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RELIGION AND MORAL CONSERVATISM IN BRAZILIAN POLITICS²

Abstract

Brazil has experienced a great deal of political instability and a strengthening of conservatism since the last presidential election and which, during the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, suffered one of its most critical moments. The objective of this communication is to analyse the important role played by religious actors during this process and to demonstrate how the political alliances established between Pentecostals and Charismatic Catholics in the National Congress has made possible a series of political initiatives aimed at dismantling the expansion of human rights and policies of the Workers Party governments. With an anti-Communist spirit and a conservative vision of sexual morality and gender relations, these political groups have in recent years approached the social movement Schools without Party (*Escola sem partido*) and today represent an enormous challenge to Brazilian democracy.

Keywords: religion, Brazil, politics, Charismatic Catholics, Evangelicals

Introduction

Since the 2014 presidential election Brazil has witnessed a period of great political instability and the strengthening of conservative social movements; one of the most critical moments was during the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. The impeachment petition was filed in the Chamber of Deputies by Pentecostal parliamentarian Eduardo Cunha, who at the time was president of the Chamber, and accepted on 2nd December 2015. The impeachment vote was marked by a series of religious demonstrations. I begin this article by mentioning the role of this parliamentarian within the context of President Dilma Rousseff's dismissal because it is an expression, not only of the growth of Pentecostals within the Brazilian population, but also of conservative religious activism in the public sphere of our country.

Data from the last three censuses carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Ge-

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2 I thank the Productivity in Research fellowship awarded by *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* for the project "Religion, Human Rights and Social movements".

ography and Statistics (BIGS) indicate changes in the religious composition of the Brazilian population, with increasing numbers of believers moving towards Evangelical groups. Whilst Catholic representation in the Brazilian population declined from 83.3% in 1991 to 73.8% in 2000 and further to 64.6% in 2010, Evangelicals have grown from 9% to 15.6% and 22.2% during the same period. Statistical indexes also reveal the Evangelical groups which grew most during these three decades were Pentecostal and which represent 13.3% of Brazilians at the last survey (2010)³.

The political expansion and strengthening of Pentecostal groups in Brazilian society is the result of a combination of both endogenous and exogenous factors in the Brazilian religious field. Amongst the endogenous factors we can cite not only the difficulties of the Catholic Church in recruiting enough cadres to improve the life of poor Christians, but also the emergence of Neo-Pentecostal churches (1970). These churches were partly influenced by North American Evangelicals and partly by Brazilian religious culture. 1) They adopted a Theology of Prosperity⁴; 2) they embraced Television Evangelicalism; 3) requirements in relation to uses and customs were more flexible 4) the form of worship changed, placing a value on the practice of exorcism and promises of healing and resolving economic problems; 5) they encouraged the engagement and participation of Evangelicals with party politics. The huge capacity of these Neo-Pentecostal churches to attract disadvantaged sections of the Brazilian population had a mimetic effect throughout the wider religious field as various religious groups adopted new forms action in the wider society⁵.

In the exogenous field, and more specifically the political, one can mention the impact of the social mobilisation during the last years of the military dictatorship, which was facilitated by the relative liberalisation of the regime (the return to a multi-party system, the re-establishment of the electoral calendar with the exception of the President of the Republic, diminishing repression against trade unions and popular social movements). This intense social mobilisation had important repercussions amongst Pentecostals who came to realise there was an opportunity to escape from social invisibility and demand access to the institutional public spheres which other emerging social groups were beginning to have. In this sense, there is an emergence of an internal agency pushing for

3 Recent research from *Data Folha* reveals “three in every ten (29%) Brazilians over 16 are Evangelical, divided between Evangelical Pentecostals 22% and 7% as non-Pentecostal, pertaining to churches such as Baptists, Presbyterian and Methodist amongst others”. See: <http://media.folha.uol.com.br/datafolha/2016/12/28/da39a3ee5e6b4b0d3255bfef95601890afd80709.pdf>.

4 This Theology promotes a shift from the millenarian expectation of salvation to a life of grace in the present, and favoured the insertion of Pentecostals in party politics, the publishing market and the restricted universe of telecommunications. See more: *Les Nouveaux Conquérants de la Foi: L'Église Universelle du Royaume de Dieu (Brésil)*, Corten A., Dozonj.P. and Oeo, A.P. (eds), Karthala, Paris, 2003.

5 Ari Pedro Oro, Un Pouvoir Politique, in: *Les Nouveaux Conquérants de la Foi: L'Église Universelle du Royaume de Dieu (Brésil)*, Corten A., Dozonj.P. and Oeo, A.P. (eds), Karthala, Paris, 2003, pp. 231-244; Maria das Dores Campos Machado, Evangelicals and Politics in Brazil: The Case of Rio de Janeiro, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 40, 2012, pp. 69-91.

recognition as a way out of the condition of being a politically and cultural subaltern minority questioning its own apoliticism. There is also a tendency to confront the more “advanced” social movements - Feminist, Black, Environmentalist and Gays – and with the world of political left, whose positions challenged the Pentecostal (self-) understanding of politics and social participation.⁶

One legislator who held the title of Pastor of the Evangelical Quadrangular Gospel Church (EQGC), told us during an interview that his and his brother’s entrance into political life was to police the persecution suffered by leaders in cities where they had tried to open new temples. Executing his seventh term in the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais, he reported both he and his brother were arrested, humiliated and accused of being charlatans in the 1970s, and this experience led the church to adopt political representation as a fundamental strategy of the church from the 1980s⁷. According to his words, having political candidates from within the church stand in elections was encouraged by a journalist who said to him: “You Evangelicals grew like a tree but forgot to strengthen the trunk. Elect a State and Federal Deputy, and a Councillor to represent the Evangelical world and church, because whoever doesn’t have representation suffers”.

The politicisation of the group would begin to be perceived in the Constituent Assembly of 1988 when Pentecostal politicians acted as “moral entrepreneurs”⁸ and sought to interfere with the legal code and prevent it from departing from Christian Morality. Pentecostal politicians weren’t alone and weren’t even the principal protagonists because also within that context, the Catholic Church had led the campaign in defence of the family and pressured politicians in general to vote against the proposals of the Feminist movement. In any case, the political performance of Pentecostals during the Constituent Assembly demonstrated the group’s political agenda essentially consisted of questions of a private and moral nature.

One of the most important points in the emergence of Pentecostalism as a public religion may have been the adoption of a corporate model of political representation with the standing of candidates from the Universal Kingdom of God Church (UKGC). This type of initiative increased the political force of the group and, consequentially, intensified the disputes within the Evangelical field, leading other churches to also dedicate themselves to the formation of political leadership which could defend the interests of their respective groups in the National Congress.⁹ In the recruitment process for political training courses, Pentecostal

6 M.D.C. Machado, Joaílido Burity, A ascensão política dos pentecostais no Brasil na avaliação de líderes religiosos, *Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2014, pp. 601-629.

7 This feeling favoured the development of a discourse of a discriminated minority persecuted by the Brazilian elite. See more: Joaílido Burity, Minoritization and Pluralization: what is ‘the People’ that Pentecostal Politicization is building?, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2016, pp. 104-115; M.D.C. Machado, Joaílido Burity, A ascensão política dos pentecostais no Brasil na avaliação de líderes religiosos...

8 Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders - Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1963.

9 M.C.D. Machado, *Política e Religião*, FGV, Rio de Janeiro, 2006; M.C.D. Machado, *Evangelicals and Politics in Brazil: The Case of Rio*

leaders have given priority to pastors and missionaries because they believe they are more committed to Christian morality and the demands and interests of the church.

It should be noted that Pentecostal interests in increasing political representations within the legislative power converged with the interests of party leaders to approach Pentecostal communities in search of votes for their non-religious candidates, as well as recruiting religious followers which would increase the electoral success of the party. This confluence of interests resulted in political actors who identified as Pentecostal (and there are many who have preserved ecclesiastical office) being found in different political parties from the 1980s onwards, although only a few politicians from this denominational group have joined leftist parties in recent decades¹⁰. Research also indicates¹¹ Pentecostals who have assumed legislative positions have demonstrated a weak commitment to party associations, passing through various during their political careers. This political characteristic, however, isn't exclusive to this group, and seems to be more linked to the political culture and party system of the country.

Some party associations – like the Social Christian Party (SCP, 1985), The Brazilian Republican Party (BRP, 2005) and the National Ecological Party (NEP, 2012) - were created, or are nowadays controlled by Pentecostal leaders. Although not all the representatives of these three associations are members of Pentecostal groups, there is a greater concentration of pastors, bishops and believers from the Universal Church in the second group (Presently of the 22 legislators from BRP, 12 are from UKGC), and of leaders associated with the Assembly of God in the first group (SCP – 7 of 9 federal deputies). The table below shows the evolution of political participation of politicians who identify as Evangelical in the Chamber of Deputies during the period 1986-2014.

de Janeiro, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 40, 2012, pp. 69-91.

- 10 There are 35 parties registered in the Supreme Electoral Court of Brazil (2017), however only 28 political associations have representatives in the Federal Chamber. Between 2011-2014 Evangelical legislators in the National Congress were affiliated to 14 different parties; already in the legislature from 2015-2018, politicians from this religious groups is divided between 19 parties. See: Vinicius Saragiotto Magalhães Valle, "Partidos Cristãos do Brasil recente: o caso do PRB e do PSC". Trabalho preparado para apresentação no V Seminário Discente da Pós-Graduação em Ciência Política da USP, de 4 a 8 de maio de 2015, p. 6.
- 11 S. Baptista, *Pentecostais e Neopentecostais na Política Brasileira*, AnnaBlume, São Paulo, 2009; M.C.D. Machado, Evangelicals and Politics in Brazil: The Case of Rio de Janeiro, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 40, 2012, pp. 69-91; M.D.C. Machado, Joanildo Burity, A ascensão política dos pentecostais no Brasil na avaliação de líderes religiosos, *Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2014, pp. 601-629.

Table 1. Evangelical representatives elected to Chamber of Deputies (1986-2010)

Election Date	Total Members	Evangelicals elected	Percentage
1986	487	33	6,78%
1990	503	22	4,37%
1994	513	31	6,04%
1998	513	53	10,33%
2002	513	65	12,67%
2006	513	42	8,19%
2010	513	68	13,26%
2014	513	83	16,18%

Sources: Baptista (2009); Campos (2010) and Vital and Lopes (2017)

The politicisation of Evangelical groups cannot be seen as something specifically Brazilian¹², however the country has been prominent amongst Latin-American societies in recent decades due to the increasing importance of Pentecostals in the political arena. In researching other countries in the region, Gooren developed five possible models of direct and indirect involvement of Protestant and Pentecostal leaders and their followers in politics in view of the potential risks for religious denominations.¹³ The first model, and at lowest risk, is centred around the Evangelical teaching of converting as many people as possible, which eventually would result in positive changes in politics and society. This is because during the conversion process and adherence to Evangelical groups, people would be orientated about their civic duties to vote in elections. The second model would be characterised by the limited mobilisation of believers around moral and ethical questions such as divorce, abortion and civil union amongst people of the same sex. The third would be marked by the mobilisation of believers around leaders of the church who embody Biblical principles and who stand as a moral example in campaigns against corruption in politics and in favour of religious freedom. The fourth model would be defined by the direct involvement of members of Protestant churches in the State machine. The fifth, and largest risk for the churches, would express the direct participation of religious leaders in political power.

In the case of Brazil, we can assert that although not all Pentecostal churches

12 See more: Paul Freston, *Protestant Political Parties: A Global Survey*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004; David Smilde, Contradiction without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Elections, *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2004, pp. 75-102; Hanna Stewart-Gambino, Evelyn Wilson, Latin American Pentecostals: Old Stereotypes and New Challenges, in: *Power, Politics and Pentecostals in Latin America*, E. L. Cleary and H. W. Stewart-Gambino (eds.), Westview, Boulder, 1997; Evguenia Fediakova, Evangelicals in Democratic Chile, 1990-2008: from 'resistance Identity' to 'Project Identity', *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 40, 2012, pp. 24-48; Miguel Ángel Mansilla, Luis Alberto Orrellana, Participation of Pentecostals Minorities in Chile, 1937-1989, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2016, pp. 104-115.

13 Henri Gooren, Pentecostal Conversion Careers, Generations Effects, and Political Involvement in Latin America, in: *New ways of being Pentecostal in Latin Americanm*, Martin Lindhardt (eds), Lexington Books, Lanham, 2016.

value the political participation of their members, there is a growing presence of religious leaders from this Christian group in public debate about both private life and the corruption which plagues the country. There is also a call from religious authorities for believers to engage in discussions about the sexual education of children and for participation in elections, requiring the candidates to adopt positions with Christian principles.

It can be seen that some faith groups – such as the Assembly of God Church (AOGC), Universal Kingdom of God Church (UKGC), The Grace of God Church (GOGC), The Evangelical Quadrangular Church (EQC) and Sarah, Our Land (SOL) etc., – could be seen as adopting the fifth model suggested by Gooren¹⁴, and consequentially assuming a higher risk of the possible future involvement of their leaders in corruption scandals which may reverberate throughout the denominations.

In recent memory, the involvement of bishops, pastors and followers from Pentecostal churches in the so called “Mensalão” political scandal, denounced in 2005, led to some groups such as the UKGC reducing the number of candidates from within the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the 2006 elections, but this concern with preserving the denomination appears to have been replaced in subsequent elections by the simple omission of ties to religious communities in electoral propaganda aimed at the wider public. That is to say, whilst on the inside of temples and amongst the faithful the religious trajectory of politicians-pastors was openly exploited, in the media campaign religious identity and the positions occupied in the church hierarchy wasn’t exploited as electable attributes by the majority UKGC candidates. Moreover, when challenged by opposition candidates, politicians from this denominational group adopted the discourse of having withdrawn from carrying out pastoral duties during the election campaign, or in occupying positions in the State machine. These strategies were employed both by Bishop Marcelo Crivella – former Senator, Minister of Fisheries and presently Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, and Pastor George Hilton – Federal Deputy and former Minister of Sport in the government of Dilma, both of whom are connected to the UKGC.

In brief, with a discourse claiming they constitute the second largest religious group in the country but nevertheless are discriminated against by the Brazilian political and economic elite, Pentecostals have managed to increase their representation in the National Congress in recent decades. However, if we remember in 2010 22% of Brazilians declared themselves to be Evangelical, we find today that this social group, like other minority identity groups (blacks, women etc.), they are underrepresented in the House¹⁵. In any case, with the creation of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (EPF) in the National Congress in 2003, the group has managed to mobilise and organise politicians in the defence of Chris-

14 Ibidem, p. 177.

15 M.D.C. Machado, Joaíldo Burity, A ascensão política dos pentecostais no Brasil na avaliação de líderes religiosos, *Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2014, pp. 601-629.

tian ideas in voting for political projects around the themes of stem cell research, abortion, civil union between members of the same sex and sexual education in schools. With the exception of politicians from the UKGC, who are more liberal about reproduction and vote according to the guidance of church leaders, the others tend to present a parliamentary behaviour aligned with the EPF¹⁶ and in the last fifteen years they have become a strong political pressure group within the executive branch.

Evangelical Conservative Activism in the 2010 Elections

One of the interesting consequences of the Evangelical attempt at strengthening throughout Brazilian civil society and politics was the shift of certain Pentecostal groups from opposing the Workers Party (WP) to being political allies of Lula and his co-religionists in the 2002 and 2006 elections. However, the initiatives of both Lula governments to meet the demands of Feminists to change punitive abortion legislation¹⁷, as well as LGBT proposals to criminalise homophobia and inserting the theme of sexual orientation in school curriculums provoked a realignment of Pentecostals which were gradually moving away from the WP government in opposition.

Amongst the measures taken by the executive branch which most displeased traditional Christians and had repercussions during the 2010 elections¹⁸, was, without a doubt, the launch of the National Plan of Human Rights 3 (NPHR3) in 2009 which incorporated various legal requests of the social movements cited above. I have already dealt with political impact of human rights in the Worker's Party governments in other works¹⁹, but here I would like to point out the fact that proposing revision of existing legislation in order to ensure women have access to health services and legal abortion, and advocating against discrimination based on sexual orientation, provoked much controversy amongst pastors, activists from social movements and those responsible for the elaboration of the program.

16 See more: Christina Vital da Cunha, Paulo Lopes, *Religião e Política: medos sociais, extremismo religioso e as eleições 2014*, Fundação Heinrich Böll, Rio de Janeiro, 2017; Christina Vital da Cunha, Paulo Lopes, *Religião e política: uma análise da atuação de parlamentares evangélicos sobre direitos das mulheres e de LGBTs no Brasil*, Fundação Heinrich Böll, Rio de Janeiro, 2012; M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostais, Sexualidade e Família no Congresso Nacional, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, No. 47, 2017, pp. 351-380; M. D.C. Machado, Christian Churches, reproduction and sexuality in Latin America, in: *History of Religions in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 547-558; M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostales y controversias de los derechos humanos en Brasil, in: *Sexo, Delitos y Pecados Intersecciones entre religión, género, sexualidad y el derecho en América Latina*, Vol. 1, 1 ed., Center for Latin American & Latino Studies American University, Washington, 2016, pp. 161-193.

17 Amongst the various initiatives we can mention the launch in 2004 of the *Brazil Without Homophobia* campaign: program to combat violence and discrimination against GLBT and the promotion of homosexual citizenship; the installation of three party commission to review abortion legislation in 2005; and the realisation of a public audience about abortion in 2007.

18 Eleição A.F. Pierucci, 2010: desmoralização eleitoral do moralismo religioso, *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, Vol. 89, 2011.

19 M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostales y controversias de los derechos humanos en Brasil...; M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostais, Sexualidade e Família no Congresso Nacional;

Due to strong pressure from churches, the original proposal was revised, but the changes weren't sufficient to eliminate the distrust of certain denominational groups towards the WP and its future candidate. Thus, in the first round of the 2014 presidential race, leaders from the Assembly of God Church (AOGC), the largest Pentecostal group in Brazil, were divided between the candidacies of Marina Silva from the Green Party (GP), Dilma Rousseff from the Workers Party (WP) and Jose Serra from the Brazilian Social Democrat Party (BSDP). Leaders from UKGC participated in the WP election campaign and fought hard battles with other Pentecostal peers making use of electronic media and the digital press to deconstruct the association of Dilma with the polemical themes of decriminalising abortion and civil union between members of the same sex.

It is important to registrar that Marina Silva, a member of the AOGC, whose personal beliefs are more traditional regarding abortion and homoaffective relationships, disputed the election for a political party which has historically held more liberal positions in relation to the themes. This duality created distrust with both the traditional religious leadership as well as the GP political base, and led to her adopting a strategy of transferring responsibility for these questions to the Brazilian population via a referendum. From this political position, the candidate who had built her political career in the WP and was a government minister in Lula's government would benefit from the clash between the Evangelical and the WP candidate during the first round of the election. In brief, the growth of Marina's candidacy amongst her religious brethren in the final stretch of the first round resulted more from attacks by Evangelical leaders against NHRP3 and the political positions of both the WP and Dilma Rousseff herself in relation to the theme of abortion, than the engagement of a number of pastors missionaries in her campaign.²⁰

Despite Marina's affiliation with Assembly of God Church, the pastors who effectively exploited religious imagery and the Christian moral discourse during the election campaign in an attempt at disqualifying the WP candidacy and attract votes from more traditional groups were sympathetic to the candidacy of Jose Serra. Supporting him since the beginning of the of his candidacy for BSDP was, for example, the president of the Brazilian General Convention of the Assemblies of God (BGCAG), pastor Jose Wellington Bezerra, who mobilised his group against WP and its candidate.

20 At the end of the first round, Marina was in third place having received 16.9 million votes (19%). In the second round she adopted a neutral position neither supporting Dilma Rousseff nor Jose Serra. <https://eleicoes.uol.com.br/2014/noticias/2014/10/05/mesmo-perdendo-marina-silva-ganhou-2-milhoes-de-votos-em-relacao-a-2010.htm>

Catholic and Pentecostal Alliances in the Fight against Sexual Reproductive Rights

The first months of Dilma's government, however, demonstrated conservative religious groups would increasingly develop joint political actions in the Brazilian National Congress in an attempt at barring proposals which expressed a secular sexual morality. The release of educational material by the Ministry of Education & Culture (MEC), including the theme of sexual diversity in schools during the first semester of 2011 opened the door to a series of clashes between the executive branch and religious politicians which would mark Dilma Rousseff's passage as president of the republic.²¹

At the beginning of March of the same year, the National Citizenship Movement (NCM) held a breakfast in the Chamber of Deputies in order to present the activities of the movement in defence of life, and to share with the federal deputies' initiatives and proposals for the 54th legislature. According to the organisers, twelve federal deputies participated in the event and pledged to "continue the fight against the legalisation of abortion". The next step was organising at the end of April, again in the Chamber of Deputies, the IV Brazilian Meeting of Governors and Legislators for Life (BMGLL), which was promoted by the Parliamentary Front for Life against Abortion (PFLA). The event, whose opening was attended by federal deputy Odair Cunha from WP in Minas Gerais and member of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal (CCR), announced not only the support of 205 parliamentarians, but also support from the Stork Network Program (SNP), a collective from the Ministry of Health. Considered by feminist groups as an initiative to reinforce the ideology of family and traditional gender representations, this program was launched only three months after Dilma's inauguration and demonstrated that reproductive politics continued to be clearly demarcated by a correlation of forces within the religious field and, by political alliances of the ecclesiastical structures with the State.

It should be noted, as the ideology of Human Rights has been strengthened in our society with the recognition of reproductive and sexual rights, religious institutions were forced to adapt their positions, forced into making use of new strategies and arguments from other discursive fields.²² In the strategic field, we can mention the organisation of large demonstrations in defence of the family and life and against abortion; the creation of NGOs, such as the Centre for Christian Psychologists (CCP), which presented proposals for intervening in the

21 M. D. C. Machado, Christian Churches, reproduction and sexuality in Latin America, in: *History of Religions in Latin America*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 547-558.

22 M. Natividade, Leandro Oliveira, *As novas Guerras Sexuais*, Garamond Universitária, Rio de Janeiro, 2013; Christina Vital da Cunha, Paulo Lopes, *Religião e política: uma análise da atuação de parlamentares evangélicos sobre direitos das mulheres e de LGBTs no Brasil*, Fundação Heinrich Böll, Rio de Janeiro, 2012; M. D. C. Machad, Pentecostales y controversias de los derechos humanos en Brasil, in: *Sexo, Delitos y Pecados Intersecciones entre religión, género, sexualidad y el derecho en América Latina*, 1st ed., Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, American University, Washington, 2016, pp. 161-193.

field of sexuality; the intense use of the Internet to combat legislative proposals of homosexuals and feminists; joint political actions with Catholics from the CCR to pressurise non-religious politicians without in voting on moral questions etc. We also observe a discursive reconfiguration with the adoption of biomedical, psychological and anthropological presuppositions and of the Human Rights regime itself.²³

In the specific case of Pentecostal legislators serving in the National Congress there has also been a successful effort in occupying key posts in internal working commissions which deal with questions related to the family and sexual minorities. The 2013 election of Pentecostal pastor Marco Feliciano to the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies (HRC) was a clear demonstration of this, because since re-democratisation the commission had been carrying out fundamental work towards extending citizenship to sexual minorities. The reaction of Christian groups to the political proposals of Dilma's government within the field sexual minorities rights, education and health grew significantly after the entrance of Assembly of God Church pastor as president of HRC and without any doubt, the initiative of the executive branch which was most attacked by religious actors in 2013 and 2014 was the National Education Plan (NEP).

Draft bill 8035/10 of the NEP for the period 2011-2020 was sent to the National Congress in 2010 and received more than three thousand amendments. I am interested here in the reactions to the incorporation of the terms *gender* and *sexual orientation* in the bill presented by the executive branch. This is because, amongst the various objectives of the plan, as stated in Article 2, were overcoming education inequality, emphasising an "emphasis should be placed on promoting racial equality, regional, gender and sexual orientation". This led to the mass mobilisation of Catholic and Evangelical politicians in the National Congress, as well as bishops, priests, and followers in Brazilian civil society against the vote on regional and municipal education plans. The bill 8025/10 was approved by Chamber of Deputies in 2012 but suffered modifications in the Senate, returning to the Chamber and voted on again in the special commission on 22/04/2014 and with reference to gender or sexual orientation. On 26/06/2016 the bill was finally sanctioned as a law by the president of the Republic with changes suggested by parliamentarians²⁴.

During the years the bill passed through the two Houses of the National Congress, a series of publicity events were held aimed at disseminating the discourse of "gender ideology" amongst politicians, and providing subsidies to legislative proposals which could prevent the adoption of gender perspectives in educational policy. On 30/10/2013, for example, Father Paulo Ricardo Azevedo (Cuiabá/

23 M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostais, Sexualidade e Família no Congresso Nacional, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, No. 47, 2017, pp. 351-380.

24 See: <http://pesquisa.in.gov.br/imprensa/jsp/visualiza/index.jsp?data=26/06/2014&jornal=1000&pagina=1&totalArquivos=8>, Last access in April 09, 2017.

RCC/Pro-life and Pro-family), invited by pastor Marco Feliciano, then president of HRC, argued it wasn't just bill 8035/10: *"there are innumerable bills which want to inoculate, in the Brazilian legal system, the word gender, like a virus...It is an ideology in which human beings are a modelling clay, totally flexible or versatile and it destroys the family"*.

Without taking into account the theoretical differences between *queer* thought and hegemonic gender within feminism, this type of discourse tends to draw an evolutionary line from Marx to Judith Butler (2004) passing through Simone de Beauvoir and Foucault. Amongst the adopted rhetorical strategies we find naturalist arguments which, although not specific to religious actors, when articulated with the moral doctrine of the Catholic Church and with an anti-communist spirit of the aforementioned priest, gain a differentiated nuance. The symbolic struggle will primarily be with these theses a) constructionist and b) social performance, which despite its distinctions, favours expanding autonomy of subjects in relation to existing institutions, especially religious, in society.

It is important to note that in this actual cultural clash priests and bishops do not go alone to the trenches. They call on young Catholic women who have graduated university and work in NGOs linked to the church or integrated in social movements such as the CCR and pro-life and pro-family etc. In April 2014, the aforementioned priest divulged on his website the news that "Women speak out against abortion in the Chamber of Deputies" at an event organised on 11th March, "as part of the commemorations for Women's Day". The name of the story was not fortuitous, the priest wanted to call attention to the fact there are women who don't identify with feminist politics and gender perspectives. It was the Family, Women and Gender seminar organised by the Inter-American Biopolitical Observatory (IABO), a Catholic NGO.

At the seminar, which was supported by the Social Christian Party (SCP) and is associated with Marco Feliciano, there were four Catholic women, presented with the titles of "Doctorates", who spoke about the "cultural roots of the culture of death"; "the elaboration and evolution of abortion statistics in the world" and "the historical and philosophical antecedences of the gender issue". At the event, which was organised with the intention of influencing the future vote of the NEP, the discursive opinions of foreign Catholic intellectuals about the ideological character of gender perspectives were mentioned and repeated innumerable times. Summarising, it can be said that, besides contesting the credibility of the intellectual opinions about gender relations, the speakers sought to compromise Feminism by associating feminists with the culture of death.

On 27th May 2014, with the justification of commemorating Family Day, a new seminar entitled Gender, Abortion and Society was organised by IABO and SCP in the Chamber of Deputies. Once again the theme of defence of life and the naturalistic interpretation of masculine and feminine gender appeared associated with contestations to the theoretical perspectives of feminists. Like at the pre-

vious event, these discursive opinions were presented as originating from within Marxist thought, which aims both to destroy the family and cause a revolution in society. I call attention to these events bringing together activists, priests and Catholic and Evangelical politicians, because the theses defended here would be replicated in various subsequent parliamentary initiatives aimed at combating the adoption of gender perspectives in public policy in Brazil. At the time of voting on the state and municipal education plans, similar seminars were held in the state spheres and in different cities throughout Brazil.

If the Catholic and Evangelical actors articulated themselves in the National Congress in order to remove the terms gender and sexual orientation from the NEP and review other initiatives of the executive power, in civil society priests, pastors and bishops used the pulpit, press and television media, as well as social networks to mobilise the followers against the WP proposals to change Brazilian education. Religious groups also financed the production of material (booklets, articles, newspaper clippings dealing with theme) which was posted on Christian sites and/or distributed throughout Brazilian municipalities with the aim of popularising the discourse of “gender ideology”. The booklet “Have you already heard of Gender Ideology?” with the subtitle “Get to know this ideology and understand the danger you and your children face!” had the following appeal:

“In all of the State legislative assemblies and municipal councils, state deputies and councillors will have to vote on this plan. Because of this you need to appear before the deputies and councillors demanding they do not place the term gender and sexual orientation in any article or paragraph of the law, and not even in the objectives of state or municipal education plans. Otherwise, all schools, whether public or private, would have to adopt the gender ideology”²⁵.

The 2014 elections, in which Dilma would face competition from ten other candidates, took place within the context of mass mobilisations of conservative religious groups. I don’t want to dwell on the electoral process in question, however it is important to mention that it wasn’t marked only by greater political participation of religious candidates in relation to previous elections (40% more pastors and 15% more fathers), but also by the presence of a Pastor in the actual dispute for the presidency.²⁶ It was Pastor Everaldo Dias, a religious leader from the largest Pentecostal church, Assembly of God, who represented the SCP, which broke ties with the WP government in virtue of its initiatives in favour of sexual minorities.

Recalling that after the death of Eduardo Campos, and with the participation of Marina Silva (GP), who is also from the Assembly of God, Dilma would face much greater difficulties in the 2010 election to gain the support of the Evangeli-

25 See: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/padrepauloricardo-files/uploads/uieqgb3e61nagba20sna/CartilhaldeologiaGenero.pdf>, Last access in July 15, 2017.

26 Christina Vital da Cunha, Paulo Lopes, *Religião e Política: medos sociais, extremismo religioso e as eleições 2014*, Fundação Heinrich Böll, Rio de Janeiro, 2017.

cal leadership which was divided amongst various candidates in the first round of voting. At the end of the first round, the two religious candidates were in third and fifth place: Marina Silva with 21% of the vote and pastor Everaldo with 0.75%. In the second round of voting, like the vast majority of Evangelical leaders, these two candidates would adhere to the campaign of Brazilian Social Democratic Party (BSDP): Aécio Neves had received 33.55% of the votes in the first round.

At the end of the election, Aécio finished in second place with 48.63% of the vote and Dilma, although the winner had won less of the vote than in 2010: 51.64% in comparison to 56.05% respectively. The election result certainly wasn't the outcome of only conservative Christians in Brazilian society. I acknowledge the impact corruption cases involving politicians from the Workers Party (WP) in the election in question, as well as the importance of economic factors and the emergence of the Free Brazil and Come to the Streets social movements, which in 2013 mobilised sections of civil society which were discontent with government policy, but believed conservative Pentecostal and Catholic activism contributed to this fall in the number of votes between the two elections. After victory at the polls, Dilma would see opposition to her government increase in temples, the streets, the media and the National Congress.

Political Strengthening of Pentecostals in the Chamber of Deputies during the 55th Legislature

The 2014 election, although not resulting in a significant gain for Evangelicals in the Brazilian National Congress, eventually created a favourable correlation for the most conservative Christian groups²⁷. The candidacy of Eduardo Cunha of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party/RJ (BDMP) for the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies was met by opposition from WP and his election resulted in alliances involving legislators from agribusiness, the arms industry, Evangelical churches and the Charismatic Catholic movements and other groups opposed to Dilma's government. As soon as he assumed the presidency of the House, Cunha tried to reopen a series of legislative proposals from the previous legislature which collided with the demands of the Feminist and LGBT movements. Amongst the reopened bills we find four in opposition to abortion and two regarding heterosexuals. Moreover, the Pentecostal politician instigated a special commission to discuss the Reform of the Family Statute and nominated political allies to direct the process and expedite the examination of the bill 6.583/13 presented to the House by pastor Anderson Freire, who created the Statute of the Family. The rapporteur of this bill in the special commission was Evandro Gucci, a catholic with links to the Charismatic Reformation.

Strengthened by the presences of "brothers of faith" in the presidency of

27 M. Tadvald, "A reinvenção do Conservadorismo: os evangélicos e as eleições Federais de 2014", *Debates do NER*, Porto Alegre, Ano 16, No. 27, 2015, pp. 259-288.

the House and by the fabricated political alliances, Evangelical politicians were extremely active in the first six months of the new legislature. In June 2015 there were two public hearings in the Chamber of Deputies expressing the opinion of the Evangelical block in the House. The first on 24th June 2015 in the Human Rights Commission which, according to the justification presented by Pr. Marco Feliciano (SCP/SP), should examine discrimination against “ex-homosexuals”. The second, which took place on 25th June in the Special Commission for the Statute of the Family, was attended by Pastor Silas Malafaia and Toni Reis, president for several years of the Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Travesties and Transsexuals (BALGBTT), founded in Curitiba in 1995.

Follow up to the two hearings revealed a strong connection between Catholic and Evangelical groups in relation to the ideologies of the LGBT movement, and demonstrated religious actors were revising their discourse and incorporating arguments and conceptions from different systems of knowledge, such as biomedicine, psychology, anthropology and their own ideological interpretation of Human Rights. In short, there was a partial appropriation by Pentecostal politicians of Social Constructionist arguments in order to explain alternative sexualities to the hegemonic standards of Christian ideology, as well as presenting groups of “ex-gays” in terms of a social minority demanding their right to be recognised by society. The *right* in question would be to receive psychological counselling and to “abandon” homosexuality. There was also concern amongst the two Christian groups to make sure the Supreme Court’s decision to recognise civil union between people of the same sex (2011) didn’t alter existing legislation in the field of the family. That is, the conception of pluralities of family, defended by progressive social movements and sections of society, served as the basis for the Statute of the Family.²⁸

On 24th November 2015 the Special Commission created to examine the Statute of the Family (composed of 13 Evangelicals, four Catholics and five politicians who didn’t use religious identity as a political attribute) met to examine and vote on the report, which was prepared by a Catholic deputy, about bill 6583/2013. The bill, besides defining the family as a union between a man and women or the community formed by any of their relatives or descendants; outlines guidelines for the role of the State; establishes the obligatory teaching of “Family Education” in primary school curriculums and the commemoration of National Family Day in schools; family councils, “permanent autonomous bodies”, “in charge of dealing with public policy towards guaranteeing the exercise of the rights of the family entity”²⁹.

Despite remarks by some deputies about the fact the proposed text associ-

28 M.D.C. Machado, Pentecostais, Sexualidade e Família no Congresso Nacional, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, No. 47, 2017, pp. 351-380.

29 Paulo Pimenta, “Nota sobre o Estatuto da Família”, Available at: <http://paulopimenta.com.br/imprensa/noticias/nota-sobre-o-estatuto-da-familia/acesso-em-13/10/2015>;

ated the definition of the family with human reproduction and excluded familial arrangements based on affection; the report was approved with seventeen votes in favour and five against. However, on 26th October two deputies, Erika Kokay (WP Federal District) and Jean Wyllys (Socialist Liberty Party/RJ – SOLP) made two motions to have the text put to the vote in the Chamber of Deputies before passing to another legislative body. Until the two appeals could be evaluated – the first had the signatures of 120 legislators and the second 89 – the passing of the bill would be suspended and if the text were rejected, it would be sent to be analysed by the Senate.

Conservatives political initiatives to combat the incorporation of gender perspectives in public policy went much farther than the Statute of the Family. Between May 2015 and June 2016, various bills were presented to the Chamber of Deputies to alter legislation which had been approved during the previous WP governments. Eros Biondin, a Catholic politician from the Charismatic Renovation, proposed amending the 5th and 6th articles of Law 11.340, (7th August 2006), which created mechanisms to restrain domestic violence against women and substituted the term gender for sex. Pastor Marco Feliciano, the author of the law (3235/Oct 2015), adding an article (234-A) to law 8069, (13th July 1990) which “deals with the Statute of Children and Adolescents and provides other measures” with the objective of criminalising behaviour which induces gender ideology.

In the other spheres of Brazilian legislative power, similar initiatives have been adopted. For example, in 2014 Rio de Janeiro state deputy Flavio Bolsonaro (Catholic member of SCP) asked the founder of the Schools without Parties (SWP) social movement, Miguel Nagib, to draft a bill based on the principles of the movement. As stated on its website, the SWP fights, amongst other things: “for political and ideological decontamination and de-monopolisation of schools”, “respect for the intellectual and moral integrity of students”; and “the right for parents to provide a moral education to their children according to their own convictions”³⁰. It was this last objective which allowed for the connection between conservative and/or religious political actors. The mentor of the movement not only drafted a bill for state legislative but also adapted the content to be presented in municipal spheres and placed the minutes on the Internet. It was then draft bill PL 2974/2014, presented at the Rio de Janeiro State Assembly (Alerj). Soon after, the brother of the said deputy, Councillor Carlos Bolsonaro presented draft bill PL 867/2014, to the Municipal Chamber of the state capital.

In December 2015, after a series of disagreements with the central Government, Eduardo Cunha³¹ accepted the opposition’s request to open impeachment proceedings against the WP President. On 17th April 2016 he led the vote which

30 See: <http://www.escolasempartido.org/objetivos>, Last access in September 10th, 2017.

31 This decision has been considered as a reaction against the serious charges of corruption involving this Congressman. See: Fernando Limongi, *O Passaporte de Cunha e o Impeachment*, *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, Vol. 103, 2015, pp. 99-112.

approved, by 367 votes to 137, the pro-impeachment report and authorised the Senate to judge Dilma Rousseff. A few days later, however, the Deputy would have his own mandate suspended and would be removed from the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies by the Supreme Court because of the accusations of public money appropriation and obstruction of justice. On 12th December 2016 Cunha would finally be dismissed from the Chamber by his peers by a vote of 450 in favour and 10 against with 9 abstentions.

In any case, it should be clarified that despite Pentecostals having lost control over the final definition of the agenda and discussion in the Chamber of Deputies with the removal of Cunha and his subsequent political annulment, these religious actors managed to open space in the government of Michel Temer. According to the Press, “the first official act of Michel Temer as interim President was to receive members from the Evangelical block which greeted and prayed for him”.³² He also appointed two Pentecostals as part of his government: Marcos Pereira, a bishop with UKCG³³ and president of the Brazilian Republican Party (BRP) was appointed Minister of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade (DIFT); Ronaldo Nogueira, a pastor from the Assembly of God, was appointed Minister of Work (MW). After transforming the President of the Republic’s Secretariat for Women’s Affairs into an organ of the Ministry of Justice, Temer also nominated ex-Deputy and Evangelica Fatima Pelaes (BDMP/AL) to direct it. Recently the media reported the secretary has been holding Evangelical services at the headquarters of the organ and “embarrassing professionals” who work there.

Final Considerations

In ending this article, I think it is important to articulate the growth of Brazilian Pentecostal activism in relation to both what has been happening in the Catholic universe and internationally. It’s impossible to ignore the fact the conservative revisions of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XV in the politics of the Catholic church favour the most traditionalistic sections of the institution, and allowed for the alliances of these groups with Pentecostals in Brazilian society, in order to prevent changes to legislation relating to the family, abortion, and sexual education in schools. Likewise, it is possible to argue that the discursive opinions presenting gender perspectives an ideology harmful to society began to be developed in the United State at the end of the 1990s by Catholic intellectuals disturbed by the performance of Feminist movements at the Beijing Conference.³⁴ The reactive politicisation of Catholics has occurred in different coun-

32 See: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/04/25/politica/1461616678_820806.html, Last access in March 13th 2017.

33 See: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2014/07/31/sociedad/1406831912_261622.html, Last access in March 13th 2017.

34 François Girard, *Negociando derechos sexuales y orientación sexual en la ONU*, in: *Políticas sobre Sexualidad: Reportes desde las líneas del frente*, Richard Parker, Rosalind Petchesky, Robert Sember (eds.), México, 2008, pp. 347-398. Available at: <http://www.sxpoltics.org/frontlines/espanol/book/index.php>, Last access in July 15th 2017.

tries (Argentina, France, Mexico, Peru, and USA) and has been fomented by the Holy See which attempts to circumvent the weakening of Christian principles in contemporary times by interfering in the legal systems of nations.

The growth of the Charismatic Catholic Renovation movement would have facilitated this reaction and in the case of Brazil, it would pave the way for alliances with Pentecostals, rightly seen as the main competitors of the Catholic Church in recruiting followers. What stands out in Brazilian conservative religious activism is the presence of various Pentecostal pastors and bishops in the legislative power and the alliance of these political actors with charismatic Catholic politicians to impede the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights. In any case, the Evangelical block in the Chamber of Deputies presently makes up only 16% of legislators, and if they demonstrated a great capacity for working with other groups in 2015 and 2016, imposing a conservative political agenda on the House, this was possible thanks to the support of other interest groups which were present.

It should also be noted, the moral agenda worked out here is, in the case of Pentecostals, in line with the Neoliberal project, and more specifically the vision of a minimal State, but also with the economic interests of certain denominational groups. That is, the political alliances established with representatives of agribusiness, the arms industry and the political elite of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) in overthrowing the WP government and ousting President Dilma Rousseff were made possible because they involved dimensions beyond religious morality. The anti-Communist spirit of many Pentecostal leaders also favoured approaching fundamentalist Catholics, and with social movements such as Schools Without Parties (SWP) which resulted in measures such as the removal of the theme of sexual orientation and gender studies from the school curricular to be implemented by the Ministry of Education of Temer's government.

In order not to close this article in an overly pessimistic tone, I should point out just as there is no univocal position of Catholics regarding the Human Rights policies of the WP governments, heterogeneous interpretations of rights and citizenship feed the fissures amongst traditionally pluralistic Evangelicals. Initiatives such as organising seminars in churches to debate human rights and the participation of the social movement Jesus Cures Homophobia at the 2015 Gay Pride parade show the clashes within these groups. These Catholic and Evangelical actors aligned with the demands of Feminism and of the LGBT community can be strengthened in the coming years, and it is up to social movements and progressive academics to give visibility to these dissonant voices.

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Мариа дас Дорес Кампос Мањадо

РЕЛИГИЈА И МОРАЛНИ КОНЗЕРВАТИВИЗАМ У БРАЗИЛСКОЈ ПОЛИТИЦИ

Сажетак

Бразил је искусио велика искушења услед политичке нестабилности и јачања конзервативизма од последњих председничких избора, док за време повлачења председнице Дилме Русеф прошао кроз веома критичне моменте. Циљ овог рада јесте анализа важне улоге верских актера у овом процесу и указивање на то како је политички савез успостављен између пентекосталаца и харизматских римокатолика у Националном Конгресу учинио могућим серију политичких иницијатива са циљем да се спречи развијање људских права и политика владе Радничке партије. Са својим антикомунистичким духом и конзервативном визијом сексуалне моралности и односа између полова, ове политичке групе су се у последње време приближиле друштвеном покрету Школа без партије (*Escola sem partido*) и данас представљају огроман изазов за бразилску демократију.

Кључне речи: религија, Бразил, политика, харизматски католици, евангелици

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