

## **Sexuality, Religion and Politics in Brazil: The Moral Agenda of Evangelical Politicians**

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### **Abstract**

*The more explicit participation of Evangelicals in Brazilian politics, brought greater emphasis to the political arena to the theme of sexual morality, which persists despite countless social changes about sexuality in the 21st century. Mobilization of various religious groups against the election of the Workers Party (PT) candidate, Dilma Rousseff, was based on the fact that she would be favourable to the criminalization of homophobia and the decriminalization of abortion. Catholics, mainline Protestants, Pentecostals, Neo-Pentecostals and spiritualist kardecistas formed an atypical "ecumenism" in defense of a sexuality strictly delimited and regulated by conservative religious standards. This article highlights the ambiguity of the laicity in Brazil and aims at analyzing the implications of gender that came out before and during the elections. In particular it will focus on the discourse of Pentecostals and historical Protestants about gay marriage, criminalization of homophobia and the decriminalization of abortion.*

### **1. Introduction**

Brazil is a predominantly Christian country, although it is internationally known as a country of religious diversity. According to the last surveys, an astonishing 88.6% of the Brazilian population claims to be Christian with 68.4% identifying themselves as Catholics (the lowest percentage since statistical surveying about the presence of religions in the country began) and 20.2% identifying themselves as *Evangélicos*<sup>1</sup> from various denominations. These two segments have become more visible in the national political arena, influencing the votes of elected officials, supporting electoral campaigns of candidates who are more aligned with their political and religious interests, opposing the candidacies of people who clash with these interests, stimulating or hindering the development of public policies, etc.

The Catholic Church has actively taken part in Brazilian political life, often in an ambiguous way. This ambiguity can be seen as the Catholic Church maintains close relationship with the established public power while also engaging in harsh criticism of the contemporary political administration. Many times this has happened simultaneously, due to the great variety of voices that compose the institution that is conventionally referred to as the Roman Catholic Church.

As for Evangelicals, their participation in the formal political world has always been very discreet, and only recently has gained visibility. According to Maria das Dores Campos Machado,

*Evangelicals gained visibility during the Constituent Assembly of 1988, when the majority of their representatives stood together in parliamentary discussions, acting as a united religious board, more precisely understood as Evangelical Caucus (Bancada Evangélica). The investigations about the ecclesial insertion and the behavior of religious actors in that context accentuated the conservatism and the corporativeness of Evangelicals. (2006, p. 17)*

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<sup>1</sup>By *Evangélico*, it is understood the religious segment composed by historical Protestants, Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals. Even knowing "Evangelical" is more restrict and is not the best English translation for "Evangélicos", in this article we will use it in a broader sense. Also although we are aware of the polemic around the terms "Pentecostal" and "Neo-Pentecostal", we will use them since these are the terms frequently used in the literature on this theme.

The reasons for this recent awakening, or recent visibility, are manifold. This more visible and aggressive participation of Evangelicals in the political world has generated a broad debate in Brazilian society and has brought forth new (or old?) questions about the laicity of State.

In the present article we will address only the Evangelical segment, aiming to understand the tensions between the political affirmation of a religious sexual morality and the idea of a national government that is inclined to the interests of all its citizens despite their religious confessions.

## ***2. The Evangelicals in the Spotlight***

The numerical growth of Evangelicals registered in the last IBGE Census caught the attention of the academy and led to increased research on this group. The last four decades were marked by a boom in the number identifying themselves as Evangelicals.

According to the demographic census from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE), in 1980, Evangelicals comprised 6.6% of the Brazilian population and, in 1991, they reached 9%. Between 1991 and 2000, there was a substantial growth in the number of people who claimed to be Evangelicals, with the total number reaching 26,452,174, which corresponded to 15.6% of the population. In 2011, the Getúlio Vargas Foundation published the New Map of Religions, coordinated by Marcelo Côrtes Neri (2011). Based on the Family Income Research (Pesquisa de Orçamento Familiar, POF) in 2009, this survey detected the growth among Evangelicals to have reached 20.23% of the Brazilian population. In 2010, the most recent demographic census indicated Evangelicals comprised 22.2% of the Brazilian population. It must be noted that this growth has happened especially among Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal groups. The classical Protestants or those with a rather long mission history in Brazil, do not exhibit significant growth, with the exception of the Baptists. At any rate, this rapid expansion of Evangelicals calls for an analysis of the sociocultural dynamics of this movement.

The historical Protestants are generally concentrated in sectors with higher education and income, and thus have a greater presence in the more privileged social circles (Neri 2011, p. 24-26). In contrast, Pentecostals, like Catholics, have a greater presence among those with less education, and are generally better received in the less privileged social classes. For these reasons, Pentecostals have become the subject of studies on religious associativism. With a higher adherence among the less privileged social classes, the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are creating (or recreating) new spaces of public participation, acting as important institutions in the process of socioeconomic inclusivism. Due to the increased difficulty of social cohesion and social equality incorporation via the workforce and/or via public policies implemented by the government, the informal mechanisms of social solidarity, like religion, gains more prominence as institutions that can attenuate the reality of social stratification and exclusion. (Lavallo and Castello 2004, p.73-74) The practices of social solidarity developed among highly vulnerable social sectors are, with relatively high frequency, initiatives of religious institutions and their members. This must be understood as a key element in the process of socialization and political activism of Evangelicals:

*... the churches appear to emerge as agents of mediation able to offer material benefits of public and private character for their members, especially for those involved in social work outside the church. In churches there is a long-lived tradition of material benefits of a private character (...), but they also participate in the management of resources connected to the public sector and, in the case of Evangelicals, the interests of the traditional institutions of the political system. (Lavallo and Castello 2004, p. 93)*

Religious associativism as instigator of social capital calls into question the supposed existence of rigid boundaries between the religious and the political, exposing the porous nature or, maybe, the artificiality of such frontiers.

The numerical growth of Evangelicals and their increased involvement with associative practices also means a higher politicization of this movement or of some sectors of the movement, as well as a higher interest in social changes, at least in relation to issues that has nothing to do with sexual morality.

The conservative nature associated with these groups is somewhat relative, as these very sectors are really adaptable to change, having abandoned an ascetic posture and having invested, for instance, in the formation of leaders to work inside and outside of churches. If religious apathy was one of the characteristics emphasized by the scholars of Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism most recently, a new approach has emerged in the last 20 years. The increase in participation and activity of Evangelicals in the Brazilian political scene has been the object of broad debate in the academy, especially in the Social Sciences. The advocacy work of religious institutions for the election of Evangelical representatives in county, state and national dimensions has not gone unseen by the researchers.

The number of politicians of confessed Evangelical background has grown significantly. They are present in many areas of public power. Thus, the supposed apathy from Evangelicals regarding politics is questionable. Formerly, perhaps such apathy was evident in classical Pentecostalism in Brazil, which had a very pessimistic approach towards political participation, but currently, this apathy is not present, except in some groups which reject political participation entirely. According to Simone Bohn,

*political apathy on the part of Evangelicals is partly due to the necessity of the maintenance of the separation between the sacred sphere and the profane sphere and partly due to the introduction of Pentecostalism in Brazil from foreign entities. Introduced by North American missionaries, the advance of Pentecostal evangelism is associated with non-engagement in the political sphere.* (2004, p. 292)

According to Paul Freston, there have been Evangelicals in parliament since the 1930's decade.<sup>2</sup> There were few in number and they were from historical Protestant churches. It was at the time of democratization that new Evangelicals emerged: the Pentecostals, especially those from the Assembly of God. The other Pentecostals in Brazil, who up until then, had been absent in politics for doctrinal reasons (and political), had a change of heart concerning political involvement (in institutional and individual terms), which ultimately resulted in an increase of Evangelical politicians all over the country. By the time of the Constituent National Assembly of 1986, thirty-six parliamentarians who claimed to be *Evangélicos* were elected, creating then what is now known as the Evangelicals Caucus<sup>3</sup>.

The slogan "Evangelical votes for Evangelical" first appeared in a book written by Josué Sylvestre titled "Irmão vota em Irmão" (Brother votes for Brother), and this slogan has been repeatedly evoked by this religious segment in each new electoral process. According to Sylvestre, *the argument of love would be enough to make believers to vote for other believers. Because someone who loves his brother would not want to see his brother defeated (...) A believer votes for another believer, because, on the contrary, one cannot affirm he is a believer himself.* (1986, p. 53-54).

In the years that followed, the Evangelical Caucus kept growing in party politics, but this time, so too did Neo-Pentecostal politicians, especially those of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

The appeal to a religious identity is still evoked in contemporary politics and political races. At present, the Evangelical Caucus is composed of 63 congressmen and 3 senators, and has gained significant visibility, especially in relation to the debate on decriminalization of abortion and same-sex civil unions. On these issues, this group is in basic agreement and has quite vehemently opposed their approval.

As we will further see, the theme of sexuality will define, if not completely, at least strongly, the political agenda of Evangelical parliamentarians, making explicit the territoriality tension of the boundary between church and State. The influence of lay Evangelicals within politics is also extremely important. The intensification of political participation of Evangelicals, especially of Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals, is clear and was evident in the Presidential election of 2010. This participation was not relegated merely to the election of Evangelicals for public positions, but as we will see, it was part of a broader negotiation for power.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1932, the *Confederação Evangélica* released a proclamation under the Presbyterians' leadership in which Protestants were urged to participate in politics, with the goal of gaining some representation in the Constituent Assembly. Guaracy Silveira, a Methodist pastor, was the only Protestant joining the Constituent of 1932 (Freston 1993, p. 155).

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentarian Front composed by Evangelical politicians of various denominations and political parties, Who claim to defend the rights of their religious communities.

## 2.1 The Moral Agenda of Evangelical Politicians: The Debate on Abortion

More and more, Evangelicals have entered the political arena, gaining increased representation in public sectors, effectively participating in the political agenda at all levels. Their participation in Brazilian party politics is marked by a strong corporativism, in addition to the fact that conservative and traditionalist postures predominate among the political representatives. It is important to understand that we cannot assume that the Evangelical parliamentarians form a cohesive group, even as they are part of an identical movement with identical political performance. Nevertheless, in issues directly related to sexuality, a propensity for a moral conservatism can be seen, following a similar tendency on the part of the electorate. Based on the Brazilian Electoral Study (ESEB) in 2002, Simone Bohn (2004) points out that Evangelicals are the most rigid voting bloc on the issue of abortion, with 46.7% of them opposed to abortion in any circumstance.

Regarding issues such as abortion or civil rights of homosexuals, among others, the popular Feminist quote, “Our bodies belong to us,” is answered with, “This body does not belong to you.” Evidently, we are not talking about a homogenous discourse, neither in the religious institutions nor, much less, in State institutions.

In the case of abortion, some Evangelical groups are flexible and thus are willing to allow abortions in certain situations. This shows the heterogeneity of the discourse. Edlaine Gomes (2009, p.100) points out that Presbyterian Church in Brazil and its approach allows pregnancy interruption when there is a risk of maternal death. The Methodist Church also stands out in this matter for admitting family planning, pregnancy interruption where there is rape, a risk of maternal death or a fetal deformation. It is important to remember that, in terms of numerical representation, as was stated above, the classical Protestant churches currently do not have much strength. The Evangelical majority in Brazil comes from Pentecostalism and, more recently, from Neo-Pentecostalism.

In the Neo-Pentecostal segment, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God claims to be favorable to abortion, allowing it in the above-mentioned situations, and also in cases of economical difficulties, the latter not currently allowed under Brazilian law<sup>4</sup>. According to Bishop Edir Macedo, the foremost leader in that denomination, abortion must be decriminalized.

The official approach of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Universal of the Kingdom of God churches concerning abortion does not necessarily become the position of the parliamentarians of these denominations. The congressman Áureo Lídio Moreira Ribeiro, Methodist, is one of the founders and the vice-president of the Parliamentarian Front for Life Defense, which is contrary to abortion. In the Presbyterian Church, the well-known ex-governor of Rio de Janeiro and now federal congressman, Anthony Garotinho, affirms that he is against abortion in any situation. Going against the guidance given by Bishop Edir Macedo, the senator and now Minister of Fishing, Marcelo Crivella, declared himself against abortion in an interview given to Radio Nova AM 990 in Rio de Janeiro. Crivella, nevertheless, stated that he agreed in pregnancy interruption in cases of anencephalic fetuses.

This dissonance between the religious institutions and the parliamentarians is explained, partially, by a relative autonomy of the politicians' candidacies in relation to the religious institutions to which they belong, particularly, in such denominations as Methodist and Presbyterian. When composing the Evangelical Caucus, these congressmen acquire higher political visibility by following the predominant principle in the Parliamentary Front, which is against the decriminalization of abortion. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, on the other hand, has the greatest influence upon the candidacy of its members, elaborating strategies and leading campaigns with a focus less directed to discussions of moral principals than it is to institutional benefits acquired from the political candidacy of its representatives.

Abortion is an ever-present issue in the Evangelical Cauca's agenda, which organizes itself as a super-party parliamentarian front when there is debate about this matter. The parliamentarians, besides being resistant to the expansion of proposals regarding pregnancy interruption, also proposes laws that prevent women from access to legal abortion. This, for instance, was the proposal of the congressman Henrique Afonso. In 2007, the parliamentarian presented Bill 1763/2007 for study in the National Congress, proposing the payment of a compensation for women who had become pregnant as a result of sexual violence, thereby declining their legal right to interrupt the pregnancy and bearing the children begotten from that sexual violence.

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<sup>4</sup> The Brazilian law admits abortion in the following cases: rape, risk of maternal death or fetal deformation.

The non-governmental organizations that defend women's rights, in a critical reaction to this proposed law nicknamed it a "rape stipend." Henrique Afonso, in opposing the legal right of women to have abortions in situations of rape and risk of maternal death argues: *abortion for us Evangelicals is an act against life in any situation, it doesn't matter whether the woman is at risk of death or was raped.* The congressman appeals to a collective group, the *Evangelicals* supposedly in agreement about their perception about abortion to sustain his proposal. When asked by his critics about the importance of guaranteeing the State's laicity, Henrique Afonso affirms: *this question of lay State is very debated, there are those who tell me that I shouldn't legislate as a Christian, but this what I believe and I do what God asks me to do, I can't imagine myself separating those two things.*<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, the congresswoman and gospel singer Lauriete Rodrigues de Almeida, openly opposed to abortion under any circumstance, presented to the chamber Bill 797/11. The project foresees the creation of a program of medical, psychological and financial assistance provided by the Federal Government to aid pregnant women, victims of sexual violence as well as in cases of fetal abnormalities.

Evangelical parliamentarians are creators and/or leaders of various commissions or working groups that address issues related to reproductive rights and family. The congressman Roberto de Lucena, a pastor of a Pentecostal church until 2010, O Brasil para Cristo (Brazil for Christ), is vice-president of the Parliamentary front for the Family and Life Support, and coordinator of the Parliamentary Front Articulation against Abortion. He made the following speech in a plenary session of Congress:

*Mr. President, honored parliamentarians, yesterday afternoon I had the opportunity of joining a funeral. Congressman Amauri Teixeira, God is my witness that it was the first time that it had happened to me: I went to a funeral happy, overjoyed; I went to a funeral with a cheerful heart, to celebrate. Yesterday we had the opportunity of participating in the funeral and buried Bill 1135 of 1991, and all its attachments, which allowed the interruption of pregnancy in any stage. Actually, this is a stagnation that this House has suffered for two decades and that finally has ended. I had the opportunity to walk, from Salão Verde, to the halls of the Congress carrying a coffin in my hands, along with the congressman Salvador Zimbaldi, president of the Parliamentary Front for Life Defense – Against Abortion; Congressman Henrique Afonso, member of my party, the Green Party; and other parliamentarians who defend life in all of its dimensions. (...) Enough of shedding blood! Let's put an end to the shed of blood in sacred Brazilian soil. Abortion is also a kind of violence and aggression. Let us say "no" to the shed of blood and let us all join hands to build a culture of peace and a respectful posture towards life. May God bless Brazil!*<sup>6</sup>

The fiery and impressive speech of the pastor congressman characterizes abortion as violence, aggression and blood-shedding. Lucena evokes God in the beginning and end of his speech, thereby evoking its religious legitimacy. This appealing to divine authority is frequent in the speeches of Evangelical Congressmen when abortion is at stake, thus reinforcing the concept of religion being a moral brake of society.

Despite the secularization and the loss of religious normative power in contemporary societies, sexuality is an issue that mobilizes religious people who are confronted with the ambiguity of the religious institutional discourse about sex as well as the ambiguity of the discourses and practices of religious individuals. When issues regarding the sexual rights of women clash with the Parliamentarian's beliefs, the Parliamentarians also clash with a very polemic equation from a religious point of view. The equation of women and sexuality sums up two historically abject terms. Abject, but nonetheless permanent in religious discourse. To be a woman is a natural condition of political disadvantage in a significant number of Evangelical churches, whether in the sexual division of religious work, or in higher influence that religion rules over their bodies and, consequently, over their lives. In the speech of the Congressman there is the premise that women who opt for abortion are murderers. The defense of life in all of its forms, according to the congressman, means, once more, not only stopping the expansion of women's reproductive rights, but also making unviable and fighting against the rights already guaranteed by the law for women.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://www.correio24horas.com.br/noticias/detalhes/detalhes-1/artigo/projeto-de-lei-podera-criar-o-bolsa-estupro-para-evitar-que-mulheres-abortem/> (Accessed March 28, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Available on the parliamentarian's website: <http://www.robertodelucena.com.br/v2/2011/09/02/deputado-fala-sobre-funeral-do-projeto-de-lei-que-previa-o-aborto/> (Accessed March 28, 2012).

In the same way, we have the argument of objection of the conscience. The religious Parliamentarians and Jurists have utilized the objection for conscience clause to dissuade health professionals' from carrying out abortions in situations in which performing an abortion would be legal. Even the very action of the parliamentarians regarding enforcement of the law as to making available the services of legal abortion in the public health system, or "Sistema Único de Saúde" doesn't exist. The difficulty in establishing public policies clashes with, among others aspects, the gender meanings which are produced and reproduced in society, meanings that house subtle forms of violence, inconspicuous in a context of institutional and subjective dominance. The Evangelical Parliamentarians work from a point of view that moralizes the body. They empty its political content. This annihilates the debate on sexual and reproductive rights as human rights.

## 2.2 The Moral Agenda of Evangelical Politicians: The Demands of the LGBT Movements in Debate

Like abortion, another theme that mobilizes the Evangelical Caucus is that of homosexuality. Traditional religious activism demands legislative and political regulation of the sex of others, especially homosexuals. Once again, sexuality is the focal point of this collective subject. Maria das Dores Campos Machado, mentioning data of the World Values Survey, states that the research showed that the level of engagement of the subjects with a religion has a direct relationship with the way these persons treat themes such as homosexuality. The frequent participation in religious activities tends to create more conservative subjects regarding issues that involve, among other things, sexuality. (Machado and Piccolo 2010, p.15) In fact, if we observe the makeup of the eminently conservative Evangelical Caucus, a significant portion of the Parliamentarians bear the title of "pastor", and in some cases, the title appears to enhance his political fortunes, by making the religious connection more visible. The title suggests a high level of religious engagement on the part of these politicians. It's necessary to say, however, the actually being an Evangelical Politician has become its own style or type. It has become a way of doing politics. This means that it is necessary to relativize the level of religious engagement of some Parliamentarians, who for political convenience, "become" Evangelicals or "go back to being" Evangelicals after years of withdrawal from this religious segment. Further, some others appeal to the religious identity of their parents. At any rate, the fact is that the Evangelical Parliamentarians, together with other Parliamentarians who represent the interests of the Catholic Church, established as a moral agenda to fight against the demands of the LGBT movements (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites and Transgenders). The Parliamentarians entered into a type of "Crusade" against any demand of these movements.

Evangelical Parliamentarians, acting in the name of what they call the struggle for moralization of the family, have offered strong political-religious opposition to the LGBT movements, trying to keep the demands of the LGBT community from being taken up and approved by the State. This is verified, for instance, in the discussion of the issue of marriage between same-sex persons, a long-term demand made by these movements. In the National Congress, various bills were studied but were never approved. Such projects were systematically blocked by representatives of the Evangelical Caucus and also by those aligned with the interests of the Catholic Church. Only in 2011, on account of different decisions by courts and judges with respect to the issue, did the Supreme Federal Court decide, approving unanimously, to establish a unified understanding of marriage between persons of the same sex, extending to them the same rights foreseen by law for heterosexual marriages. According to one of the SFC ministers, Marco Aurélio, there is a *lack of political* desire in Congress *regarding the judicial defense of homosexual marriages*, and this is revealed by the non-approval of bills that treat this case. Shortly before approval of the law by the Supreme Court, the congressman of Acre, Astério Moreira, known for defining himself as a defendant of the *Evangelical Christian family*, made the following statement to the newspaper *A Gazeta do Acre*:<sup>7</sup> *I'm not in favor of marriage between homosexuals because there is still a legal contract in these cases. I'm against it for religious and spiritual matters. The Bible condemns relation between same sex persons. It's a Biblical principle.*

Once again there is special pleading for an authoritarian word (the Bible), as often is done when treating the issue of abortion. Evangelical politicians have assumed the role of regulators of sexuality in the name of God. The religious argument stands for itself. It is a supposed universal truth that allows no questioning.

This can be seen, for example, in the arguments of the Evangelical congressmen of the Legislative Assembly in Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ) in defense of Bill 717/2003, proposed by the Evangelical congressman Édino Fonseca.

<sup>7</sup> A Gazeta do Acre, May 6, 2011. Available at: <http://gazeta-do-acre.jusbrasil.com.br/politica/6936430/deputados-evangelicos-radicalizam-contra-uniao-de-homossexuais-na-aleac> (Accessed April 24, 2012).

The Bill foresees the creation of an assistance program for people who wish to opt for *the change from homosexuality to heterosexuality*. For the Evangelical congressman Samuel Malafaia from the Health Commission which approved the project together with the Commission of the Constitution and Justice,<sup>8</sup>

*Man and woman were created and born of opposite sexes to complete each other and procreate. Homosexuality, though accepted by society, is a distortion of the nature of the normal human being. Thus, the opportunity to bet once again on the condition of normal procreation is praiseworthy.* (Natividade 2006, p. 116)

The appeal to nature, the normalizing discourse, prevails in political-religious hermeneutics over the use of bodies. *Bodies contain the inscription of socio-cultural meanings, meanings which oscillates between allowed and forbidden. In them we find the cultural objectives and it is upon them that social expectations are placed. Bodily existence is not disassociated from cultural experience, which is what determines the legitimate uses of bodies.* (Souza 2012, p. 338) According to Evangelical worldview regarding sexuality, the legitimate uses of bodies are inscribed exclusively in heterosexual relations.

Also the debate over the Bill against homophobia (PL 122/06) mobilizes the religious politicians. They argue, among other things, that the right to freedom of speech, and even the right to religious freedom is at stake, as the proposal bars public manifestations against homosexuality. In Evangelical segments, with rare exceptions, the discourse of the heterosexual norm prevails, and the practice of homosexuality is considered an *abomination*, being strongly fought against in the pulpits of these churches and their innumerable publications about the issue. Pastor Guilhermino Cunha, affirmed in a public forum in Brasília that he recognizes *the importance of the matter, but that we [Christians] position ourselves in the light of the holy scriptures which crystalize the principles and values experienced and defended by 98% of the great Brazilian Nation.*<sup>9</sup>

The pastor's argument affirms a collective subject, the Christians, as a homogeneous segment on issues relative to homosexuality, not recognizing the multiplicity of voices present among the subjects that call themselves Christians, be they simple believers or clergy of the most distinct religious institutions. This poliphony tends to be denied by the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, which presents itself as the spokesperson of the cohesive and traditionalist segment when the question is sexuality, specially, homosexuality.

### **3. The Electoral Process in 2010: Sex as Currency**

Among the nine candidates for the Brazilian Presidency in 2010, three stood out in the primary campaigns as very competitive, two of which were women. Although women had run for President in Brazil before<sup>10</sup>, women candidates had had garnered few votes and little attention in the media. This started to change in 2006 with the candidacy of Heloísa Helena (PSOL - Socialist and Liberty Party), who received 7% of the vote. The number of votes was somewhat impressive, but still too little to attain executive power. In 2010, however, voters' attention was directed to women. In the primaries, Marina Silva achieved 19%, Dilma Rousseff 46%, and José Serra 32%.

The race went on to a run-off between Dilma and Serra, and Dilma was elected with 56.05% of the valid votes. The 2010 Electoral Process was marked by this important and unique milestone for Brazilian women. The political importance of women's struggles, especially the feminist movement was discussed, but another issue was more prominent: the power relationship between religious groups and the candidates regarding issues like abortion and homophobia.

A moral agenda imposed itself in the electoral process of 2010, mobilizing Catholics and Evangelicals in the anti-abortion and anti-criminalization of homophobia.

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<sup>8</sup> The Bill 717, a state law, was refused, but other similar projects are being elaborated in the National Congress . The congressman João Campos, president of the Evangelical Parliamentarian Front, proposed a project of a legislative decree authorizing psychologists to treat homosexuality as a disorder. This goes against the statutes of the World Health Organization, as well as Psychology Federal Counsel's ethic code.

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <http://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/homossexuais-projeto-de-lei-provoca-polemica.html> (Accessed April 22, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> The participation of women as candidates for the Presidency of Brazil started in 1989, which were the first direct elections after the military dictatorship. In that year, Livia Maria Ledo Pio de Abreu (PN), ran for the Republic Presidency. In 1998, again a woman ran for the presidential elections: Thereza Tigreiros Ruiz (PTN). In the elections of 2006, two women ran: Ana Maria Rangel (PRP) and Heloísa Helena (PSOL), until then, the woman receiving the most votes in presidential electoral runs reached 6.5 million votes.

The leading candidates in the primaries – Marina Silva, Dilma Rousseff and José Serra – had become hostage to the pressure of Catholics and Evangelicals, which reduced political debate to a discussion about opposition to or support for abortion and the criminalization of homophobia (Bill 122). The candidate most concerned with negotiating the politics of these matters was Dilma Rousseff, candidate of Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party - PT) and supported by ex-President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva. Lula enjoyed strong popular support, which manifested in strong support for Dilma, who knew well how to work with that political capital. Marina Silva (Green Party - PV) who, despite being Pentecostal, defended the laicity of the State during her campaign, was criticized by the conservative and progressive sectors at the same time. She was criticized primarily for defending the laicity of the State, but also for not being trustworthy in the fight for the decriminalization of abortion and same-sex marriage, mainly due to her religious identity.

However, the apparent (and only apparent) incompatibility of the candidate with the Evangelicals' moral agenda against abortion and the anti-homophobic law, which would justify the distance of more conservative Evangelicals, is that (for the pragmatism of these religious leaders) Marina Silva, even being Pentecostal, did not represent a concrete possibility for winning as she was too far behind the two other candidates in the polls. José Serra (Social Democracy Brazilian Party - PSDB), on the other hand, received much support from the most conservative wings of the Catholic Church as well as the Evangelicals, as he was openly against abortion.

The political use of media by religious people gave special attention to the issue of sexuality. The banner of religious moral principles related to reproductive rights, especially the fight against the decriminalization of abortion, against the decriminalization of homophobia and against the marriage of homosexual couples, was raised and vigorously defended by Catholics, Spiritualists and Evangelicals. The latter had strong participation in the elections of 2010 due to these issues. The Evangelical Parliamentarians found strong support in the Evangelical media, which invested in a moral discourse about family.

The various new forms of communication have been used in all spheres, even in the religious one. Between radio and TV time, Evangelicals detain a significant slice of the communication in Brazil, which allows a greater visibility for their leaders, as well as their political-religious ideals. Denominational publications are also important means of visibility. Besides that, electronic means are today an effective instrument for diffusion of opinion and political propaganda, and the Evangelicals have been using these means very resourcefully. Internet, through the social networks, has become an instrument used more and more for the mobilization of believers around issues addressed in the political arena and which, one way or another, impact on the institutions and religious elements. The Evangelical leaders figured out how to take advantage of this:

*I just want to say one thing: life belongs to God, and I just want to say another: abortion is killing another human being. I just want to say one more really important thing: is abortion an issue of public health?(...)No. Women having abortion is a issue of public health. But, okay, you want to defend abortion? So, seek those who are for abortion. You're against it, so seek those who are against it, and vote from them. If that is what you want for society, then vote for it. Are you against it? Are you against the Bill 122?<sup>11</sup> Are you against the laws which are in the PNDH III<sup>12</sup> to vote for homosexual groups to become first class citizens, are you against it? So, pay attention to the citizens you're voting for – Pastor Silas Malafaia.<sup>13</sup>*

The speech of the pastor of Assembly of God Victory in Christ quoted above was transmitted all around the country, and was given in the context of electoral races. The program in video was also shown on Internet in various religious websites. Malafaia, host of the TV show *Victory In Christ*<sup>14</sup> and Jose Serra's political ally, showed disconnected portions of speeches of the candidate Dilma Rousseff in different interviews from 2007 and 2010, in which she affirmed not having a defined religion and being for abortion. The pastor also tied the candidate to the Bill 122, which criminalizes homophobia.

<sup>11</sup> Bill against homophobia.

<sup>12</sup> National Human Rights Plan.

<sup>13</sup> The pastor's speech in a television program shown in the electoral period of 2010, was transcribed and published in the site "Unidos na Fé". The video was removed. Available at: <http://www.unidosnafe.com.br/joomla1.5/latest/dilma-rousseff-ataca-os-crist-os-e-evangelicos-video-evangelico> (Accessed March 17, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Also transmitted in the USA by CTNI.

Another widely broadcast video was that of Pastor Paschoal Piragine, of the Baptist Church in Curitiba, Paraná.<sup>15</sup> Having more than three million hits, this video shows pictures of aborted fetuses while the pastor speaks against the candidate Dilma Rousseff as being favorable to the decriminalization of abortion. These and many others initiatives of Evangelical leaders fortified the opposition of Dilma, who needed to step back in her opinions and answer to religious leaders.

On the other hand, the candidate received support from important leaders, such as Bishop Edir Macedo, founder of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the largest Neo-Pentecostal church in the country. Macedo was an aggressive rival of the Worker's Party in the second round of elections in 2002. In the elections of 2010, in the midst of the negative press Dilma was receiving from many Christian groups, Macedo wrote a supportive letter to the candidate, characterizing the "accusations" against her as "the devil's game". This was in reply to the information (unconfirmed) in which the candidate was said to have stated that "not even Christ wanting so" would steal the victory from her. In that letter, addressed specially to Evangelical public, the bishop stated that

*If Christians were as agile and efficient at using their modern tools of communication to propagate the Gospel, as they seem to be at propagating gossip, certainly many souls would be gained for the Lord Jesus. (...) Someone who believes that he is serving the Kingdom of God by spreading information without being sure of its truthfulness is actually playing the Devil's game. The Lord Jesus does not need lawyers, nor communication consultants who go out defending his name. He needs true Christians, who understand, live and preach the Truth.*<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the pastor and former congressman Manoel Ferreira, one of the most important leaders of the Assembly of God, the largest Evangelical church of Brazil, pronounced himself in favor of Dilma Rousseff. Ferreira was the coordinator of the Evangelical movement of Dilma's campaign, and gave the candidate access to Evangelical leaders, though not without negotiating beforehand to ensure that the candidate wouldn't proclaim support for decriminalization of abortion.

In addition, Dilma had to cope with the usage of religion on the part of her political adversary, José Serra. This other candidate for the Presidency of Brazil gained strong support from conservative sectors of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches by strategically proclaiming himself as against abortion and in favor of religious liberty, which meant being opposed to the law against homophobia. So later, with the discovery that his wife, Mônica Serra, had had an abortion the year before, José Serra stopped using the slogan "Dilma pro-abortion" in direct confrontations with the candidate, while maintaining that his campaign tagline of "defender of life".

Reinforced by the direction that the anti-abortion and anti-Bill122 campaign assumed, and in an attempt to take the election to a second round, the Evangelical leaders joined in the coordination of Dilma's campaign and posted a series of demands in exchange for political support of the candidate. According to Ari Pedro Oro and Ricardo Mariano (2010, p. 30), Evangelical Parliamentarians and leaders

*took advantage of the fragility of the Worker's Party on moral and religious issues to personally demand a commitment from Dilma to assure religious liberty, to veto any project approved of by the National Congress which would be "against life and family values", to reject homosexual marriage, as well as the bill that would criminalize homophobia, to reject adoption of children by homosexual couples, and to reject regulation of the function of the sexual professionals. This was the moment in which the Evangelical leaders and politicians made the most of the power to influence and pressure the PT candidate and the campaign leaders during the entire Presidential election. And they didn't hesitate.*

The Evangelicals felt safe enough to dictate the political agenda of the candidate. During difficult moments in the race, the campaign strategies had to be reviewed, and new concessions had to be made to the Evangelicals to guarantee the support of the most conservative electorate.

It is important to note that all of the Evangelical religious authorities that pronounced themselves in favor or against Dilma were men. The debate of women's reproductive rights was a subject addressed only by men.

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<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://videos.gospelprime.com.br/posicionamento-do-pr-paschoal-piragine-jr-sobre-as-eleicoes-2010/> (Accessed April 24, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/impreso,edir-macedo-defende-petista-e-ve-jogo-do-diabo,617564,0.htm?reload=y> (Accessed April 25, 2012).

The female Evangelical Parliamentarians never entered into the discussion, hence it was difficult to find material from these women that was available in the media and could be analyzed. It rests on us to carry out a *Feminist hermeneutics of suspicion* (FIORENZA, 1992) of this lack.

Though making up the majority of the Brazilian electorate, the number of women in the Legislative branch is still, in general, rather limited. In the 2006 elections, 45 federal Congresswomen and 133 state Congresswomen were elected. This corresponds respectively to 8.2% and 12.8% of the elected officials. Among those who declared themselves Evangelicals, only six Congresswomen and one female Senator were elected for the 2006-2010 mandate. In comparison to Evangelical men elected for the same mandate, among senators, congressmen and governors, there were 49 Evangelicals in the legislative and executive branches.

The religious groups with which the female Evangelical Parliamentarians were associated were groups in which the power asymmetry between the sexes is evident. Primarily made up of women, the Evangelical churches are quite ambiguous in relation to their female followers. Maria das Dores Campos Machado points out the need to consider the ambiguity of the Evangelical segment in relation to its capacity to provide the strengthening of self-esteem of women, to enable them for public life and, at the same time, keep them far from decision-making positions. (Machado 2006, p. 49) In a way, this repeats itself in the political arena, where women, in general, and specifically Evangelical women, have the least amount of influence in important matters.

The moral agenda that dominated the political platform of Evangelicals in the 2010 elections was guided completely by men. They conversed amongst themselves, spoke to the media, held meetings and sat with Dilma and with Serra to negotiate the “Evangelical vote”, which is, by the way, predominantly feminine. In reproductive rights of women and human rights for LGBT population, the main interlocutors of the Presidential candidates were Evangelical men. Even the historical relationship between the Workers Party (PT) and the feminist movement was called into question by the secretary of communications of the PT, André Vargas, who thought that the dialogue with feminists was misunderstood in the discussion of the III National Plan of Human Rights with regard to decriminalization of abortion. (Oro and Mariano 2010, p. 29)

The issue of the rather small presence or even absence of women in the Evangelical Caucus in the process of political negotiations of their partnerships with the Presidential candidates does not mean that the direction of negotiation would have been any different. As Machado helpfully points out, *electoral and parliamentary behavior of those females who take part in politics is not necessarily aligned with women’s movements, or even suggests sensitivity to the demands of the female population.* (2006, p. 51) This, at any rate, makes explicit the level of inequality of gender that still reigns in Brazilian politics.

In the current administration (2010-2014), of the 66 Parliamentarians who claim to be Evangelicals, only eight are women. The party with the greatest representation of Evangelicals is the Christian Socialist Party - PSC, which accounts for 11 congressmen/women, two of which are women. Curiously, not one of the current eight women who make up the Evangelical Caucus has any commission or work group related to the discussion of decriminalization of abortion, the criminalization of homophobia or the legalization of homosexual marriage under her coordination. Because of the experience of the 2010 election, this has become an important niche of political discourse for Evangelical parliamentarians, but as in religion, women in politics occupy less privileged places than their peers.

At the end of the 2010 debates, maybe the most victorious segment was the Evangelicals, who had their political power amplified by the political use of religion, particularly religious sexual morality. Dilma was elected and the Evangelicals are “demanding compensation,” now in 2014 elections. The question of abortion, homophobia and same-sex marriage has been used as currency in the relations of power contested in the Brazilian political scene.

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