

Rhetoric of Loss in the 2018 Brazilian Presidential Elections: Religion, Social Fears and Tradition in Focus

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In this paper we reflect on the production of two political strategies that we name Rhetoric of Loss and Allies of Evangelicals. Our focus fell on their mobilization during the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections, in particular, by then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro. We seek to explore the convergence between religious and secular narratives and interests in these processes given that games of concealing and revealing the religious have played out markedly in Brazilian politics over the last two decades. The thoughts we develop here are the fruit of a collective and inter-institutional work of monitoring the 2018 elections in Brazil. In this election, religious stances and perspectives were presented and defended in the light of narratives that emphasized tradition and security, producing hope about a rescue of authority, lifestyles, and social values that are under threat today.

Keywords: rhetoric of loss, religion, evangelicals, elections 2018 Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro

INTRODUCTION

[There are] pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. She has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line. Which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.

Mary Douglas, 1966.

In a context of post-structuralist production and in which the dimension of agency overlaps with that of representation as a means of thinking about different social dynamics, I take license to begin these reflections with Mary Douglas, an anthropologist whose contribution was fundamental to the development of notions such as separation, risk, pollution, danger, order, purity, and morality in the Social Sciences. In particular, Purity and Danger will be mobilized here as an analytical tool of a political context in which the religious element (actors and narratives) emerges as strategies to achieve and maintain political power.

More specifically, since the 2010 elections in Brazil the idea of an observable “disorder” in the form of moral dangers has been gaining strength and in the 2018 elections these feelings (of disorder and danger) have assumed centrality in the narrative of a good part of the victors in those elections.

Thus, in this article I aim to reflect on the production of two political strategies, namely, the Rhetoric of Loss and the Allies of Evangelicals. Our focus fell on the mobilization of these strategies during the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections, but we continue to follow the situated use of these strategies during the administration of President-elect Jair Bolsonaro. Our attention is drawn, in the arrangements that sustain such narratives, to the convergences between religious and secular interests in a kind of game of concealment and revelation of the religious common for at least two decades in Brazil, conforming processes identified as the instrumentalization of religion and national politics (Oro, Mariano 2010).

The reflections we develop here are the result of collective and inter-institutional work following the 2018 elections in Brazil¹. In this election, Christian stances and perspectives were presented and defended in the light of narratives that emphasized tradition and security, producing hope about a rescue of authority, lifestyles, and social values that would be under threat in modernity. The strategic political union of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States and Latin America is remarkable. However, because of the continued growth of Pentecostalism in the world and the visibility its leaders seek in the mainstream media and social networks, this is the segment that receives the most attention from academia and the press in its conservative political actions. According to Mariano and Gerardi (2019), citing Mark Shibley (1998), Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism are “related” on the theological and cultural levels and were formed in reaction to Protestant theological liberalism in the late 19th century. Although the weight of this growth manifests itself in cultural terms with reverberations in different spheres of social life, it is worth pointing out that the efficacy of the strategies that I will present in this article are due to it and also to a context of growing violence in the countryside and in the cities², of increasing unemployment³, of innumerable changes in customs in Brazil and in the world. In my analysis, I will privilege the religious dimension, aware, as I have said, that a multiplicity of factors influenced the success of the strategies followed in the research.

In the first section of this article I will present a brief picture of the growing opposition of evangelical leaders to public policies and directives of the federal government in the nearly 15 years leading up to the 2018 elections. In the next section, I emphasize the 2014 and 2018 elections with a view to reflect on public sentiments experienced in the period and their relationship to the emergence of a Rhetoric of Loss. In the last section I highlight a specific composition between Catholics and Evangelicals with a view not only to electoral victory, but the affirmation of a majority block in religious terms with social and political expressions to be considered.

THE DISSATISFACTION OF EVANGELICAL LEADERS WITH THE LEFT IN BRAZIL

Since the presidential elections of 2006 we have been able to identify significant tension between religious leaders linked to powerful evangelical denominations and the federal government. The tensions have several empirical motivations from which I would highlight: the Federal Policy investigation that resulted in the indictment and imprisonment of Pentecostal bishops and pastors in Operation Leech (Operação Sanguessuga)⁴, the government support for PLC 122/2006 that made discrimination or prejudice of gender, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity a crime⁵, the denominational disputes for power in the media⁶, the changes in the Civil Code (Mariano 2007), among other situations and public policies resulting from leftist administrations between 2002 and 2015.

Parallel to the chasm that was being created between the federal government and the left-wing parties in relation to evangelical media leaders in increasing proportion, more conservative and organized sectors of the Catholic Church protested against the PNDH3 - National Human Rights Plan⁷, the result of a public consultation unparalleled in the history of Brazil and that included the provision of guaranteed rights for organized minorities, among them women, gays, lesbians, and transgender people. The proximity between Catholics and Evangelicals around specific agendas in the National Congress has been solidifying since then (Machado 2012; Vital da Cunha and Lopes, 2012; Mariz 2017 among others) resulting in a Christian alliance that we will analyze later in this article.

In the presidential elections of 2010, part of the evangelical leaderships linked to denominations of great projection supported the candidacy of José Serra (PSDB - Brazilian Social Democracy Party). Pastor

Everaldo, federal deputy for PSC-RJ (Christian Social Party), supporter of then-candidate Dilma Rousseff, in an interview granted to the research (Vital da Cunha, Lopes and Lui 2017), made clear his dissatisfaction and that of other evangelical leaders with the leftist administrations, especially after 2010. He said they felt “betrayed” by the government citing as examples the case of the production of the Ministry of Education’s didactic material to combat homophobia in schools that at one time served as an apology to homosexuality and the early eroticization of children, as disseminated in numerous posts and materials producing disinformation, dissemination of fake news and moral panics⁸, and the making of the National Plan for Social Participation - PNPS that, according to Everaldo, in an interview, had the intention of placing unisex bathrooms in schools across the country (Vital da Cunha and Lopes 2012; Vital da Cunha, Lopes, and Lui 2017).

The suspension of the aforementioned Ministry of Education teaching material, known in the mainstream media as the “gay kit”, as well as the obstruction of the passage of the bill criminalizing homophobia in the Federal Chamber, the election of Marco Feliciano to the presidency of the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies in 2013, among others, were counted by evangelical leaders as signs of the growth of the political capital of this group in Brazil. The launch of an evangelical candidacy in the 2014 presidential elections was emblematic of this perception, as well as of the undeniable ambition of leaders of the PSC that brought together several politicians linked to the Evangelical Assembly of God Church in direct competition with the PRB (Brazilian Republican Party, now Republicanos [Republicans]), a party linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Vital da Cunha, Lopes and Lui 2017). These elections were very close, taking place in a significantly polarized climate between PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) and PT (Workers’ Party), although this was the election until then that had the largest number of candidates for the presidency of the Republic (three female candidates and seven male candidates) in an also record number of parties in the dispute (32 parties). Conflicts and opposition were consolidated. Despite the fact that we understand that there are many more possible compositions in social life than the binary frameworks allow us to see, a basic perspective of anthropology, the binarisms were being activated with repercussions to be understood in the course of the debate.

Society came out of the elections even more divided: Dilma Rousseff (PT) won with only a 3% difference over her opponent, Aécio Neves (PSDB). Dissatisfaction and fear were revealed in the higher percentage of null, white and abstention votes - after all, there were almost 28%. In the National Congress, political fragmentation increased with the election of representatives from 28 parties, six more than in 2010. The “evangelical vote”, a disputed target on the political scene since at least the election of Fernando Collor de Melo, was largely concentrated around the candidate Aécio Neves (PSDB). In these elections, the categories of religion and tradition were called upon to explain positions and to pacify tempers, although, in many cases, they seemed to inflame them even more. The defense of the family by Evangelical and Catholic leaders was publicly based on “tradition”, for example. With this they sought to counter the accusations that they were talking about religion or as religionists, violating secularism. They sought grounding in an ethic and aesthetic of the traditional family, of traditional Brazilian values (Carranza and Vital da Cunha 2018).

In the broth of antipathies, attitudes and hatreds that exploded in 2013, and were amplified after the 2014 presidential elections, the rejection of religion grew in various social segments being identified as an evil to be combated. The public antidote presented by leftist politicians, social movements, and intellectual and artistic elites would be, to a large extent, the defense of the secularity of the State⁹.

In 2016, the municipal elections took place in a period immediately after one of the biggest political dramas of Brazil’s newly democratic period: the impeachment of then-president Dilma Rousseff (PT). The opposition between right and left was accentuated in society and the electoral use of this ideological sharpening was analyzed by different social scientists (Mariano 2019; Oro and Carvalho 2017; Almeida and Toniol 2018; ROMERO, MANSILLA, LOZANO, TONIOL, BURITY, TORRE, 2019; Pinheiro-Machado 2018; among others). In Rio de Janeiro, the winner was the then Senator of the Republic, Marcelo Crivella, nephew of Edir Macedo and bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, who, in that election, unlike what he undertook in his campaign for reelection to the mayoralty in 2020, sought to

conceal his religious ties in different situations, such as, for example, in debates and free electoral time (Vital da Cunha, Lopes and Lui 2017, Almeida and Reis 2017, Marques 2018).

2018 ELECTIONS AND THE RHETORIC OF LOSS: PURITY, DANGERS, PERFORMANCES

In 2018 the climate of the elections was of accentuation of feelings of threat, and danger. Religion, which in the previous presidential dispute was presented more as a national tradition, reinforcing a Brazilian Christian identity, now occupies the center of the dispute with candidates clearly announcing their religious identities and moral ties to these communities as a means to differentiate themselves among the other competitors for the national executive, which also occurred in the states, and to communicate with their communities. It was an election of records, as we had 30.8% white votes, null votes, and abstentions nationwide; 13 candidates running for president of the Republic, many in coalitions, in a total of 34 parties; 8,207 candidacies for federal deputy. Also, in 2018, 79% of Brazilians wanted a president who believed in God. Of the national total, 30% wanted the president to be of their same religion¹⁰. The public feelings of astonishment and fear, so present in the 2014 presidential election¹¹, did not cool down in 2018. On the contrary, they remained, gaining many contours in a sense of perceived danger experienced on at least four planes: physical, property, moral, and economic. The sense of this danger was exploited and buffeted by most of the candidates for the national and state executive and legislative branches in political performances that won enough minds and hearts for the election of several of the actors who mobilized it (Vital da Cunha and Evangelista, 2019).

The danger that composed the narratives of most of the victorious candidates was located in the present and in the projection of a future in which ongoing changes would gain strength amplifying among a significant number of the population feelings of disorder, insecurity, impurity, in the terms of Douglas (2012). Reactions to diversity and pluralism, to “mixtures” that challenged the prevailing social order emerged in the form of moral panics in a context of high modernity amplifying demands for security and the strengthening of identities (Mariano 2016; Magali 2020). In this social and political environment, it was possible to observe, then, demands for the ratification of roles, for the binary opposition between genders (Correa and Kalil 2020), social positions¹², for the explicitness of what is allowed and what is forbidden, what can and cannot be mixed, to be equivalent, for clear definitions of what is or is not pure (Douglas 2012) based on sacred scriptures and tradition.

We can think of this historical context as “cold times of history” identified by Durkheim as those in which social transformations gain strength and legitimacy, old ideals and divinities would be under the threat of fading away or losing centrality in social life. These cold periods of change are seen by this social science classic as existentially and morally disturbing for individuals. Charles W. Mills, in the same vein, decades later, concludes that:

“When people cherish certain values and feel no threat to them, they experience well-being. When they cherish them but feel they are threatened they experience a crisis - either as a personal problem or a public issue. And if all their values are at stake, they experience the full threat of panic” (Mills 1969, p.17-18).

In this context, the author calls for the sociological imagination to serve the purpose of producing ways of understanding the ongoing transformations in order to placate such feelings of fear, threat and apathy that would weaken interpersonal and interinstitutional trust, compromising collective life.

This shared sense of threat on so many levels favors demands for a regression, for a return to the past¹³. In supralocal terms, the 2016 US presidential elections showed the surgical use that the campaign of then-candidate for the presidency of the Republic, Donald Trump, made of a narrative that sought in the past the positive referential for future actions expressed in the well-known slogan Make America Great Again. Also in the sense of revisiting the past with a view to the future, the so-called Convivialist Manifesto was born in the heart of Western Europe. It includes hundreds of intellectuals in the elaboration of proposals for a sustainable life with a sensitive defense of the recovery of ways of life and relationships with nature from

a more or less recent past in human history. Although it is not possible to establish an equivalence between the two dynamics, I draw attention to the fact that the refusal of the present and the proposals for the future from a diverse number of actors ideologically more in tune with right-wing or left-wing perspectives locate in the past a wealth of possibilities for improving the lives of the populations. Although their tactics and proposals for the future are different, in both cases the past is a source of inspiration.

In the 2018 elections in Brazil the priority agendas of the victors gravitated between moral agenda (with emphasis on issues involving “gender ideology”, defense of the nuclear family called “traditional family”, as we have already highlighted), public security (in the form of the “fight against violence” and “maintenance of order”) and fight against corruption (with a strong moral stamp of cleaning up/renewing politics) (Vital da Cunha and Evangelista 2019). In the candidacies in general, but in the evangelical and Catholic religious ones in particular, the narrative was that the recovery of values, a return to the past would serve as the basis for restoring social life. The prefix “re” was very common in the campaign material and speeches of these victorious candidates. It was even present in the inaugural speech of President-elect Jair Messias Bolsonaro, on January 1, 2019, in which he stated that his mission was to “restore and re-erect our homeland, definitively freeing it from the yoke of corruption, criminality, economic irresponsibility, and ideological submission¹⁴”. There was a clear reference to something that had been lost and needed to be recovered. The (alleged) losses on the level of customs and ideology were the ones that were mainly present in the narratives of Christian candidacies. A rhetoric of loss was announced. This, as we began its formulation in the book *Religion and Politics: social fears, religious extremism and the 2014 elections*, can be considered as a discursive tactic articulated by different social and political leaderships (among them, religious) based on an imperative: the return of order, predictability, security, unity, authority. It is a discourse that opposes the social changes that have been socially experienced in the world since the 1990s and, in Brazil, especially since the mid-2000s. The moral and even ontological insecurity produced by changes in paradigms about the body and sexuality, added to the increase of armed violence in the countryside and in the city and produced in a significant contingent of the population a desire to return to a status quo ante in which they did not feel so many physical, moral and property threats. The context of its emergence would be that of the strengthening of the recognition of diversity in the political sphere (Novaes 2014) and, on the other hand, a growing visibility (and legitimacy) of actors and discourses identified as conservative in the sense of customs, of the morality that regulates the notions of normality shared at each moment in societies (Domingues, 2019; Almeida 2019; Reis 2019; Starling 2019; Boulos 2016; Demier 2016).

The rhetoric of loss is a narrative founded, therefore, on a moral insecurity in the face of empirically identified social changes that seek recognition. In the face of these changes that aim to establish another normativity or to deconstruct patterns of normality that denied legitimacy to various groups and lifestyles, the rhetoric of loss proposes the “rescue” of a sense of security (alleged or not) that is socially shared. The defense of a family model and a pattern in gender relations are central examples of this narrative. According to interviews we conducted with parliamentarians in the National Congress since 2007, evangelicals, more than any others, identified in the preservation of the family unit the solution to innumerable social problems: from the increase of the economy with a discipline oriented to success from early childhood to the containment of drug use and increase of self-confidence¹⁵. So, in short, the defense of the family became a fundamental discursive resource that challenged those who dared to denounce it¹⁶. The rhetorical montage made it seem that those who stood in its way were against the family. No. What was being confronted there were different perspectives: one that claimed that only one type of family was legitimate (nuclear, heterosexual) and another that defended the valorization of this and other types of family, as we have seen in the Family Statute¹⁷. It was the (fictitious) unity based on a normativity anchored (supposedly) in nature and legality against a plural perspective that aimed at the legal and moral guarantee of several family forms. Christian religious people, and also those who did not have in religious institutions and discourses their basis, strengthened and availed themselves of this melancholy.

Evidently, in a dialectical movement, these social actors simultaneously identify, amplify and forge this moral insecurity that can be characterized here by a doubt, discomfort, fear and embarrassment about how to place themselves before the diversity of sexual and gender identities and, of course, before all the

situations in which these identities emerge: at home, in school spaces, at work, in social leisure interactions, etc. Thus, the rhetoric of loss is a narrative based on the identification of a public sentiment that longs for change. But not towards the new, not prospective, avant-garde, utopian. The arrow of this desired change goes toward the past. A past that is, to a great extent, imagined. The feeling of melancholy here is dominant. In this place of memory (or the lost desire for memory) social relations would be harmonious, socially sustainable, produce predictability, hence, security. This desire for “moving backwards” can also be called retrotopia. This is the title of a posthumous book by Bauman (2017) in which he deals, in global terms, with a collective desire for return, for the containment of freedom in the name of increasing the feeling and everyday experience of security.

The rhetoric of loss was then presented as a narrative to disagree, in the political spectrum, with the discourse of freedom. The opposition between right and left emerged, in this sense, as, on the one hand, the defense of security in its different dimensions: economic, moral, and physical¹⁸. On the opposite side would be the defense of universal rights, freedom of behavior, guarantee of diversity, and democracy. Of course, this does not mean that right-wing groups are totally or partially opposed to democracy and civil liberties, and that left-wing groups are not concerned with the security agenda. However, in terms of public presentation and situated identification, right-wing groups, especially in this 2018 election, identified themselves by advocating for security, authority, and predictability and gained significant success at the ballot box from the activation of this rhetoric of loss. In the campaign, religious conservatives only spoke of freedom to defend them against homosexuality, the freedom to educate their children without intervention of national education plans that addressed issues related to sexual diversity. Another aspect present in the previously mentioned points worth mentioning is the loss of authority. Among different social groups, and especially among Christian religious people, it was possible to observe programs, homilies, books, pronouncements in the media, on church pulpits, etc. of a narrative emphasizing in a tone of denunciation a relative loss of paternal and maternal authority over children, of husbands over wives, of bosses over subordinates, of public officials over the population, of teachers over students. This point, in particular, was highlighted in the inauguration speech of the Minister of Education, Milton Ribeiro, Presbyterian pastor, theologian, lawyer, former vice-rector of Mackenzie University (SP), who promised in his administration to “rescue the respect” to the teacher and reverse the “deconstruction of the teacher’s authority” in the classroom. These narratives can also be computed for the understanding of the effectiveness of the electoral and political use of the rhetoric of loss.

The loss of authority or threats to it can be verified at the political level, as well as in gender and domination relations altered by the power correlations between global North and South with the spread of decolonial theses (Fraser 2018; Holland 2020; Correa and Kalil 2020; Quijano 1993; among others). A confrontation of elites was announcing itself (Castel 2017) taking on numerous ideological facets. That is, the feeling that something was lost or getting lost was not only among reactionaries, right-wing extremists, but among a very broad set of Western societies, as we saw in other examples above.

The complexity of the social arrangement that has enabled the expansion and moral force of this Rhetoric of Loss in its religious and secular face is great. One of the elements that I would highlight, in the religious sphere, is the Pentecostalization of the social base (Oosterban 2008; Vital da Cunha 2018; among others). Whether through institutional membership in Pentecostal and charismatic Evangelical and Catholic churches and communities, or a moral referential that is based on battle (Dominion Theology) and discipline for success (Prosperity Theology). In addition, the growth of armed violence has caused an increasing number of people to fear being victims (or are traumatized by having already been victims) of the escalating violence in the countryside and in the cities - 180 Brazilians are killed every day, 75% of them black, according to the Atlas of Violence¹⁹. However, to these threats on the physical/patrimonial level and on the economic level with the dizzying increase of unemployed people as of 2014 in Brazil, the feeling of threat²⁰ on the moral level produced a line of continuity between material, concrete threats and those identified as in the realm of customs. They allowed for the creative exploration of dystopian scenarios in which human life would be compromised in view of the liberation of contraceptive use, abortion, and same-sex marriage. The identification of these feelings of threat and their manipulation formed the basis of the campaign of most of the victors in the 2018 electoral process (Vital da Cunha and Evangelista, 2019).

Besides the manipulation of a religious morality and the large legal and illegal production of content in the media by Jair Bolsonaro's campaign, the discourse of vigorous combat against crime was important. Bolsonaro presented a discourse that the population has become accustomed to evaluating as "energetic" (Larangeira 2004), that is, a discourse of combating violent criminality with ostensive actions and extreme use of force²¹. In more sociological terms, it was a presentation of himself as a strong man without fear of being considered authoritarian. Thus, the perception of Bolsonaro as a messiah to guarantee the return of a lost security was very important in the campaign.

Bolsonaro and other candidates who had electoral success mobilized the feelings of threat dispersed in the population to present themselves as those able to promote the rescue, the resumption, the return of something that had been lost. Thus, in the face of the feeling of insecurity, a narrative was articulated that sought to produce a sense of hope of a return to the past (even if idealized) of full employment, of the definitions of roles between men and women. Religion operated as an institutional support network. But this feeling of threat and the desire for an immediate solution by a "forceful" route was shared by a much larger contingent of people without any necessary guidance from any institutional body. In one very specific issue the religious base was important: in the agenda of defending a family standard. This took the attention of Christians in Brazil, in line with what had been happening in other Latin American countries (Mariano and Gerardi 2019; Guadalupe and Carranza 2020; among others). But this alone would not secure the vote for Bolsonaro.

ALLIES OF THE EVANGELICALS

Another very important strategy articulated by Jair Bolsonaro was precisely to play with two of the majority religious identities in Brazil: the Catholic and the Evangelical. That is, he presented himself as a Catholic, but had a support base in evangelical institutions, to which he often waded. His ex-wife is an evangelical, his children present themselves as evangelicals, his current wife is an evangelical engaged in social work in her church in Barra da Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro. Jair Bolsonaro (and other candidates in 2018) took advantage of this relationship by becoming AoEs -Allies of Evangelicals- in order to achieve and maintain power by constantly motivating and strengthening the loyalty of their supporters.

By the hands of evangelicals Bolsonaro came out of the basement of Brazilian politics. According to Damares Alves, then secretary of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front ("Frente Parlamentar Evangélica") in an interview granted to the research (Vital da Cunha e Lopes, 2012), Jair Bolsonaro was not a member of the FPE, but met frequently with its representatives. He was strategically invited by Damares to attend the Public Hearing held in May 2011 to present the teaching material to combat homophobia in schools and denounce what they considered an apology to homosexuality. The consequences of this were amply documented in the media at the time, and have been repeated in 2018, since Bolsonaro's main opponent was Fernando Haddad, who was then Minister of Education when the aforementioned teaching material was being prepared. From this mechanism Bolsonaro stopped being a niche candidate (military-based) to gain visibility on the public scene as a defender of Christian moral values - and this package included not only the defense of the family as a slogan, but also the fight against racial quotas, homosexuality, defense of guns, etc. He tried to run for president in 2014 but did not have enough party support to do so. He was baptized by Pastor Everaldo in 2016 and joined the PSC (Christian Social Party) in order to run for the elections. He sounded out the partnership of the then Senator Magno Malta (PR-ES (Party of the Republic, now Liberal Party)) and was not successful. He quit the PSC and then joined the PSL (Social Liberal Party) with a view to running in 2018.

With this AoE mechanism, all those involved won electorally: charismatic organized Catholics, Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Evangelicals, and renewed Baptists, as well as Bolsonaro himself and his party, which went from one congressman in the previous legislature to 52 at the beginning of the legislature in 2019. They consistently occupy the executive in ministries and secretariats.

In 2014, buoyed by the growth of evangelicals, according to IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) data, and their unprecedented public visibility, they launched the first evangelical candidacy for the presidency of the Republic with support, initially, from major religious and political leaders. The

failure of the then candidate Pastor Everaldo was resounding: he finished in fifth place in the total number of valid votes. The “strategic retreat” came in the 2018 elections. This was the year in which we could observe the great laboratory of the AoE tactic, as there was no evangelical candidacy as such, but there was a candidate allied with evangelicals who would represent them (most of them, let’s say). What Mariz (2017) identified in the 2016 elections as a presence of Christian candidacies to the executive and legislative branches came to be confirmed in 2018 in Brazil.

In electoral terms, another candidate for the executive in 2018 mobilized this AoE strategy quite a bit. It was Wilson Witzel, then candidate for governor of Rio de Janeiro for the PSC. He was victorious due to a set of situations, as in every electoral victory. Specifically in his case, the positive media aura of the magistrates in Brazil (in the wake, at the time, of the enormous political capital of Judge Sérgio Moro, head of the operation that became known as Lava Jato), of “not being a professional politician”, as it was colloquially said during the election, and, irremediably for having contact with the evangelical support base articulated by the president of the PSC, added to the situation of growing episodes of violence registered in the state, especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro and the Metropolitan Region, and the adaptation of his speech from the middle to the end of the election to the line of “energetic” combat against criminality. In this sense, he was getting closer and strengthening ties with evangelical candidates for the Senate, especially Flávio Bolsonaro (PSL-RJ), Jair Bolsonaro’s son. Witzel presented himself as a Catholic but was campaigning with Pastor Everaldo at different evangelical events. The governor of Rio de Janeiro followed this line during his short period in the conduct of state politics. His mandate was interrupted on August 28, 2020, when he was removed from the office of governor for 180 days. He is currently facing impeachment proceedings for suspected irregularities in the area of health care. On November 29, 2020, day of the second round of this year’s municipal elections, he was baptized evangelical at the Igreja Vida Nova, in Inhaúma, located at the foot of Morro do Alemão, in Rio de Janeiro’s northern zone.

The AoE tactic was carried out in the elections, but it remains in force in the cases presented as well as in many other cases in the executive and the judiciary. It is important to note, finally, that in this logic, the tactics of concealing and revealing religious ties and/or sympathies are situationally mobilized as a resource for connecting with numerous bases. The logic that organizes the dynamics of the AoEs, as we have seen so far, is factional. In the classic articles by Moacir Palmeira and Beatriz Heredia (1995; 2004) and Moacir Palmeira and Márcio Goldman (1996) on the “tempo da política (time of politics)” we can access an important analysis with an excellent ethnographic base on the factional context in which strict oppositions that can go as far as physical violence are perpetrated by the opposition and the situation, tearing apart the social fabric during their disputes, reaching the limits of territorial and political division of municipalities that were previously integrated. Trustworthiness amongst faction members emerged as a central element in the internal composition, more so than issues of public interest and ideology. This factional logic of trustworthiness can be observed, for example, during Jair Bolsonaro’s campaign and in the composition of government ministries and secretaries. In the first and second levels of the federal government, the justifications for accepting invitations and the motivation for appointments, on the other hand, passed, with great emphasis, through the publicizing of the faithfulness of the invitee to Jair Bolsonaro’s persona and the group around him. The loyal support, more than the coherence with political and intellectual paths, would be the basis of this relationship. The resignations were also justified in these factional, visceral terms, see ministers of health, justice, and even directors of research institutes during these years of his administration (Vital da Cunha 2020). The formation of a new party by initiative of the President of the Republic and his sons (all of whom have left the PSL) has in its name the reinforcement of this thesis of the ethos of trustworthiness. The party is called Alliance and the image that projects its value is that of two circles together in green and yellow showing unity and strength, two ideas/feelings that emerge as slogans of the party in formation.

CLOSING REMARKS

Politics is a social field in which impressions and affections are of great importance. The climate of opinions conducts debates, campaign strategies, and guides choices at the ballot box. In this context, as Alexander (2014) asserts, the performances of truth activated by candidates are central. Truth is a fundamental part of the electoral dispute for all the morality, security and predictability that this idea holds. It works as an aura that the opponents in the field seek to place over themselves, imputing to others the place of lies, precariousness, and insecurity. In the 2018 elections, what made up the performance of truth among several victorious candidates, as highlighted here for the national executive and in some Brazilian states like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, presented itself under the production of oppositions presented as clear. Between political and non-political, between corruption and correctness/decency, immoral and moral, left and right, impure and pure. The basis of the narratives was to establish radical differences between one and the other with a strong valorization of (business) management over politics, of the “energetic” character in the fight against growing and disturbing evils of public order such as violent crime and corruption, as well as traditional values of society. In all cases a frontal opposition to the present imposed itself. But it was mainly in this issue of traditional values that a range of appropriations, combinations, strategies, feelings were perceived and used. In the shared melancholy about what was being lost around tradition, fruit of a long process of globalization exponentially felt with the wide use of technology, of social networks, the recovery of tradition would be fundamental. The loss of grand narratives, of the romanticism in which the very notion of the nuclear family is valued (Giddens 1993; Duarte 2004), seemed to have produced a rift in the social structure. According to Illouz (2011), the late 19th century was deeply marked by the emergence of psychoanalysis. According to the psychoanalytic imagination that would have gripped the West in the twentieth century, the nuclear family would be the exact point of origin of the self - the locus in which and from which the narrative and history of the subject can begin. Ironically, at the same time that the traditional foundations of marriage were beginning to crumble in the second half of the 1900s, the family returned with full force playing an even more crucial role for the constitution of new narratives of identity (Illouz 2011: 15 and 16).

The social changes perceived in a gradual way throughout the 20th century would reveal what emerges in the narrative of Christians in the 2018 elections in Brazil as polluting forces, taking Douglas’ (2012) terms. In this sense, the defense of women’s freedom, of guaranteeing LGBT rights, of fighting racism emerged as narratives of disorder, producers of moral pollutions, of insecurity because it valued “mixtures”, symmetries between “non-equals”, according to the traditional framework, especially in a country with a strong slave and authoritarian heritage (Schwarcz 2019; Peixoto 2013; among others). The national left, identified as the main actors in the defense of these agendas were, therefore, treated as “the evil” to be fought by these actors. The recent political polarization has collaborated to consolidate a Christian right. Thus, “antipetism and anti-leftism have increasingly guided the political positions of evangelical leaders and deputies” (Mariano and Gerardi 2019: p 74) and, in 2018, revealed themselves with great strength in the campaign with electoral victory of several of their representatives²².

In supra-local terms, the reactions to these “polluting forces” among Christian groups came in the form of fundamentalisms identified, above all, from the 1940s onward in the United States, the country of their dispersion. The antipluralist Christian tradition formed in this environment would be focused on the family, the defense of male authority and the creationism, the containment of women’s sexuality, autonomy and rights, radical opposition to feminist demands (accused of eroding patriarchy, effeminizing men and masculinizing women), abortion, homosexuality, sex education in schools (Mariano and Gerardi 2019: p. 65).

For Christian fundamentalists and other defenders of the “lost” tradition, what its rescue offered was security around roles, around what men, women, children should do, how they should behave, what they should look forward to. Thus, “in the struggle for control of private morality and public life, they did not hesitate to instrumentalize the government to unleash crusades against adversaries, defend Christian and family values as the moral foundation of the nation, and attempt to impose moral standards rooted in their biblical truths” (Mariano and Gerardi 2019: p. 65).

Bolsonaro's narrative production was segmented for a diverse audience ranging from a conservative elite to the poorest and most socially vulnerable, as anthropologist Isabela Kalil (2018) reminds us. My argument is that the segmentation of his discourse had a common ground anchored in this rhetoric of loss. For each segment (businessmen, conservative religious leaders, women, men, youth, etc.) he explored a particular sense of loss. The question of the loss of authority and of common traditional moral references represented by the nuclear family brought together many minds and hearts.

In this ethic and aesthetic of purity and danger, the situated union of Christians followed victorious. If in the religious field Catholicism is the target of demoralization and attacks by Evangelicals, especially those linked to the so-called Neo-Pentecostal denominations or the third wave of the Pentecostal movement in Brazil, in politics this approximation has been noted in different studies revealing situated compositions aiming at parliamentary and electoral gains. The situated "mixture" of these actors does not pollute them morally. On the contrary, in this union, they defend and value what would be common to the national majority. The ADE performance - allies of the evangelicals - was a robust strategy that we saw at its culmination in 2018 with updates in the Brazilian municipal elections in 2020 in which several mayoral candidates in large cities presented themselves as evangelicals with Catholic vices, and the reverse was also true.

In this article, accusations of moral contamination between spheres and attempts to naturalize passages between secular and religious, on the other hand, are noted. The insistence on ethnographic monitoring of the various contexts and groups that supply these movements and narratives is a fundamental scientific mission and, as such, of notable public relevance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is a translation of a previously published as "Retórica da Perda nas eleições presidenciais brasileiras em 2018: religião, medos sociais e tradição em foco" PLURAL. ANTHROPOLOGÍAS DESDE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE. Año 3, N° 6. Julio-Diciembre, 2020. ISSN: 2393-7483, ISSN. en línea: 2393-7491 P.123-149. <https://asociacionlatinoamericanadeantropologia.net/revistas/index.php/plural/article/view/153>.

Translated & edited by American Publishing Services (<https://americanpublishingservices.com/>).

ENDNOTES

1. I am referring to the research "Evangelical candidacies in the 2018 elections: mapping of postulants to legislative power in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bahia, and Minas Gerais," conducted between 2018-2019, by the Institute for Studies of Religion with support from the Heinrich Boll Foundation. The team formed for this research included Christina Vital da Cunha and Clemir Fernandes as consultants and Ana Carolina Evangelista in the executive coordination. Research assistants included Felipe Lins, Marcelle Decothé, Gabriele Ribeiro, Vanessa Cardozo, Rafaela Marques, and Rodrigo Camurça. The period of project making, data collection and analysis was from July 2018 to February 2019. Part of its results are in Vital da Cunha and Evangelista (2019).
2. Data from the Atlas of Violence 2015 revealed the figure of 28.9 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Most deaths occur in cities, but the Atlas shows the growth in the number of homicides and violent deaths of undetermined cause in the countryside. In this regard, the municipality of Altamira (PA) had the highest increase, followed by other cities in the interior of Bahia, Sergipe, and Maranhão. Data from the Brazilian Yearbook of Public Safety pointed out the figures of 30.8 and 27.5 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017 and 2018, respectively.
3. 26% of the Brazilian population was below the poverty line in 2017, according to IBGE data. This means that they receive approximately up to R\$420.00 per month or less. In 2017, the percentage of unemployed people in Brazil reached 12.7% of the population, the highest number since 2012, when the historical series began.
4. The "scandal of the leeches" or "mafia of the ambulances" was the name given to the Federal Police investigation launched in May 2006 with the objective of fighting corruption in the national legislative and executive spheres. Its mission was to dismantle a gang formed by congressmen, advisors, and civil servants

- that operated through fraud in tenders for the purchase of ambulances by the Ministry of Health, at the time under the command of José Serra, during the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The gang allegedly used 110 million reais of the budget for the purchase of overpriced ambulances, many of which were in no condition to be used. In the Chamber of Deputies, 67 impeachment proceedings for breach of parliamentary decorum were opened, of which 29 were evangelical federal deputies.
5. Also known as PL 122 to combat homophobia. On June 13, 2019, by majority vote, the Supreme Court voted to frame homophobia and transphobia as a criminal type defined in the Racism Law (Law 7,716/1989) until the National Congress issues a law on the matter.
 6. Evangelical leaders who used to rent time slots in the open TV channels in Brazil have risen up against the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. According to them, in addition to already owning Rede Record, the UCKG started to lease time slots in other networks by offering a high price for them. This made it difficult and, in some cases, impossible for other evangelical leaders and denominations to be present on TV. This animosity, which had been circulating in the evangelical environment since the mid-2000s, came to light during the 2014 state elections. In electoral programs in the period, Pastor Silas Malafaia spoke out in favor of Pezão, against Marcelo Crivella, revealing the case of the media dispute accentuating, “If they do this to brothers, what will they do to you?”
 7. The Third National Human Rights Program, instituted by Decree No. 7,037 of December 21, 2009, and updated by Decree No. 7,177 of May 12, 2010, is the product of a democratic and participatory construction, incorporating resolutions from the 11th National Human Rights Conference, in addition to proposals approved in more than 50 thematic conferences, promoted since 2003, in areas such as food security, education, health, housing, racial equality, women’s rights, youth, children and adolescents, people with disabilities, the elderly, the environment, etc. To learn more see <https://pndh3.sdh.gov.br/portal/sistema/sobre-o-pndh3> Accessed 07 September 2019.
 8. Moral panics conform a “mechanism of resistance and control of societal transformation.” These elements, as Miskolci states, “emerge from social fear of change, especially change perceived as sudden and, perhaps for this very reason, threatening” (Miskolci, 2007: 103).
 9. Numerous groups, congresses, seminars, and public hearings were held to reflect on secularism in Brazil. I would highlight an emblematic movement in the period: Strategic Movement for the Laic State. The Manifesto of its launch (June 18, 2013) was disseminated in the media, in university and social movement circles of religious and non-religious base, among politicians, in class councils. This manifesto has sociological importance in this debate because at the same time that it gathers in its paragraphs current statements on democracy, freedom, and secularism, it disseminates them and increases their visibility and potency in the political debate. In its text, Brazil appears as a nation “threatened” by the so-called “religious fundamentalism”, which would compromise the free exercise of democracy by obstructing the expansion and compromising the guarantee of rights for the different groups that make up society. The solution presented in the document was to make effective the secularization of the State.
 10. The data are from the “Retratos da Sociedade Brasileira - Perspectivas para as Eleições 2018” (Pictures of Brazilian Society - Outlook for the 2018 Elections) survey, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE) in March of this year on behalf of the National Coordination of Industry (CNI).
 11. For follow-up analyses regarding this election see VITAL DA CUNHA et al. 2017.
 12. It is possible to identify a compendium of public speeches for the maintenance of a status quo ante in which popular layers were not present in the same space as national elites in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7V4tIUYP8>
 13. Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte (2004), in analyzing the place of romanticism in modern Western culture, contributes substantially to my reflection on the rhetoric of loss by enumerating and analyzing how in periods of strong criticism of the changes experienced socially around the “mores” arising from capitalism, liberal democracy, and individualism, society reacted by seeking in the past a narrative, subjective, and structural opening. Campoamor (2020), on another scale, also publishes a reflection on the fact that in times of crisis, the public feeling of nostalgia is common. It is worth analyzing, in our specific context, how this nostalgia is stitched together, how it relates to and how religious elements are activated to strengthen it, how political actors use it strategically and with a view to individual or institutional gains.
 14. Source: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/01/leia-a-integra-do-discurso-de-bolsonaro-na-cerimonia-de-posse-no-congresso.shtml>. Accessed October 9, 2019.
 15. To access the content of the interviews recorded with Zequinha Marinho (PSC- PA), Geraldo Pudim (PMDB-RJ) and other parliamentarians see Vital da Cunha 2017b. On the political defense of the family see Teixeira (2016), Luna and Oliveira (2019), Duarte et al (2008) among others.

16. To access a brief history on the Family Statute and its parliamentary support among Catholics and Evangelicals see Carranza and Vital da Cunha 2018.
17. Senate Bill PL 430/2013, authored by then-senator Lídice da Mata (PSB-BA), known as the Family Statute, provided for the legalization and regularization of adoption, kinship relations, and marriage by expanding the notion and legal guarantees granted to the family formed by man and woman to other possible conformations such as the homosexual one. It was shelved at the end of the legislature in 2018.
18. Relating here to combating urban violence and that which is growing in the countryside and in medium-sized and expanding cities.
19. <http://www.ipea.gov.br/atlasviolencia/> Accessed October 2, 2019.
20. Almeida (2019) has been reflecting on the formation of a conservative wave in which evangelicals would have a fundamental incidence. In the formulation of his argument he elaborates that this wave presents itself in some lines of force that keep an important parallel on these public feelings of threat on which I have been reflecting since 2014.
21. For more on situations that produce the imaginary of “urban violence” and the “metaphor of war” that publicly justify the extreme use of force by agents of the state see Machado da Silva (2008); Leite 2001 among others.
22. Other longitudinal research papers, without emphasis on the religious issue, analyze this pendulum movement from lulism to so-called bolsonarism (see Pinheiro Machado and Scalco 2018).

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