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Lula, Israel's Genocide, and Racism on Brazilian Corporate Media



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“Brazilian diplomatic tradition relies on solving problems. The ‘incident’ with Israel takes the opposite direction and affects not only the image of our country but also the course of subjects that actually matter for the population in an electoral year.” With these words, the host of Brazil’s most renowned talk show, Roda Viva, closed last Monday’s edition, which had the Minister of Institutional Relations Alexandre Padilha as a guest. It was an exceptionally editorialized closing; normally Roda Viva’s hosts simply say, “Goodbye,” when the show runs out of time.

The “incident” the journalist refers to is Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s speech during the African Union Summit in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, where the Brazilian president compared the current genocide in Gaza to Hitler’s mass extermination of Jews during the Second World War. And of course, it includes Israel’s subsequent attempt to

humiliate Brazilian diplomacy by declaring Lula persona non grata and inviting Ambassador Frederico Meyer to the official Holocaust Memorial for public scolding.

Basically, the host (or his bosses) was stating that Lula was irresponsible, jeopardizing both Itamaraty's diplomatic tradition and the electoral potential of the so-called democratic camp in the municipal elections that will take place later this year throughout the country. His speech summarizes what has been the most "progressive" social-democrat reaction of Brazilian corporate media to Lula's strong statement. More reactionary outlets simply dropped openly genocidal rhetoric and inflated over one hundred congressmen to file an impeachment request against the president.

Behind a mundane preoccupation with Brazil's electoral normality, there lies a pure and simple hierarchization of human life. But, for now, let's stick to their arguments: more than a conceptual mistake, Lula's speech was supposedly a tactical error, since it happened at the same time as former president Jair Bolsonaro was getting more and more cornered for his flagrant participation in a plot to overturn the 2022 elections and remain in power via a coup.

Why should Lula revive a moribund "bolsonarismo," when Finance Minister Fernando Haddad's neoliberal agenda managed to cool down the markets and grow above expectations? Why should he ignite a Congress that's overcrowded with all kinds of fascists? Why should he offer a deviant talking point for the opposition on the eve of the elections, in a country where evangelical fanaticism is on the rise? And more than that, why should he do that right before an immense protest in São Paulo that Bolsonaro convened in his own defense? If over 100,000 supporters of the former president managed to fill Paulista Avenue, blame shall not be put on the persistent inaction of our political and media classes, inaction grounded in the 1985 general amnesty that acquitted all crimes committed by the dictatorship that had ravaged the country since 1964. No, shame on Lula, whom they see as a Bolsonaro in red.

Behind the hegemonic reaction, there is a fetishist reliance on an imaginary normality that must be achieved and maintained using one single tool: moderation. It's what Tariq Ali would call the extreme center, a pseudo-responsible political posture based on the Thatcherian idea that there's no alternative to neoliberalism, the "natural" course of "human evolution". It's a brutal inversion of Lenin's advice, that we should be flexible when it comes to tactics, and inflexible in terms of principles.

Lula's statement was based on principles: antiracist, anticolonialist, humanist. What Israel is doing to Gaza is definitely comparable to the lowest standards humankind has ever reached, including the Holocaust. It's the mass extermination of a whole population whose overwhelming majority is comprised of women and children specifically because it's been subjected to systematic assassination for seventy years. Genocide must be stopped now, and Israel's Prime Minister will not do so—not only because he's ever been ideologically committed to it, but also because his survival depends on the annihilation of the Palestinian people. He is far too compromised, judicially, economically, and politically to suddenly change course.

The brakes must be pulled from the outside. And that should be a global priority, otherwise, everyone will have to deal with the moral, political, and humanitarian consequences of having idly watched a genocide unfold in real time. The world had no idea of the extent of the Holocaust until the Red Army liberated the extermination camps of Eastern Europe. One could claim ignorance then. Not now. As we couldn't during the immigration crisis of 2015, the ongoing Yanomami extermination in Brazil, or the death policy applied by fascistic governments, especially in the United States and Brazil, during the harsher years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now everybody is watching.

If the Israeli government has its way and manages to achieve the Zionist Final Solution, it will effectively succeed where Hitler failed. *Lebensraum*, living space for the development of the “Aryan race,” was what Hitler sought with the total disappearance of what he called Judeo-Bolshevism from the East of Europe. *Lebensraum* is what the state of Israel is trying to establish by ethnically cleansing the Gaza Strip. Lula's comparison is conceptually accurate.

But more than that, it's the only antiracist position possible. Because every colonial project, including Israel's, is racist by definition. Holocaust, in the Zionist discourse, is an ideological tool, as made clear by Jewish political scientist Norman Finkelstein, another persona non grata in Israel. Divorced from the actual holocaust and turned into a historical exceptionality beyond any comparison, Holocaust becomes a carte blanche for its own reenactment. By clearly making the comparison, Lula echoes Aimé Césaire and deconstructs in two simple sentences the exceptionalism that justifies Israel's colonial endeavor.

As the late theoretician of Négritude would say, “[I]t would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that

without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his demon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the [B]lacks of Africa.”

The Brazilian corporate media and political class show how unchanged the last century’s bourgeois remains in the 21st century: even municipal elections in the country have heavier moral weight than the complete and systematic extermination of a non-white population.

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