

# Consequences and legacies of the Zero Hunger program in Brazil

STEFANIE ANDRADE PRANDI MENDES

**ABSTRACT:** This article explains why and how Brazil chose a food security approach for the Zero Hunger Program (ZHP), an internationally recognised program to end hunger. The analysis of this work, using the Cultural Political Economy lens shows that due to semiotic and extra-semiotic factors, and the dialectical interaction between the two, a new hegemony was created in the food governance arena in Brazil influenced by path dependent social and economic imaginaries.

**KEYWORDS:** Zero Hunger Program. Brazil. Hunger. Lula. Food Security.



## Consequências e legados do programa Fome Zero no Brasil

**RESUMO:** Este artigo explica por que e como o Brasil escolheu uma abordagem de segurança alimentar para o Programa Fome Zero (PFZ), um programa reconhecido internacionalmente para acabar com a fome. A análise deste trabalho, usando a lente da Economia Política Cultural, mostra que devido a fatores semióticos e extra-semióticos, e à interação dialética entre os dois, uma nova hegemonia foi criada na arena da governança alimentar no Brasil influenciada por imaginários sociais e econômicos dependentes de rotas prévias.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Programa Fome Zero. Brasil. Fome. Lula. Segurança Alimentar.

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**STEFANIE ANDRADE PRANDI MENDES**

Master in Public Policy (Erasmus Mundus MAPP). Bachelor in International Relations (UFABC). Consultant at International Institute of Social Studies. Email: stefanie.prandi@gmail.com

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## 1 Introduction

The Zero Hunger Program was a turning point in political interventions on the food governance field in Brazil, but it was not sufficiently understood as the cultural content, and the production of meaning related to food beyond the commodity value was never observed. Through the Cultural Political Economy lens this article will show the dialectical duality of the structures and the meaning-making related to the ZHP, highlighting the political, economic, social and cultural processes and impacts on the variation, selection and retention in a Program targeting the fight against hunger in Brazil. This analysis is important, because it can bring insights to the comprehension of the origin of the Program, the development of a new political perspective in a path dependent neoliberal structure and the legacies of this Program for the country.

Despite access to adequate food being considered a human right since the 1940s by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), hunger is a persistent issue in the world that affects all continents. According to the report, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (FAO, 2020b), not only is hunger an enormous problem, but it has increased in the past decade. In 2019, 690 million people in the world were hungry – 8.9% of the world population while, at the same time, global food production was capable of feeding all the earth's population (FAO, 2019; 2020a). Notwithstanding, this issue is aggravated in certain areas, especially in developing countries, where access to food is poorly organized even though food production is mainly from countries which are not highly industrialized.

Brazil is emblematic of countries in this situation. It was considered the third-largest food producer in the world in 2018, the biggest exporter of commodities in 2019 when in 2020, 54% of the population faced some level of food insecurity (NUMBER..., 2021; PENSSAN, 2021). This situation is not new, however, only after the re-democratization of the country with the proclamation of a new Constitution in 1988, a social protection system started to be built, where rights and policies to fight poverty were prioritized: policies that are intrinsically connected to hunger (Souza and Vaitsman, 2014). The political environment was more receptive to social

policies and multilateral agencies were strongly instituting conditional cash transfers (CCT). Hence, at the end of the 1990s, the presidential candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), together with social movements and labour unions, designed an innovative program called the Zero Hunger Program (ZHP) – *Programa Fome Zero* – to fight mainly hunger but also poverty and inequalities.

The ZHP was created to promote social and economic policies to fight hunger at a national and local level and it was well accepted by society and supported by peasant movements, labour unions and other social movements (MDS, 2010). Anchored in the left-wing principles which were becoming popular in the Latin American “pink tide” (BULL, 2013), it proposed to change the reality of millions of Brazilians. In Lula’s government the strategies were a mix of pragmatic and populist responses to the inflexible opposition groups and to avoid an economic collapse.

Together with the Worker’s Party, and aiming governability, they introduced moderate changes, prioritizing interests of private actors such as banks, corporations and large landowners, maintaining FHC’s neoliberal economic policy, for example, by the “aggressive primary fiscal surplus of around 3.0% of GDP” (ELLNER, 2019, p. 02). The Program partially succeeded in its aims and continued throughout Lula’s second mandate and Dilma Rousseff’s (also from the Worker’s Party) first and second mandate, when Brazil finally came off the Hunger Map (FAO, 2014) and the program was terminated.

There is a vast range of studies about the ZHP, focusing on different perspectives and using diverse theoretical frameworks to interpret it. On the one hand, some, such as Takagi (2006), are focused on historical analysis of the policies, interpreting the creation, development and implementation of policies, highlighting problems and limitations. Tomazini and Leite (2016), on the other hand, are constructivists and focus their work on the impacts of the ideas, interests and knowledge production behind the paradigm formation of Food Security in Brazil with the ZHP. Santos (2009), which has a Marxist interpretation, emphasizes the structural problem of hunger related to poverty and food insecurity. Much research focuses on policy analysis with a Rational Choice Institutionalism approach. Almeida (2004), Hunter & Power (2005)

and Hall (2006) point out mistakes in the diagnosis of the problem that Zero Hunger Problem intended to solve. Belik, Silva and Takagi (2001) highlighting the program targeting problems defended especially by researchers linked to IPEA and the World Bank and Moura (2007), explains the lack of political content and political marketing strategy.

Research on the ZHP is only based on policy analysis, measuring policy failure or policy success, including government reports. In this sense, due to the lack of academic production in this area that focus on the cultural and social significance of food there is a gap that needs to be fulfilled on the research agenda. This gap needs to be addressed by a lens that goes beyond policy evaluation, which is able to capture the deeper political, economic, social and cultural drivers of the ZHP, because food is not just a commodity, the food system has dynamic properties which involves “information flows between the system and its components and between the system and the external environment beyond the system boundary” (DOHERTY *et al.*, 2019, p. 05). In this sense, the relations surrounding food or hunger has cultural significance, shapes social and interpersonal relationships, represents classes, and has also a symbolic value.

Nevertheless, one theoretical framework captures that: the Cultural Political Economy. CPE is a post-disciplinary approach that takes the cultural turn in Political Economy seriously and is able to capture the dialectical relational content of meaning-making (semiosis) and the material (extra-semiotic) (JESSOP; SUM, 2001; 2013; JESSOP, 2002; 2004). It helps to unveil all the social, economic, political and cultural relations within food governance that can fight or led to a state of hunger. In this sense, this research grounds the understanding of the ZHP within how politics works in Brazil, and unveils elements like discourse, political mobilization, structure, nature of power, interests, institutions, structures and hegemony. This perspective on the ZHP allows the comprehension of the legacies the ZHP left in Brazil what can provide a deeper understanding of the challenges the country has been facing with hunger and it is important to understand the political feasibility of the ZHP in a context of commodities boom, neoliberal structures, national and international elites that went in opposition to the hegemonic grain of political interests, culture and institutions.

Given that, the aim of this research is to comprehend why and how Brazil chose a Food Security approach for its main program to fight hunger in the country – the Zero Hunger Program. The main argument of this work is that due to the re-politicization of certain economic and social imaginaries food security resonated between the path dependent structures and ideas, being selected and sedimented as the approach for the Zero Hunger Program.

The methods used in this article are composed by a qualitative typical single case study of the Brazilian Zero Hunger Program, which is a good representative of the phenomenon under study and allows “opportunities for investigating causal pathways” (GERRING, 2016, p. 48). This work incorporated documental research from the Brazilian government sources, such as: the Lula first discourse after his election; the 3 volumes of the Zero Hunger Program study by the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger; The Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) Program: the Brazilian experience by the Ministry of Agrarian Development; and, the Food and Nutritional Security Law (LOSAN). Also, documents from important social movements that were considered in the design of the Zero Hunger Program, either for its relevance to the national scale or in terms of the support for Lula’s candidacy such as the Landless Workers Movement (*MST- Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra*), the Small Farmers Movement (*MPA – Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores*), Workers Unions, *La Via Campesina*, the international unification of peasants’ movements. And, finally, reports and documents from international organizations such as: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with its Hunger Map; the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

## **2 From problem situating to the Problématique**

### 2.1 Research Methodology

This research will draw upon the tools of Cultural Political Economy (CPE) to comprehend why and how the food security approach was privileged in the Zero Hunger Program case. The

study of this case will be methodologically operationalized through the evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention proposed by CPE (JESSOP; SUM, 2001; JESSOP, 2002; 2004). This will allow the arrow to be drawn from meaning-making to structuration, the process of complex reduction (given that the natural and social world are very complex), highlighting all important factors in each of the three moments mentioned above. Moreover, it will enable this work to explain beyond the materiality and the structures which the orthodox Political Economy focus on, shedding light on the cultural turn, stressing the intersubjective production of meaning.

The methodology is divided in three moments: variation, selection and retention. CPE recommends the integration of these three evolutionary mechanisms into the semiotic analysis to highlight the dialectic of path dependency and path shaping that “emerges from the contingent co-evolution of semiotic and extra-semiotic processes that make some meaningful efforts at complexity reduction more resonant than others” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 07). As stated in CPE, there is a constant variation in apparently routine social practices – discourses and practices – due to material or semiotic causes (crises, new challenges, and adaptations). The semiotic conditions influence, among others, the differential multiplication and change of social groups, associations, organization (JESSOP, 2004).

In turn, particular discourses are selected for “interpreting events, legitimizing actions, and (perhaps self-reflexively) representing social phenomena” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 8). Here, the semiotic (ideas) and material factors operate extensively; the first by influencing the resonance of discourses in personal, organizational and institutional terms and by also “limiting possible combinations of semiosis and semiotic practices in a given semiotic order” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 8); the second by conjunctural or ingrained power relations “path dependency and structural selectivities” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 8).

Finally, the retention of some resonant discourses happens. Some examples of this are the “enactment in organizational routines, integration into institutional rules, objectification in the built environment, material and intellectual technologies and

articulation into widely accepted accumulation strategies, state projects or hegemonic visions” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 8 - 9). Hegemony here, is a concept borrow from Gramsci and depends on the creation and dissemination of an adequate common sense (GRAMSCI; HOARE, 1971; JESSOP; SUM, 2013). The potential for greater effective institutionalization and integration into patterns of structured and durable compromise depends on the range of sites – horizontally in “personal, organizational, institutional, functional systems” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 32) or vertical in “micro-macro, local-regional-national-supranational-global” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 32) – in which resonant discourses are retained. The reciprocal interdependences will also recursively affect the retainment of resonant discourses.

There is a reinforcement at this point, as particular procedural devices favour these discourses and practices. This involves especially the discursive selectivity and the material (structural) selectivity and such mechanisms “recursively strengthen appropriate genres, styles and strategies and selectively eliminate inappropriate alternatives” (JESSOP, 2009, p. 9) and are powerful ways of promoting complementary discourses across society.

During the evolutionary path of variation, selection and retention, there are significant discursive-material moments of production of hegemonies, which are inserted in four modes of strategic selectivity, that is, conditioning elements. The four modes of strategic selectivity, an encounter between Marx, Gramsci and Foucault (JESSOP; SUM, 2013), are the following:

- Structural selectivity: This selectivity is grounded on the contested reproduction of context, organizational forms and institutional orders of social forms (e.g. patriarchy, racism) and that can be seen through structures favouring certain interests, identities and strategies over the other. In this selectivity, path dependence limits extension for path shaping.
- Agential selectivity: It is grounded on the capacity of social agents to make a difference in certain conjunctures, neutralize opposition and ignore resistance. They need to have the ability to “(1) read conjunctures and identify potentials for action; (2) re-politicize sedimented discourses and rearticulate them; (3) recombine extant technologies or invent

new ones; and (4) shift the balance of forces in space-time” (JESSOP; SUM, 2013, p. 219).

- Discursive selectivity: Here, semiosis is rooted in enforced selection of sense and meaning in face of complexity. It considers enunciations of the social world: what, who is authorized to, how it enters the contextual fields. It also takes into account the genres, styles and discourses and how they produce constraints and/or opportunities. The semiotic resources can frame and limit possible imaginaries, discourses and identities and shape the scope for hegemony.
- Technological selectivity: Aggregation of knowledge, disciplinary and governmental rationalities in governing social relations. In addition to a capacity to transform nature, technologies also shape social relations through divisions of labour and knowledge, their material and epistemological effects.

### **3 Discussion and findings**

The Zero Hunger Program has been discussed using a variety of approaches, but none of them took into account the cultural turn and the dialectical duality of the semiotic and extra-semiotic elements. In this sense, the present article will address the questions that lie behind the Zero Hunger Program through a Cultural Political Economy (CPE) approach, where the conditioning four selectivities (strategic selectivity; agential selectivity; discursive selectivity; and technological selectivity) interacted throughout the moments of variation, selection and retention on the production of hegemonies, answering why and how food security had more resonance in the Zero Hunger Program.

#### **3.1 Variation**

The hunger crisis in Brazil identified by the Hunger Map in 1994 (FOOD FOUNDATION, 2017) was a disruptive – re-politization – moment on the sedimented views of the world that generated a variety of ideas to find answers to fight undernourishment and



hunger. Among them, discourses connected to food security ideas and food sovereignty ideas emerged from different structures, presented below.

At the moment of variation, different institutions and organizations claimed the discourses of food governance and two particular concepts were most resonant, food security and the food sovereignty. These discourses were embedded in structures that have institutional orders of social forms. On one side, there were the Bretton Woods institutions (FAO, WB and WTO) that throughout the years since the post-war have been building and re-building a dominant Food Security Framework and shaping responses to hunger based on certain interests of the countries that funded them and had power of decision, such as the United States and the European Union (JAROSZ, 2011). These countries influenced the reproduction of neoliberal policies internationally, as they understood hunger as a problem of supply and demand, and the responses increased productivity through technological research and agricultural development to keep food prices low while keeping volume high.

On the other hand, food sovereignty was created by peasants' movements, through *La Via Campesina*, in a counter-hegemonic attempt to show that the problem of hunger was about equity, distribution, control and access to food resources, not scarcity (LVC, 2007). Their reach was not the same as the dominant international organizations who had articulations with powerful countries. Instead, *La Via Campesina* was mainly composed of peasants from developing countries, which were, and are, the most affected by the policies of Food Security.

The resonance of food security was due to dominant and hegemonic social and economic imaginaries that were connected to the strong structures built in the Bretton Woods agreements and later in the Washington Consensus, from a movement of path dependence from the previous political mandate of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, which popularized deregulation and privatization measures (TOMMAZINI; LEITE, 2016).

At the moment of variation, also different social agents were acting to "make a difference" (JESSOP; SUM, 2013, p. 219), especially

around the creation of The Zero Hunger Program, before Lula's election. This included the sociologist Herbert de Souza (Betinho) from the Movement for Ethics in Politics, which launched a national campaign in the mid-1990s, called Citizens' Action against Hunger, Poverty, and for Life, the biggest campaign against hunger in the country (NOSSA..., 2021). This social movement designed what would become the first Zero Hunger project. Another influential actor was José Graziano, an agronomist supporter of land reform, who helped to articulate the Zero Hunger Program, becoming the Minister of the Extraordinary Ministry for Food Security, the first institution to manage and implement the Zero Hunger Program, and later he would be elected FAO's Director General and implement the Zero Hunger strategy in a global scale (JOSÉ..., 2021).

Finally, the newly-elected president Lula, who identified in the Zero Hunger project the potential to adopt it as your main candidacy project, ignoring the resistance of the agribusiness institutions, at first, who would be more in favour of marketization and commodification of food instead of the fight against hunger. Hence, he managed to incorporate this Program in his government when he was elected, initially with the proposal of an Agrarian Reform among other policies that would benefit small and family farmers. Lula emerged as a leader since his role in the social movements in the 1980s, but he gained more support when a 'Parallel Government'<sup>1</sup> during Fernando Henrique Cardoso mandate was structured (TOMMAZINI; LEITE, 2016). His figure was crucial for the presidency campaign because Lula was originally from the north-eastern part of Brazil, the poorest region of the country and one of the main targets of the Zero Hunger Program, besides his personal experience with poverty and hunger and with the social movements throughout his life.

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1 The Parallel Government was born with the group that supported Lula in his 1989's candidacy and in 1991 launched a document called National Food Security Policy, suggesting access to food policies, challenging Cardoso's focus enhancing the production of commodities. From this Parallel Government was also created the Citizenship Institute, the institution that first designed the Zero Hunger project. (Tomazini and Leite, 2016).

From the 'Parallel Government', other influential actors emerged, such as Renato Maluf, municipal manager and proposal rapporteur of the National Food Security Policy, who organized and partook in debates with specialists in Food Security Forums, civil society, parliamentarians, labour unions, entrepreneurs and religious leaders to design and legitimize this policy (TOMMAZINI; LEITE, 2016). He would later be influential in the creation of governmental agencies as the Food Security Especial Secretariat and *CONSEA*.

In *Towards a Cultural Political Economy*, Jessop and Sum (2013) stress the Gramscian idea that organic intellectuals make discourse, but also the Foucauldian idea that discourses make organic intellectuals. For them, this happens through the identification of certain problems – mostly urgent – in which intellectuals elaborate a problem, its solutions, truth regimes and social practices. This applies to the Brazilian case, as Lula with the Worker's Party were the organic intellectuals that were shaping the new rules of the elected government and the scope of the Zero Hunger Program. Together with the Citizenship Institute, they put the discourse of the left-wing approach in the proposals for the new policies. In fact, despite the huge opposition to the ZHP from the media, academics, and even some leftist organisations, it attracted the attention of poor voters for Lula, as the ZHP became a metaphor for inclusive, socioeconomic policies (PAES-SOUSA; VAITSMAN, 2014).

The report created by the Parallel Government, the National Food Security Policy, shaped the direction of the following food governance policies, initially in Cardoso's mandate, but with more strength in Lula's mandates, acting as a technology of power (FOUCAULT, 1977; JESSOP; SUM, 2013). In 2001, the Citizenship Institute promoted seminars with political leaders, social movements (Single Central of Workers, National Confederation of Agricultural Workers, Federation of Workers in Family Farming, Popular Movements Centre, Landless Rural Workers Movement), NGOs, and researchers (Fome Zero, 2001). In addition, on October 12<sup>th</sup> of 2001, the Zero Hunger project was launched at the Federal Senate, and onto the country's political agenda, another technology that would shape social relations of labour and knowledge (TAKAGI, 2006; JESSOP; SUM, 2013).

### 3.2 Selection

During the selection, the ideas coming from international organizations such as FAO, WB, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) had a bigger resonance due to their influence in the country through the funding of policies to fight hunger.

These structures, or institutions favoured the interest in food security in their strategies. In the FAO (2002) report about the ZHP, it mentioned that “elements of PFZ (ZHP) fit well with the strategies of the two international Banks”. The World Bank was also strategically planning to fund policies in Brazil and saw in the ZHP an opportunity to widen its influence. The World Bank’s strategy in Brazil stated that improving productivity in rural space (including family farming) and strengthening the social protection system were type of policies they would fund because they contributed directly to poverty reduction, which was the scope of their work and were public policies part of the ZHP (FAO, 2002).

These organizations resonated with the structures in the country since the Washington Consensus in the beginning of the 1990s, when the WB and the IDB started to finance projects to reorganize the politics and economy of countries after the Cold War (NAÍM, 2000). Most of the policies were based on privatization, deregulation and modernization of public areas such as Education, Health, Energy and other strategic sectors (LIMA, 2009). These structural changes were reproducing hegemonic interests and were very ingrained in political and economic spaces, remaining until the end of Cardoso’s mandate, and, as shown above, the same institutions showed interest in continuing to fund public policies in the country, despite a completely different approach from the new leftist government of Lula. The policy of these institutions proposals were fundamentally geared towards food security, due to their interests and the selection of this approach became even more resonant in the country because of their extensive influence.

Another structure sedimented from the past, hence, path-dependent, is the political and economic elite in Brazil. They are represented in different scales in the private and public sector, including the Brazilian Congress, and one important group in the food governance field is the agribusiness. The sector has

associations, unions, confederations and educational spaces. The Brazilian Agribusiness Association (Abag) promoted congresses to legitimize their ideology; and their foundational *oeuvre* from 1993 is called Food Security: an agribusiness approach (PINTON; YANNICK, 2019). This reference to food security justifies the demand for public support to the sector that the State has always honored.

In the 2000s, with the commodities boom, Brazil had a surplus on account of the primary export sectors – above all, agribusiness and mining. Due to the growth of China and India, the country became dependent on production growth in these areas, as there was little investment in industry or services (DELGADO, 2008).

Lula was a central actor in the implementation of the ZHP, and for that, his agency on selecting which approach the policies would get was crucial. In the beginning, during the design of the Program, as shown in this article, he defended Agrarian Reform as one of the bases for social change in the country. This resonated with the ideas of food sovereignty, however, throughout the implementation, certain actions changed. His role as a conciliator between the elites and the social movements was central to his governability, and he did not shift the focus of agrarian production in the country. On the contrary, he gave total priority to the re-primarization of the economy, focusing on the primary export model, which has agribusiness as its flagship (DELGADO, 2008).

After taking office, Lula showed some impact of the FHC discourse on some policies, especially the reforms to the public sector pension plan and the monetary policy. Moreover, in the formation of his cabinet, he had to balance social activists, such as his Minister of Cities, Olivio Dutra, former governor of Rio Grande do Sul from the left-wing of the Workers Party and Marina Silva, activist for the Amazon, as Minister of Environment with leaders from the political and economic elite, such as his vice-president José Alencar, leader of the right-wing Liberal Party, the director of the Central as Bank, Henrique Mereilles, former president of BankBoston and member of Cardoso's Social Democratic Party of Brazil, and his Minister of Finance, Antonio Palocci from one of the most moderate wings of the Workers' Party. This strategy could

be also seen in the food governance field with the choice of the Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Rodrigues, former president of the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness (Abag) while the Minister of Rural Development, responsible for agrarian reform, was Miguel Rosseto, from the left of the Worker's Party and sympathetic to the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (VERGARA-CAMUS, 2005).

Lula, also, being a nodal actor (JESSOP; SUM, 2013) was able to make certain changes, incorporating social rights, an important agenda for his mandate, and in the field of food governance, setting the agenda for small farmers' rights, conditional cash transfer – the Family Grant – and focus on developing the poorest region in the country, the north east (MDS, 2010).

The discourse of Agrarian Reform remained, but no action resulted from it. On the contrary, Lula chose for the Ministry of Agriculture an agribusiness entrepreneur, Roberto Rodrigues, to be in charge in the Ministry. Roberto Rodrigues had deep connections with the promotion of agrarian reform, together with the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Social Development, but this was never among the interests of the agribusiness nor was it one of the main programs after the creation of *MDS* and ending of *MESA*.

In terms of the international organizations, the FAO discourse towards the ZHP was that they would expect the formulation of new national policies towards hunger and malnutrition that would be sustainable in the longer term. However, the way they would support it was through the Special Programme for Food Security, a clear statement of what kind of policies they would support (FAO, 2002).

Another important discourse acting in the selection moment was the *MDS* description of the Zero Hunger Program. It differed strongly from the beginning of the program in 2003, where it would be considered a fight against hunger and its structural causes that lead to social exclusion and would also ensure the end of hunger in the future (FREI BETTO, 2005). This discourse was highly personified in Lula's image and the social movements that supported him such as the Landless Rural Worker's Movement, the Small Farmers Movements and different leftist movements. Instead, the Program would be described as an initiative to promote food and

nutrition security and contribute to eradicating extreme poverty (SILVA; DEL GROSSI; FRANÇA, 2011). This became a very similar discourse to the World Bank, the IDB and FAO, and less connected to the image of the pioneers and designers of this policy, such as Frei Betto, Betinho, Lula and José Graziano.

The hegemonic idea of food security started to be sedimented by technologies of power that would routinize and institutionalize rules. The biggest of them was the money in the funds that international organizations would send and agribusiness would promote with the commodities boom. Another technology used by agribusiness to promote the selection of certain imaginaries was the use of media and advertisements by the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness. On a variety of media, including TV, they advertised the value of the country's agricultural production and showed the chain of interdependence that links every citizen-consumer to agribusiness (PINTON; YANNICK, 2019).

Beyond the public support and considerable budget transferred to the agricultural sector, there were intervention tools that actors integrated into their strategy as planning policies, labour regulations, environmental and forestry regulation, and, a credit offer policy (LEITE, 2015). The ideological legitimation was initiated with the selection of Roberto Rodrigues, an agribusiness leader, previous president of Abag to be the Minister of Agriculture of Lula's mandate (2003 - 2006). Although agribusiness interests have gone in the opposite direction of the social movements projects such as Agrarian Reform, the foreign exchange generated by exports sustained the redistributive policies implemented during Lula's presidency and is reputed to have contributed largely to employment and GDP (PINTON; YANNICK, 2019).

### 3.3 Retention

The most conspicuous demonstration of retention of Food Security was the creation of the Food and Nutritional Security Law - 11.346 (*Lei de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional - LOSAN*) in 2006 (BRASIL, 2006). The LOSAN was created to solve the lack of a legal framework to organize and judge the policies related to

food security, including the ones in the scope of the Zero Hunger Program. The law provided the government a framework for the National Food and Nutrition Security System (*Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional – SISAN*), designed to coordinate and monitor the decentralised policies to ensure the right to adequate food. The law is multisectoral, allowing the government to design linked-up programmes that address the factors affecting the food and nutritional status of diverse individuals and social groups (FOOD FOUNDATION, 2017). The SISAN was led by two institutions: The National Intersectoral Chamber on Food and Nutrition Security (Camara Nacional Interministerial de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional - CAISAN), exclusively composed of Ministers and CONSEA, already mentioned before as the Council composed of civil society and government members, providing social control and participation (FOOD FOUNDATION, 2017).

These two institutions use the National Conferences on Food and Nutrition as part of their decision-making process. The National Conference happens every four years, is preceded by state and municipal conferences and approves guidelines for the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and Annual Plan, with two-thirds of civil society participants and one third of government servants (FOOD FOUNDATION, 2017). This shows how the discourse of Food Security is retained horizontally and vertically, promoting an effective institutionalization and integration into patterns of structured and durable compromise, and retaining all the discourses, and implemented rules and routines.

Later, in 2010, Lula approved the National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security, Decree 7.272, providing a more integrated framework with specific guidelines, management procedures and mechanisms for funding, monitoring and evaluating government actions on food and nutrition (BRASIL, 2010). This policy was articulated and delivered through the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan, which is also renewed every four years and outlines all programmes to be implemented, traces every one of the projects and activities to be executed, with quantifiable targets and timetables that are connected to the public spending plan (FOOD FOUNDATION, 2017).



The discourse over the ZHP was that throughout the years between 2003 and 2009, Lula's mandate, 20 million people were removed from poverty, particularly in rural areas where 4 million people crossed over this line (DEL GROSSI, 2011). This happened due to the development of a variety of social policies in the scope of the Zero Hunger Program, such as investments in family farming, the acquisition of products from small farmers to school meals and access to potable water (MDS, 2010).

The discourse of Agrarian Reform was not visible anymore as the focus on economic growth took over the discourses of the President, and he even used the phrase "sugarcane heroes" for the producers of biofuels, which was extensively criticized by his supporters from grassroots' movements and peasants' movements alike (DELGADO, 2008). The discourse shifted completely, and Lula extensively spoke about the Family Grant, the conditional cash transfer that was one of the 52 projects of the ZHP, but became the most successful and attractive of them for the next electoral campaign (JUNIOR, 2009)

The Zero Hunger Program faced some limitations, especially due to the difficulty coordinating multisectoral policies and so the ZHP was gradually replaced by the Family Grant, policy that was once in the scope of the ZHP (MDS, 2010). Different groups inside the government were in dispute for that space and the group that supported the Family Grant gained power and influence (TOMAZINI; LEITE, 2016). This can be seen by the size of the budget, a technology of power (FOUCAULT, 1977), of the Zero Hunger Program directed to the Family Grant: since 2003, R\$ 62.4 billion was spent in the Zero Hunger Program and R\$ 43.5 billion, 70% of the total was spent in the Family Grant (JUNIOR, 2009).

This money would come not just from the budget of the Ministries, but also from international organizations. The World Bank, in 2004, approved a US\$572 million sector-wide loan (SWAP) to support the Family Grant in the cash transfers (96%) and technical assistance to improve selection and monitoring mechanisms in an effort of capacity building (HALL, 2006). The IDB also approved a loan of US\$1 billion to the Family Grant. These two endorsements were equivalent to one quarter of the total estimated funding for

the Family Grant during Lula's mandate and influenced the conditional cash transfer approach to poverty reduction in Brazil (HALL, 2006). These technologies were essential to retain the Program and all the mechanisms of implementation, monitoring and evaluation and to give the Family Grant a leading role in the ZHP.

Once again, another technology was advertising. The Zero Hunger Program and the Family Grant became almost brands of the Lula government. It was not clear all the policies the programs incorporated, but the number of families served was very big, amplifying national visibility. These brands were used as a way to simplify the understanding of the programs for public opinion, but also as a marketing strategy to connect them with Lula and the Worker's party, who were aiming at the next elections (JUNIOR, 2009).

### 3.4 Sedimentation and re-politicization

With the sedimentation of Food Security as the approach of the Zero Hunger Program, due to the variety of selectivity acting throughout variation, selection and retention, food sovereignty was forgotten in the Program. This can be evidenced by the erasure of Agrarian Reform from the discourse and from the main projects of the ZHP, the number of moderate and right-wing politicians and agribusiness supporters in the government and the funding from international institutions that praised Food Security measures. This approach, however, removed Brazil from the FAO's Hunger Map in 2014, during Dilma's mandate, a successor of Lula from the Worker's Party.

Nevertheless, some challenges to this view were presented with the new governments, and now, the variety of construals does not relate to food sovereignty, but to not investment in food security at all. This is, according to Jessop (2009), a re-politicization of discourse and rise of an unstructured complexity, which occurs when the structured complexity and the sedimented discourse are disrupted. In the case of Brazil, Bolsonaro's election, the extinction of *CONSEA* shows the lack of interest for the fight against hunger, even with the aggravation of COVID-19 in the country, negatively

affecting the jobs and possibility to work of a generation. Penssan Network (2021) shows that 9% of the population were hungry in 2020, the same level the country was at in 2004. This scenario explains, once again, how path dependence and path shaping acts in the Brazilian policies to fight hunger.

#### **4 Conclusion**

The Zero Hunger Program was a complex and audacious Program to fight hunger in Brazil at the beginning of the 2000s. By using the lens of Cultural Political Economy, this research has shown that the conditioning elements of the four kinds of selectivity were acting in the semiosis and in the extra-semiotic factors in a dialectical way throughout the variation selection and retention, producing a new hegemony – the food security policies in the Zero Hunger Program – influenced by social and economic imaginaries. In the moment of variation, it was shown how the diversity of construals, mainly food security and food sovereignty, were trying to be more resonant and become predominant, and the structures of the Bretton Woods institutions rather than the social movements, were hegemonic showing more potential to reproduce their interests. The actors from the Parallel Government, especially Lula, founded an opportunity in the Zero Hunger Program to create a food governance project to win the elections and try to incorporate elements of both approaches in the policies, through organizations of seminars, congress and reports to gain public opinion support.

Lula was elected and the Program was launched with the financial support of regional structures such as the IDB, FAO and WB regional offices, which put their strategy within the scope of the ZHP. With the formation of Lula's office and the desire to achieve governability, there was a need to conciliate the interests of social movements, the majority of his candidacy base and the interests of the economic and political elite. In pursuit of this, Lula nominated moderate and conservative actors to compose the government's agencies and ministries. The most glaring example of this in the field of food governance was the choice of Roberto Rodrigues, former president of the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness, for

Minister of Agriculture. This influenced the discourse of the policies, which at the end of Lula's first mandate focused on the re-prioritization of agriculture to export, instead of an Agrarian Reform, with the support of media, advertisements and funds.

With the development of the government, institutions, rules and routines, systems and laws were established to create an organized framework to implement, monitor and evaluate the food security policies. Here, food sovereignty and Agrarian Reform were left out of the reports, and the focus was on the economic growth that the commodities provided with the commodities boom, the funds of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank and the focus on the Family Grant, the new advertisement of the government, who were aiming at the next elections.

It is important to add that in certain times, food security was used to explain a proposal that was actually based on a food sovereignty approach, the Agrarian Reform. In this way, the term food security is considered as both security and sovereignty. This modification in meaning of sovereignty diverts those who would support food sovereignty initiatives into supporting food security initiatives. This emptied the meaning of food sovereignty.

In the Brazilian case, after the institutionalization of the Zero Hunger Program and its end marked by Brazil's removal from the Hunger Map in 2014, a new crisis started to happen, and, again, different construals were being generated, and the cycle restarted. This theory also helped the research to understand how the retention of the previous discourse influenced the crisis and is affecting the creation of new discourses and future practices. Thus, the analysis of the ZHP through a Cultural Political Approach, provided a deep understanding of the semiotic and extra-semiotic factors that influenced hunger and food governance, answering why and how Brazil chose a food security approach to fight hunger in the country.

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