

Book Review

— *Brazil after Bolsonaro: The comeback of Lula da Silva*, edited by Richard Bourne, Routledge, 2024

To fully appreciate the objectives and insights offered in *Brazil after Bolsonaro: The comeback of Lula da Silva*, it is necessary to start with Richard Bourne's earlier work, *Lula of Brazil: The story so far*. In this book, published in 2008, Bourne, who previously served as The Guardian's education correspondent, documents the remarkable biography of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva. It details Lula's political ascent from being a metalworker and a founding member of the Partido dos Trabalhadores to President of Brazil, first elected in 2002 and re-elected in 2006. Fast forward to 2023, and we find Lula returning to the presidency after spending 580 days in jail from April 2018 to November 2019. His defeat of the far-right Jair Messias "Trump of the Tropics" Bolsonaro marked a political resurgence and a significant moment for Brazilian democracy. While Bourne's earlier work provides a solid foundation, it is unfortunate that he could not update "the story" of Lula of Brazil to include this comeback. Still, the emerging question went beyond the figure of Lula: "How and why a democracy, still only 45 years old, was brought by intense polarisation to face a nearly mortal challenge and survived?" (p. xii). To answer these questions, Bourne edited *Brazil after Bolsonaro: The comeback of Lula da Silva*, a collection of 15 essays from 19 specialists forming a nuanced understanding of Brazil's internal dynamics and its positioning within South America and the world.

To confess, my initial scepticism led me to believe that *Brazil after Bolsonaro* would merely capitalise on a moment of uncertainty, offering a simplified narrative that would soon feel outdated. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it serves as a crucial and timely refresher, filled with valuable reflections and insights. One of the book's unexpected strengths is its ability to encourage readers to re-engage with contemporary Brazilian politics – a critical task for those of us who, myself included, for self-protective reasons, have distanced ourselves from people's daily struggles and painful realities during Bolsonaro's "desgoverno".

Brazil after Bolsonaro, begins with a Preface and Acknowledgements, the only part where we follow Bourne's analysis. This leads into the book's core,

divided into four parts. The first part consists of three chapters that explore the Background to Change. These chapters help us set out some coordinates to understand Brazil's shift, borrowing Thomas Traumann's words in Chapter Two (p. 22), from "a lively country where soccer and carnival are remedies capable of turning sorrows into joy" towards "an embittered country, divided by adamant opinions and uncompromising positions."

In the second part, Context and Issues, contributors, who avoid glorification or demolition, cover a wide range of topics: Courts and executive-legislative relations (Chapter 4), the economy (Chapter 5), social policies, poverty and hunger (Chapter 6), higher education (Chapter 7), Black representation (Chapter 8), public security (Chapter 9), human rights (Chapter 10), environmental protections (Chapter 11), and Lula's commitments to Indigenous peoples (Chapter 12). The authors, who were recruited and agreed to write prior to Lula's re-election (p. xiv), present their arguments succinctly, highlighting transformations in post-Bolsonaro Brazil while pinpointing the challenges that lie ahead for Lula's third term and beyond.

The third part shifts focus to Foreign Policy, encompassing discussions of the Pink Tide (Chapter 13) and Brazil's role on the global stage (Chapter 14). These complementary chapters are exceptionally insightful and a compelling read for anyone interested in contemporary geopolitical dynamics. They explore a myriad of challenges – amongst others, the climate crisis, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the increasing tension between the US and China – while prompting critical questions about the implications for regional integration and BRICS. The concluding part of the book features Chapter 15, penned by Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, who served as the President of Costa Rica from 2014 to 2018. He reflects on the tumultuous years between Lula and Bolsonaro, particularly under Michel Temer, who took office following Rousseff's coup-impeachment. Through personal anecdotes, including his choice to leave the room during Michel Temer's speech at the 2017 UN General Assembly, Solís Rivera reveals the profound warmth and enduring connection the charismatic Lula continues to inspire among his supporters.

The ending of Brazil after Bolsonaro is both insightful and creative, effectively positioning Brazil within the regional landscape during a time of economic deglobalisation. However, it reveals a bias that permeates throughout the book, focusing mainly on the roles of presidents, policies, political parties, and electoral politics. As a political ethnographer, I could not help but wonder what would happen to the conclusions if the main protagonist was a favela resident rather than an (ex)President. I found myself longing for a deeper exploration of the complexities and contradictions of everyday politics. Such an analysis would, for example, also focus on the imitation of Bolsonaro and the enjoyment of humiliating the poor. Although contributors mention the popularity of word-plays, such as *corruPTos* (combining corrupt with the PT political party), a deeper analysis of the libidinal economy as a political factor was missing. Even if this cannot easily be quantified or marked on a timeline, we should take this

seriously in our analysis of how people understand and feel what is happening in their country and region, especially if we want to get a better grip on political polarisation.

Nonetheless, *Brazil after Bolsonaro* stands out as an essential resource for anyone keen on understanding Brazil's political landscape. It is not a book you will read in one go; the serious topics it addresses demand thoughtful engagement. This is a book to return to, revisiting specific sections to deepen your understanding of each topic. So, as a word of warning, if you are looking for a book to read in bed, *Brazil after Bolsonaro* is not it – unless your idea of bedtime reading involves wrestling with historical dates, events, and graphs. However, that is not necessarily a negative; it is a reminder to stay awake and mindful of Brazil's enduring complexities and the lives of its people.

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