a simplistic approach. In front of the international community, president Jair Bolsonaro did not assume any of the many omissions of his administration regarding the problems of the region, nor did he point out the numerous actions related to environmental public policy in the country that harmed the activities of the public bodies overseeing environmental issues.

CONCLUSION

The UN General Assembly is one of the most important geopolitical events to understand the directions member countries are taking. It is an opportunity for the leaders of the organization's member states to present the current social and economic situation of their country as well as their proposals for facing contemporary challenges. The president of the Federative Republic of Brazil was the first to make his discourse and, when addressing the subject of the Amazon, he employed a

resource that he condemned twice on the occasion: disinformation. Jair Bolsonaro presented inaccurate data, made unsubstantiated statements, indicated alleged enemies, victimized himself and kept silent about real and negative information regarding his government. In his capacity as Brazil's highest authority, he promoted a distorted view of the management and reality of the Amazon to the world, simplifying its complexity. As we sought to demonstrate throughout this paper, political discourse as an argumentative mechanism for action can lead to misplaced meanings and ineffective mobilizations on the Amazon, putting its effective protection at risk.

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