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Course: ANTH 4340

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Final Paper

On Tuesday, June 23rd, I conducted my interview with Edwin Iseense, a fifty-five-year-old Brazilian born immigrant, who works as an IT engineer in Toronto. The only reason as to why I am mentioning his name in this paper, is due to his own choosing, as he wanted his name to be associate with his actions. I have had the pleasure of knowing Edwin for the better part of the last eight years, as my family and him arrived in the country around the same time. What started off as an uncle figure to me, quickly became more of a friend and mentor. We shared (and continue to share) a lot of the same arguments, ideologies on politics and human rights, and views in general, at times where the politics in Brazil was almost a tabooed topic. I decided to call Edwin to do an interview due to his outspoken opinions on the Lula Livre movement (Free Lula Movement). I will not go into as much detail within the movement itself, as I have done within the previous paper, rather I will focus on Edwin's views on the issues of social movement, online activism, and his own personal beliefs, ideologies, and sense of morality. What was supposed to be a 30 minute interview (for which I drafted 13 questions on issues such as Identity, online Activism, and Globalization), quickly escalated to a one-hour and 21 minutes extremely pleasant conversation regarding the notion of power, backlash towards our actions, Brazilian politics, our own ideals, and where do we see such politics within a few years given the social crisis that resides within the country. The Free Lula movement poses a great deal of difficulty as its actual objectives are not completely known (as even when Lula was released from prison, the movement still lives within the festivals that happened, and people have continued to use the

online hashtag #LulaLivre), however, the beauty of the movement lies within that same assumption, something Edwin considers to be a non-linear progression (something he suggests started with the hatred and hostility towards Lula being something that was present within the socio-political stage within Brazil during the early 2000s).

My first question directed at Edwin, was in regards his participation in the movement itself. He acted quite surprised as the first question being so direct to the point, however, I simply wanted to assert questions of identity. I wanted to know where he stood regarding the movement, and how he considered the movement's origins. We briefly talked about an article we were reading at the time, which was written by a Brazilian political scientist Luciana Tatagiba, in which she describes the origins and reasons for such "*Anti-Petismo*", which is the strong opposition towards the Worker's Party which was founded by Lula Himself (Tatagiba, 2018). Edwin gives his own take on the issue of such "*Anti-Petsimo*", and he attributes as not only as an opposition towards the Worker's Party itself, but as an opposition towards Left-Wing politics in general. Another paper could entirely be written on the rise of such hate politics within Brazil in the 2000s throughout Lula's reign as president. Edwin tries to identify such class of people by saying "There has been a rise of this opposition that considers itself politicized, composed by those of middle to high class, white, heterosexual, which has been benefiting themselves from such governing. They saw that they could eventually bring down the leftist government". He affirms that he is no anarchist, and citizens should eventually follow the constitution, and when he saw that Lula was being investigated for alleged corruptions schemes, he simply stayed put and decided to watch it unfold. He begins to mention that the turning point for him, was when Lula was called for a deposition in front of the then judge Sergio Moro to be questioned regarding such allegations. However, if one takes a closer look at such case, one will see the

irregularities within the premises as they brought Lula in for (For the sake of the paper's length, I will not go in depth as to what irregularities were). Edwin was one of those who picked up on such irregularities. He says for him it seemed too theatrical, something the opposition had to do in order to stop Lula from running for the following election, and he mentions that once he realized what had happened, was when he became sympathetic for Lula. During his answer, Edwin touched on a subject that for me was the most interesting, and instantly I had picked up on. He begins to say that in Brazilian politics, the right-wing government always tries to remove the left-wing government from power (he briefly mentions the 1964 Brazilian coup d'état), and with the impeachment of then president Dilma Rousseff in 2016. He proceeded to then say that the reason for such opposition towards Lula and his government, was in large part due to Lula's power over the Brazilian people and the strength that his character represent for millions of Brazilians, with sayings that "He managed to stay for two full presidential mandate, being the only president in Brazil to finish with a 80% approval rating" (with the actual rating being 87% according to G1, G1 2010). This comment on Lula instantly brought me to the Hannah Arendt reading on Violence and Power. Edwin constantly referred to Lula as a powerful individual, as Arendt mentions in her article regarding the colloquial use of words such as Power "It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among key words as 'Power', 'Strength', 'Force', 'Authority', and finally, 'Violence'... To use them as synonyms not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistics... but it has also resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities they correspond to." (Arendt, 1969). With the risk of misplacing such words within the context of Brazilian Politics, I decided to dive deeper into what Edwin considered a "Powerful" man. What he meant, as Arendt points out, was the singular individual ability to rally millions of people to become his followers and eventually, keep him in

“Power”. It refers to his personal, singular characteristics that eventually gave him such acclaim. When thinking about “Power”, Arendt makes the claim that power is never the property of the individual, making us not to think in such terms when talking of the singular. Thus, when Edwin refers to as Lula’s power, he is talking about the collective that has been supporting him ever since his presidential tenure, and long past that (such as the Lula Livre Movement). However, when talking about strength, Arendt makes the claim that “The strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many, who often will combine for no other purpose than to ruin strength precisely because of its peculiar independence.” (Arendt, 1969). This is perhaps, the most accurate representation that I have ever encountered of Brazilian politics. When Edwin mentions that the opposition and hostility towards Lula, and that the fact the Right-Wing Political Parties are constantly trying to dismantle the Left-Wing government (I bring here the example of the right-wing party PSDB candidate Aécio Neves, which hours after losing the election of 2014, called for protests alleging election fraud on the Worker’s Party Part) comes from that exact quote of Arendt. The fact that Lula was from the poorest part of the country (Northeast), who did not graduate elementary school, and was himself part of the working class (when Edwin started talking about such characteristics, I instantly connected the dots within such Marxist approach with the crisis within class of the bourgeois and proletariat), could form his own political party with its own ideology, become one of the greatest presidents of the country, and even after falsely imprisoned, still exert such influence within Brazilian Politics, caused what Arendt says “It is the nature of a group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength” (Arendt, 1969).

At this part of the interview, it was clear that Edwin considered himself part of the Lula Livre movement, however, I was yet to know why. I wanted to know what prompted him to post

articles on social media, to participate in such group discussions, and to spread awareness about such movement, and be in defense of Lula. When talking about the current state of Brazilian politics, Edwin mentions that he had to eventually distance himself from people who had such hatred and hostility towards Lula, who would blindly believe in news that were clearly fabricated, and worst of all, who would support a candidate for presidency who had clear homophobic views, who made misogynistic comments on open media platforms, who was openly racist, who considered himself to be the only politician who was not corrupted (only to later have been involved in scandals that got him removed from the political party that put him in the president's seat in the first place, with allegations of corruption), and someone who was a federal deputy for 30 years with only three projects approved. Based on such assumptions, Edwin said it himself "I had to distance myself from such people" and before he stopped his sentence, I chipped in saying "Due to politics, right?". He said that it had nothing to do with politics at this point; it was past that, and it was now a question of morality and character. He said he could understand how someone would vote for someone whose views were so backwards (his words exactly), how someone could go out of their way to defend such views when there were millions of people dying of hunger throughout Brazil. It is common that when someone joins a social movement, their views on certain subjects change dramatically. When asked if his views had changed since he had joined the Lula Livre movement, he continued to say that the reason he joined, was because of his views, not the contrary. He had seen what the Lula administration had done for the less fortunate of the country and could not believe that the idea of fighting and advocating for human rights was a topic of discussion attributed to those with Left-Wing ideologies. Edwin became extremely passionate about this subject as it was close to his heart, and he had suffered from his political views, as he recalls an incident where people he

knew before joining the movement seemingly stopped talking to him in the manner the used to, once they found out about his views.

As the conversation went on about politics, identity, machismo, and the future of the country, I decided to wrap up the interview with something that has been interesting me during the past few weeks, which has been this insurgence of online activism. When asked on his opinion of online activism, Edwin seemed to struggle to formulate an answer due to his thinking that online activism, does not seem to him, real activism. He said himself “Do I think I am changing the world? Not one bit. I do not even consider myself an activist because of that. For me to become an activist, I need to be in the street with millions of people protesting.”. However, he considers his opinion to be constantly conflicting itself, as for one side he does not believe in the power of online activism, and for the other he also believes that we should not underestimate the power of online communication. He feels it is his duty to report on news that are not legitimate, rather than post the content himself. For this, I turn into the Bonilla and Rosa article on Digital protest in order to make sense of his actions. When discussing such differences between online and “real” activism, the authors take a position saying that “Many have disparaged hashtag activism as a poor substitute for ‘real’ activism, and, indeed, some suggest that the virality and ephemerality of social media can only ever produce fleeting ‘nanostories’ with little lasting impact” (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). The reason why people choose to eventually follow such strands of activism, as Bonilla and Rosa point out, to combat the way in which media realms portray them as something they are not, eventually falsifying information. This can instantly be linked with Edwin’s own ideology of choosing to use his platform as a mean to shed awareness by not simply posting, but for acting towards misrepresentation.

I have always admired Edwin's passion not only for politics, but towards his views. He has always been someone with strong, and yet fair views on various subject. When he said that he wanted to distance himself from people (who are close to me, ultimately leading him to distance himself from me, although we share the same views), is something I have always admired. He has helped to me to understand the nuances of Brazilian politics, which is something that as time progresses, gets infinitely more complex. We have grown to share very similar values within our lives, and this paper would not be possible without him. It is often difficult when going back to Brazil and seeing the misery that I once thought was simply normal and ordinary. The idea that I grew up with was the simplistic view of "It is the way it is". I had several questions as a child, and that was simply the answer I received every time, being from my Christian upbringing, or my family's value. I find it depressing that some look at that way, and simply accept it without having the slightest will to further their explanation. It is not a matter of politics at the end of the day (as Edwin points out); it is a matter of human decency. Solidarity for those who have suffered for long, given such oppression. As Edwin himself posed "Do I think Lula was innocent? Partially no. I do not believe he was involved in anything; however, I do believe he knew what was going on. He had to, as he was the goddamn president. However, what he did for lower class and minorities of Brazil, which was constitutionally expected of him, will always have my respect. I do not mind paying more taxes, knowing that such taxes will be turned into something for the less fortunate. It is my duty as a citizen."

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