

Volume 37
issue 2 / 2018

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 37 (2)
aug/2018-nov/2018

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

From “Gay Kit” to “Indoctrination Monitor”: the conservative reaction in Brazil

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TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Bomfim, I. (2018). “You can’t buy my life”: Calle 13, the representations of the continent in the Latinoamérica musical narrative and the ambiguous Puerto Rican context. *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, 37 (1), pp. 85-106.

Submitted on February 25, 2018 / Accepted on: July 29, 2018

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v37i2.1102>

Abstract

Based on empirical research of documentary sources, the article discusses the conservative reaction in Brazil by analyzing two cases: the so-called "gay kit" and the "Indoctrination Monitor" (a digital platform created by a newspaper). It highlights their religious element, related to the demographic and also media growth of the neo-Pentecostals; in this case, creating a "moral panic." The study shows how Evangelicals had been distancing themselves from Dilma Rousseff, until they became strong supporters of the parliamentary coup. The comparison between the victory achieved by the conservatives regarding "gay kit" and the failure of the "Indoctrination Monitor" discuss some of the limits of the ongoing conservative project.

Keywords

Conservatism; Evangelical media; Moral panic; Media populism.

Introduction

The article discusses the similarities and differences between the cases of the so-called “gay kit,” a significant example of how politicians and conservative activists embarrassed the government of Dilma Rousseff, and the initiative of the digital newspaper *Gazeta do Povo*, inspired by the conservative movement *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without Party – ESP), “Indoctrination Monitor,” which had brief duration, showing the limits of the Rightists’ agenda.

The construction of an antagonistic rhetoric with progressive social topics and the creation of a “moral panic,” based on strategies related to “media populism,” are featured. I also discuss how these situations show, on the one hand, the strengthening of conservative and fundamentalist groups in Brazil and, on the other, their difficulty, especially in the second case, in imposing their ideas in a post-coup Brazil, in the complex environment of a “new media regime” (Carpini, 2018).

Before the exposure of these two cases, a description of a relevant political agent (especially in the first case) is made: Evangelical groups, as well as their strategic use of the media. Later, at the presentation of the cases, I focus on the forms of communication used to establish its framework from the “moral panic” perspective. Finally, a comparison is made between both situations.

Brazil’s “new right” and the Evangelical bench

Córdova points out the emergence, in the whole Latin America, of a new religious and Evangelical right. This contravenes a regional history in which Protestantism, in the early 20th century, had progressive role, for example, with the defense of the secular State. The author interprets this fact from the dominant mode of religious conversion since the 1980s, when religious references “contrary to social and cultural changes that could affect the traditional patriarchal family” emerged (Córdova, 2014, p. 123).

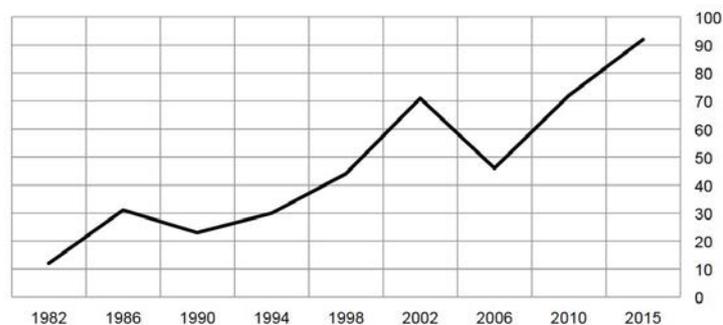
Studies that analyze the religious politicians in Brazil, particularly Pentecostals, notice that their objective, especially in relation to the social advancements of certain groups, is to form a “new right,” whose characteristics are “a combination of moral and cultural reaction, an opposition to the development and/or maintenance of the welfare State” (Cowan, 2014, p. 105).

The creation of an “Evangelical bench” dates back to the 1988 Constituent Assembly, and it can be explained by two fears about the new Letter: relaxation of moral rules (with the decriminalization of abortion) and the legal brakes on the

growth of (neo) Pentecostals, from the articulation between Catholics and leftists (Mariano, 2011; Silva, 2017). Elected with the slogan “brother vote for brother,” the parliamentary activity of Evangelicals was contrary to that of progressive groups in moral (such as sexuality) and economic issues (pro market economy), winning a relevant by-product: radio and television concessions (Cunha, 2007).

The ability of popular and electoral mobilization of churches is related to changes in the religious profile of the Brazilian population, with growth of Protestantism¹, which makes possible the election of legislative representatives. Chart 1 shows the (almost always) continued growth of the “Evangelical bench,” that is, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FEP).

CHART 1 Number of federal deputies of the “Evangelical bench” in the elections between 1982-2015



Source: Silva (2017, p. 247)

The only moment the number of deputies decreased was in 2006, when the bench lost almost half of their representatives due to the “*Mensalão* scandal” (2015) and the “ambulance mafia scandal” (2016). The fuss made “some denominations to take back the discourse of restoration of ethics in politics and emphasize other elements, such as traditional family values” (Silva, 2017, p. 246).

Evangelicals tend to align with parliamentarians of the “Catholic bench” on some social issues, but especially on moral issues (Alves, 2016; Silva, 2017). The so-called Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) movement, the most recent conservative wave of the religion, began to emulate many of the practices of Pentecostals to join the partisan political environment (Silveira, 2008). Both groups have converging views: liturgical, theological and the concern with the use of the media (Silva, 2017)².

¹ Both the Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the surveys of Datafolha Institute indicate the same downward trend in the number of Catholics and growth of Evangelicals (in its various denominations). According to the institute, in 2016, Evangelicals were 29% of the population (in 1994, they were 14%) and Catholics amounted to 50%, against 75% in 1994 (Alves, 2017).

² Silva (2017) notes that it was difficult to assess the weight of this bench, however, in 2015, with the creation of the Catholic Mixed Parliamentary Front, with 209 deputies and five senators, it was possible to have a more precise notion of the representativeness of this group.

The Legislative Power is seen by many Evangelicals as the privileged scope of their political participation³. This occurs considering that, on the one hand, the occupation of these spaces allows them to propose or react against the legal frameworks and influence public policies. On the other hand, the electoral strategy used by the churches generally adopts an “institutional model” (Oro, 2003), developed by the neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), which has a centralized organizational structure that favors this strategy.

In this case, candidacy is built within churches, linking the candidate to the institution. The institutional charism is more important than the candidate (Silva, 2017). At least in part, the electoral success of Pentecostal candidates is due to the fact that their faithful have been recruited from lower economic strata and are, therefore, more susceptible to religious leadership influence (Machado, 2005).

The theological pillars of neo-Pentecostalism, the Domain Theology (with a dualistic cosmology, stating that, to be in the fight of “good” against “evil,” the individual should be strong spiritually) and the Prosperity Theology (defending that the man of faith is meant to be prosperous in the earthly world) promote dialogue with economic groups in search of rise.

However, to interpret the political growth of Evangelicals only as something strictly religious does not seem accurate. According to Mariano (2011), the phenomenon stems from the national political culture: the religious occupation of the public sphere has been stimulated by party leaders.

The conquest of positions in the Executive is also on the horizon of Evangelicals, despite the preference for the Legislative. In this sense, the election of the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro Marcelo Crivella (nephew of Edir Macedo, creator and leader of UCKG) in 2016 is significant, since he is also a (licensed) bishop of this church. In this election, he managed to overcome rejections suffered (Mariano & Oliveira, 2009) by his association with UCKG.

Despite acknowledging that the Evangelical bench gives visibility and features a new presence in the national public scene of such churches, Prandi and Santos state that this group “does not seem able to cause with effectiveness and legitimacy any change in the country’s future” (2017, p. 210). However, they recognize, as well as other authors, the strength of the *reactionary* engagement of Evangelicals, which focus on the ethical ground, “our [Evangelicals’] ground,” according to Cowan (2014).

³ It is noteworthy the importance of occupying certain spaces, such as the presidency of the Commission on Human Rights of the Congress, in 2012, and even the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies, which was the case of the deputy Eduardo Cunha, allied to the church Assembly of God (AG).

That is, it is more likely that they act to oppose the criminalization of homophobia than to propose the criminalization of homosexuality, for example. Whether in society or in the parliament, the religion, Evangelical or not, when it wants to impose itself, acts as a brake to the advancement of modernity, not as a guiding ideology of the action, but as a guide for the entire society [...]. (Prandi & Santos, 2017, p. 202)

As we shall see, this reactive content is clear, in a successful way, in the case of "gay kit." And the importance of the political articulation of the group gained more visibility and relevance with the strong support given by the Evangelical deputies to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. During the vote, "most parliamentarians justified their votes based on God, their churches and on the Christian family," indicating "the expressive presence of political representatives linked to Christian denominations in the Brazilian Congress" (Silva, 2017, p. 249).

Evangelicals and the media

It is said that protestants have created a peculiar and distinct culture in competition with other faiths, with a strong dependence on the media to gain legitimacy (Campos, 2004). The missionary content of the Protestant faith joined the expansion of print culture, which is related to the centrality of Bible reading in "historical" Protestantism⁴.

Later, the modern means of communication (radio, television, internet) have also become agents of religion. Here, more than a line of continuity, we note a division between Evangelicals and their relations with the media. While the "historical" ones have a more rationalist theology, in which Protestantism is emphasized as a "religion of the book", the "neo/Pentecostals" prefer interior lighting and emotionalism, which is why their communication style heavily adapted to electronic media (Campos, 2008).

Thus, in the United States (source of neo-Pentecostalism), the link between the media and the Protestant religion shaped the so-called "televangelism," with the transmission of cults on radio and television, in this case, from the 1960s, as well as the creation of shows of religious character. American practices influenced Brazilian Evangelicals. The shows of televangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart and Rex Humbart were broadcast, through the purchase of time, on television networks in the country.

Although Brazilian Evangelicals, especially the neo-Pentecostals, have used, and continue to use, the radio and the press as preaching vehicles, maybe the main

⁴ Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Methodists and other denominations that arose before the Pentecostal movement, which gained strength in the United States in the early 20th century. It is noteworthy that the term "neo-Pentecostal" is reserved to the churches created after the 1970s.

mark of their entry in the media is the insertion in the television market, with the purchase of RecordTV network by UCKG, in 1989. This network already had national coverage and was modernized by the church. The movement made by UCKG, based on the sublet of timetables in the programming of radios and televisions for the purchase of networks, is sought by other churches, however, it depends on the business structure that only few have.

The purchase of RecordTV was the culmination of a long process of Universal's involvement with the media, as Edir Macedo, early on, adopted the electronic evangelization. Before becoming the single leader of UCKG, Macedo hosted a popular religious radio show. The extraordinary growth of Universal, in a relatively short period of time, must be thanked, to some extent, to the use of electronic media. For Mariano (2004, p. 130):

Due to its unique capacity to introduce the church, its message and its religious appeal in homes, electronic evangelism has the advantage of being able to reach those who have no contact or relationship of trust, friendship and kinship with believers of the denomination.

However, the occupation of the media space by Evangelicals⁵ does not have only proselytist reasons, which are associated with stiff competition among churches (Campos, 2008). Martino (2014) notes that the acquisition of visibility by religion represents a possibility of making it a legitimate interlocutor in political discussions. And this has been exploited by neo-Pentecostal groups, in defense of their leaders and institutions and also in the public debate.

The media as an instrument of defense of Evangelicals

The critical scrutiny of traditional media groups towards (neo) Pentecostal churches has always been the norm, being frequent the accusations against Evangelical leaders of "exploitation of faith"⁶. However, the continued occupation of the media space by Evangelicals gave one more reason to be distrustful: the fear of unfair competition. The consolidated vehicle owners realized that the media outlets of the churches could survive with the money of the faithful.

⁵ In addition to the case of UCKG, several other denominations, with greater or lesser success, use the media (usually renting programming on networks). Among other pastors with current media presence there are Silas Malafaia, from AG, R. R. Soares, from the International Church of the Grace of God, Valdomiro Santiago, from the World Church of the Power of God, and Agenor Duque, from the Apostolic Church Fullness of God's Throne.

⁶ To describe the political career of Marcelo Crivella, Mariano and Oliveira (2009) recover a significant set of media criticism, sometimes similar to evangelical leaders of different denominations. Campos (2008) also speaks of the criticism of the press against the segment in the mid-2000s.

It is particularly noteworthy the action of Grupo Globo and its TV network in this critical perspective, as it is surrounded by trade dispute. However, UCKG can defend itself in the public media space now. The peak year of the dispute was 1995, when Globo aired, during *Jornal Nacional*, the video of a pastor from UCKG kicking a statue of Our Lady, in a cult broadcast on Record, causing bewilderment among Catholics. In the same year, the display of a “motivational” video in which Edir Macedo “taught” pastors how they should get donations also provoked indignation. In cases of this kind, RecordTV, to defend the church, tends to transform the criticism at UCKG in “persecution” against all Evangelicals (Pereira, 2010).

Cunha (2015) points out, as of 2009, signs of the approach between Grupo Globo and the Evangelicals (such as the creation of a gospel label, by the record label of the group; the inclusion of Evangelical characters in soap operas etc.). However, the dynamic is “still ongoing and full of religious, market and political nuances” (ibid, 2015, p. 72-73), according to the author. In addition, this approach tends to deliberately exclude UCKG, and everything indicates that the conflict between the Evangelical trade media and Globo will persist.

It is noteworthy that RecordTV is not structured as a network dedicated strictly to proselytism and seeks to adopt a “secular” format (albeit defending the Evangelical values)⁷, using commercial programming strategies. This relates to its goal of competing in the media market with the main TV network in the country, Rede Globo. UCKG, however, also created a network with religious purposes only, the TV Universal (former TV IURD). On the other hand, the sublease of programming from Record for the broadcast, in the mornings, of religious programming by UCKG has been, for 20 years, fundamental to the economic support of the network⁸.

The renting of programming is also a usual strategy in other churches. Thus, when news were released about possible restrictions on the practice, Evangelicals mobilized themselves to fight against media regulation, claiming “censorship.” And the leader of the Assembly of God (AG), Silas Malafaia, two days after the report on the subject (Wiziack, 2012), published on the website *Verdade Gospel* a manifesto called “The Government and the Workers’ Party (PT) want to control the media” (Malafaia, 2012).

⁷ The justification for the creation of an “Evangelical media” given by actors of this group is the antagonism between individualistic and hedonistic values of traditional media and the culture of religious conservatives (Vital da Cunha & Lopes, 2012, p. 119).

⁸ It is estimated that UCKG transferred R\$ 575 million to Record, in 2016, because of this strategy, which represented almost 30% of the gross revenues of the network in the year mentioned (Feltrin, 2016). The church may have plans to suspend this practice in 2020 (Feltrin, 2014), in order to legitimize Record in the advertising market as a “secular” network, but nothing indicates that the rent of programming in other networks with proselytizing purposes will be interrupted.

This episode, characterized yet by other manifestations from the Evangelical media against Dilma Rousseff, marks, according to Alves (2016), the initial moment of the removal of Pentecostals from the federal government, which reached its peak in the large group supporting Rousseff's impeachment. Also relevant is the coalition of this segment "with great part of the Brazilian media that also sees its interests and power threatened by State regulation" (Koren, 2016, p. 123).

Considering this resistance, the Minister of Communications released a statement and informed the retreat of the Executive. The concern has not had any more development on the part of the government, whose pattern alignment with the reaction was repeated in the case of "gay kit."

"Gay kit" as a strategy for creating a "moral panic"

Although in both mandates of Lula's administration (2003-2011) there has not been any progress in some agendas regarding women and groups of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transvestites/Transsexuals (LGBT) – abortion, civil unions between homosexuals, laws criminalizing homophobia, for example –, some researchers and activists claim that the overall balance was positive. Actions such as the Brazil Without Homophobia program, created in 2004, coordinated by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights, and the First Brazilian National LGBT Conference, held in 2008, justify the positive evaluation of the performance of the federal government. It was from the resolutions of the Conference mentioned that the National Plan for the Promotion of LGBT Citizenship and Human Rights (PNPCDH-LGBT) was elaborated, in 2009.

This also seems to be the perception of conservative groups and of the so-called religious bench. That way, when the demands of these groups began "to reflect on the Powers instituted, a robust reaction was manifested in the Legislature" (Lacerda, 2016, p. 9).

PNPCDH-LGBT made a diagnosis about the importance of education involving diversity and proposed the creation of a public-governmental cooperation project for public schools. This is the genesis of the set of educational materials intended for the approach and prevention of homophobic bullying in schools, pejoratively nicknamed "gay kit" by conservatives. Already by the way they called the material we can note the strategic positioning of the agents opposed to it in the attempt to create a "moral panic."

The interpretative key of "moral panic," used by Miskolci (2007) to discuss the issue of same-sex marriage, appears to have adjusted well to the case of the material in question, as it has been highlighted by Vital da Cunha and Lopes

(2012). The concept of “moral panic” refers to the “way the media, the public opinion and agents of social control react to certain disruptions of normative standards” (Miskolci, 2007, p. 111).

The “moral” character of this kind of panic is related to fears of changes in the social order or in its idealized conceptions. The symbolic politics of moral panic operates, according to Miskolci (2007), through a replacement mechanism, in which a group that cannot enforce its opinion in public debate changes the terms of the discussion. Thus, the agents of moral panic do not claim to be opposed to homosexuals or homosexuality, but rather to “pedophilia”; they do not claim to be against the discussion of sexuality and gender equality in schools or the organization and political mobilization of teachers and students, but rather “indoctrination.”

The media often plays an important role in the construction of moral panics, to the extent that it amplifies the voices of actors interested in promoting them, developing topics related to basic fear. One can see that by following the case of the so-called “gay kit.”

Educational materials, which began to be developed in 2008 and would make up an educational activity of the program School Without Homophobia, were created by an NGO from São Paulo (ECOS – Communication in Sexuality). They consisted of: 1) a guiding notebook to the educator (“School Without Homophobia Notebook”); 2) six bulletins geared to students; 3) poster for the dissemination of the project; 4) cover letters about the initiative to managers and educators; and 5) three educational videos with discussion guides. Training would also be provided to the educators who would use the material.

The public controversy began on November 23, 2010, when, at the seminar “School Without Homophobia,” held at the National Congress, the material was presented, albeit without having been approved by the Ministry of Education (MEC). It is claimed that the “trigger” of the controversy was the statement, in jest, of one of the representatives of MEC, the secretary André Lázaro, on the discussions, while preparing the material, about a kiss between two girls in one of the videos (Vital da Cunha & Lopes, 2012, p. 113). However, the unfortunate declaration may have been only a pretext for the attack of the groups opposed to the discussion of sexuality in schools.

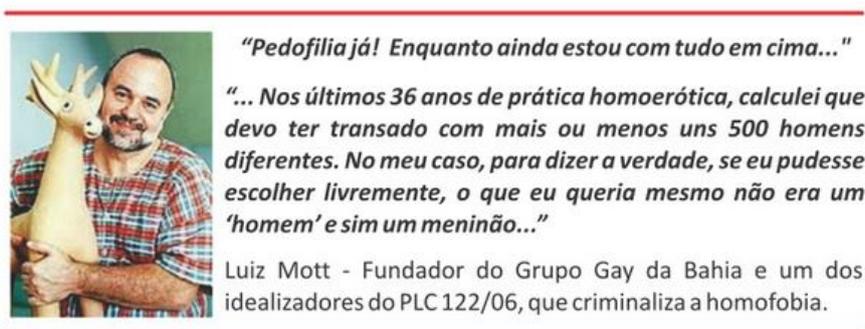
Thus, on November 30, the deputy Jair Bolsonaro (from the Progressive Party of Rio de Janeiro at the time), having already participated in a TV show to talk about the subject, makes a speech in plenary session⁹, with untruths (including

⁹ Available in video from: <<https://goo.gl/uX7bZo>> and transcribed from: <<https://goo.gl/so2ayJ>>. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.

that the material would be distributed to students aged seven years) and distortions/substitutions (such as the association between homosexuals and pedophilia: "This homophobia thing is a cover story to entice kids"). Such a speech made the deputy's supporters nickname the material "gay kit." In May of the following year, Bolsonaro produces and publishes a bulletin, which became known as "Information on Gay Kit,¹⁰" with a series of distortions in its criticism to the contents of PNPCDH-LGBT. This occurs "by omitting words, ideals and expressions. [...] a number of pejorative adjectives ('Gay Republic', 'Gay MST', 'Gay First Job Program', among others) that reinforce a normative and conservative discourse" (Grespan and Goellner, 2011, p. 106).

Bolsonaro tries to create a "moral panic" based on low attacks and "irreverent" inventions. This happens in the "biographies," included on the last page of the material, of the "Defenders of Homosexual Fundamentalism in action," shown in Figure 1. All signs indicate the anthropologist and activist Luiz Mott never said "Pedophilia now!", however, he bears a resemblance to a celebrity journalist, notoriously homosexual, who used the catchphrase "Dignity now."

FIGURE 1. Part of the "Information on Gay Kit," by Jair Bolsonaro¹¹



Source: <https://goo.gl/ERS5Lc>

Bolsonaro's discourse against the "gay kit" spreads, more or less mitigated, over the traditional media, with emphasis on RecordTV, which produces alarmist news stories on the subject¹² (Oliveira Júnior & Maio, 2017). In the developments of the case, the religious political representatives began to get a lot more involved

¹⁰ Available from: <<https://goo.gl/ERS5Lc>>. Access on: Feb. 20, 2018.

¹¹ Translated text: "Pedophilia now! While I still got it..."

"... In the last 36 years of homoerotic experience, I gather I must have had sex with almost 500 different men. In my case, to be honest, if I could choose freely, what I really want is not a 'man' but a big boy..."

Luiz Mott – Founder of the Gay Group from Bahia and one of the creators of PLC 122/06, which criminalizes homophobia.

¹² For example: <<https://noticias.r7.com/jornal-da-record/videos/comentario-de-ex-secretario-do-mec-sobre-kit-gay-causa-indignacao-21102015>>. Access on Feb. 20, 2018. The article uses the term "gay kit," naturalizing it.

in the discussion, attacking the government and the educational material, in an opportunistic convergence with other conservatives.

It is argued that three points, unrelated to the educational materials, worsened the conservative position. The first was the recognition by the Supreme Court of the stable union between homosexuals, in the trial of Actions on the topic, on May 5, 2011, which can be understood as a “moral shock.”¹³ As the attempts for the approval of this kind of legislation never advanced in Congress, the trial was seen as a victory for human rights activists and as a defeat for religious politicians. Another aspect linked to homosexuals was the concomitant discussion of a substitute to the Complementary Bill 122/2006, which provided the punishment for discrimination “by gender, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.” The religious bench nicknamed the project the “gag law,” stating that the religious could be “censored” for defending biblical positions. The proposal was filed in 2014.

The other issue involved allegations of illicit enrichment of the Chief of Staff, Antonio Palocci. Religious and conservative fronts, with members of the opposition and also of the heterogeneous “allied base,” take advantage of this crisis to bargain with the government, proposing that Palocci does not testify in Congress in exchange for the guarantee that the educational material would not be distributed to schools. The government gave in.

Many Evangelicals felt that the President had a “debt” with the group, for having defended (such as Edir Macedo) the then candidate, during the 2010 presidential election, from the charge of being pro-abortion. In fact, Rousseff said, before the first round, that: “in my government, we will hear systematically religious groups. This partnership is strategic for us” (Bertolotto, 2010). Reinforcing the commitment, before the second round, the candidate for Vice President Michel Temer went after the religious leaders. It is possible to say that there was “a clear adhesion movement to conservative values” (Vital da Cunha & Lopes, 2012, p. 100).

In this sense, one of the latest statements of the President, before the end of the debate on the anti-homophobia material, saying “it will not be allowed to any government agency to advertise sexual options” (Damé, 2011) was inconsistent with the historical trajectory of the Workers’ Party, but not with the dynamics of the election campaign of 2010.

The fiasco of the “Indoctrination Monitor” and School Without Party

¹³ The “moral shock” (JASPER, 2014, p. 69) differs from the notion of “moral panic,” as it refers to a disturbing event for certain group that favors the recruitment and mobilization for a cause. It is the case of the approval of abortion in the United States in 1970, which is associated to the rise of the religious right in the country.

On December 6, 2017, the digital newspaper *Gazeta do Povo* launched an internet platform dedicated to receiving “reports of ideological indoctrination in Brazilian classrooms, which would be published after rigorous journalistic verification” (Gazeta do Povo, 2017). However, on the tenth day of that same month, the company suspended the initiative, claiming that, after reflection motivated by criticism from readers and trade unions, had agreed with the argument that the idea could encourage a denouncement and harassment atmosphere in schools.

Although unorthodox, the initiative of *Gazeta do Povo* was not inconsistent with the editorial line that the newspaper has been adopting. In April 2017, the vehicle published several texts to clarify its “convictions”¹⁴. Previously, they had hired columnists aligned with its tendency, among them, Leandro Narloch (columnist of *Veja* magazine and author of the “Politically Incorrect Guide” to the Brazilian History), Ricardo Amorim (economist, columnist for the Millenium Institute’s website, which promotes liberal ideas), and the economist Rodrigo Constantino (former columnist for *Veja* and president of the Liberal Institute Council). Constantino himself (2017) notes, when commenting on the editorial project, that *Gazeta* has invested heavily in this occupation of territory further to the right, it took risks, put itself out there. I ask my reader: how not to repay this brave act?”.

The “guts” of the liberal-conservative project of the newspaper¹⁵, in the case of the “Indoctrination Monitor,” however, did not last. This initiative is aligned with the conservative agenda of the School Without Party (ESP) movement, which had been praised in previous editorial, because “it performs an extraordinary work, devoting itself to collect and report ideologization episodes in the whole country” (A Escola, 2014). In this text, however, the newspaper criticizes the legal route adopted by ESP to solve the problem, because, besides defending the cases of indoctrination should be solved between parents and schools, it says that “the law creates the risk of a sterile denouncement, almost a school mccarthyization.”

Despite this position, the newspaper, the same of the “Monitor,” had published various articles related to “indoctrination,” most of them reflecting the expansion of interests that ESP began to show.

Before explaining this point, it is worth describing, synthetically, ESP. Created in 2004 by the lawyer and attorney Miguel Nagib, who was inspired by similar initiatives in the U.S., the movement began to gain greater visibility ten

¹⁴ See <<https://goo.gl/jPPz9Z>>. Access on Jan. 20, 2018.

¹⁵ That is, liberal on economic matters and conservative on customs. According to Constantino (2017): “several classical liberals understood the importance of moral values to a free society. Liberals should not confuse liberality with freedom.”

years later. This occurred in the context of manifestations against President Dilma Rousseff, when ESP received support from leaders and conservative groups, such as the Free Brazil Movement, MBL (Romancini, 2018).

The movement began to grow after initiating some sort of legal activism, urged by politicians such as the federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro (PSC-SP), with support for the presentation of bills, at different levels, to combat the ideological indoctrination. It was also important that he added the moral agenda to his concerns. Miguel¹⁶ (2016), as well as other authors, notes that the ESP growth occurred after this operation. Thus, the fight against the so-called “gender ideology” has been stimulated, beside the concern with “ideological indoctrination.”

Ongoing criticisms and analysis of the movement highlight its conservative content, with a technical conception of education, and the threat of curtailment of freedom and autonomy of teaching in case the projects inspired by ESP are approved (Almeida Neto & Silva, 2017).

For what it could be retrieved from pages that are no longer online¹⁷, the “Indoctrination Monitor” on December 7 had as “Latest News” (at the bottom of the page) seven news stories (presented in the order they appear on the website) previously published by *Gazeta do Povo* on the subject, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. News Stories associated with the “Indoctrination Monitor”

Date	Title of the News Stories	Location:
10.24.2017	USP faz evento por “criança viada travesti” [Univesity of São Paulo makes event for “queer transvestite child”]	São Paulo – USP
10.11.2017	Drag queen dá “aula” sobre papéis de gênero [Drag queen “teaches” on gender roles]	Juiz de Fora – Colégio João XXIII
10.10.2017	Aula de química tem “Fora Temer” no quadro [Chemistry class has “Outside Temer” on the board]	Vila Velha – Escola Estadual Geoffrey Schneider
10.09.2017	Sindicato gaúcho usa alunos em protesto [Trade union of Rio Grande do Sul uses students in protest]	Porto Alegre – Elementary School
09.28.2017	Governo do Espírito Santo promove ideologia de gênero [Government of Espírito Santo promotes gender ideology]	João Neiva – EEEFM João Neiva
09.22.2017	Atividade de escola estadual tem beijo lésbico [State school activity has lesbian kiss]	Uiraúna – Escola Estadual José Duarte Filho
08.18.2017	MST promove doutrinação em Instituto Federal [MST promotes indoctrination at Federal Institute]	Chapecó – Instituto Federal Catarinense

Source: <<https://goo.gl/p236Ly>>. Access on Feb. 20, 2018.

¹⁶ In a reference to the country’s current context, it is noteworthy that this researcher, who analyzed the “indoctrination” issue within ESP, was accused of “appropriation of public good for promoting party political thoughts” by the minister of Education (MEC, 2018) for proposing an undergraduate discipline at UnB called “the coup of 2016 and the future of democracy in Brazil.” The minister received members of conservative movements pro-ESP soon after taking office; however, it seemed as if he was trying to distance himself from the movement, by criticizing the legal initiatives inspired by it (CRUZ and CRUZ, 2017). In this sense, his request for Miguel to be investigated is ambiguous.

¹⁷ WayBackMachine, available from: <<http://www.waybackmachine.org>>. Access on Feb. 20, 2018.

By the titles of the news stories, we can see how “moral indoctrination” became important, as four of the subjects are addressed to it, while the other three are related to “political indoctrination.” The “Monitor” had other pages, but they could not be retrieved. Thus, it is difficult to know whether he had access or not, serving only to “rehash” the articles already published by the newspaper.

Although the newspaper claims not to support the legal initiatives of ESP, for certain positions, as well as for news coverage that promotes the cause (and with nuances encouraging the “moral panic”), there is alignment between the vehicle and the movement in question. Thus, it speaks to the conservative sectors through the “political indoctrination” criticism and to the religious through the “moral” issue.

There is here a strategy of market occupation, from a conservative segment. In this sense, what can be understood as the ESP “populism” articulates a form of “media populism” practiced by *Gazeta do Povo*. The characteristics of the populist movement of ESP include its antisystem content, as well as the exclusive character, separating people into “good” and “bad,” the latter being seen as antagonists to be defeated (Hameleers et al., 2017).

“Media populism,” in turn, has two current definitions, according to Mazzoleni (2014). The first highlights the character of contemporary media, in general, and the second its ideological element. Thus, the first definition refers to a guideline strongly directed to the market and in association with the “infotainment” in journalistic coverage. To make the news more palatable (and, in the era of digital networks, spreadable), the preferred option is to make them simpler and more customized. If the situation is exotic, unexpected (classic news values), it is even better.

We find this type of strategy in the association between a prestigious University and a “queer child” or in a drag queen “teaching” at a school (in the first two news of Table 1). In part, in the political news of the same table, the “scandalous” nature they try to give to the events, according to the titles, has a similar populist content – seeking to incriminate what the *antagonists* do.

The second definition refers to how the media contents can be ideologically associated with political movements. In the news stories of *Gazeta do Povo* related to ESP, which seem to strengthen the movement, this tends to occur, although in the editorial, the newspaper claims not to fully endorse the initiative.

Final considerations

What are the resemblances and differences of the cases analyzed? The similarities include: the conservative grouping, the moral and religious element

(especially in the first case), the attempts to create a “moral panic” based on social changes (also in the first case) and on the “media populism” (especially in the second case, although Jair Bolsonaro’s “alternative media” can be considered populist).

Among the differences, first of all, there is the result. In the case of “gay kit,” this is explained by the Brazilian electoral logic, in which the dissociation between the presidential and the Legislative results are common. Thereby, the elected government, in addition to socializing with the opposition, needs to compose heterogeneous “allied bases.” The “strategic partnerships,” to use Dilma Rousseff’s term in relation to Evangelicals, are subject to the kind of tension we have seen in this article. And, more importantly, minorities have certain veto power.

This power should not be overestimated, according to Veloso (2016, p. 39), in an analysis on the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, because alone it can only obtain delaying favorable results.

The implementation of the veto power, in fact, is only possible when there is a significant part within the [Chamber of Deputies] CD that agrees with their positions or when the definer of the legislative agenda acts directly as an actor with veto power in the internal space to halt the progress of bills that are not in accordance with his personal beliefs, especially when this is part of the composition of this parliamentary front.

This strategy of the religious right can be associated with a more general pattern of conservatives of Brazil’s “new right”, who, for Delcourt, adopt an asymmetric counter-strategy in the democratic debate” (2016, p. 134), i.e. they seek to hinder the governance of progressive parties rather than formulate policies. However, it is important to ask, especially in the next election, if the latest proposals of this new right, as well as its forms of communication and style, tend to change in the direction of more constructive strategies. Maybe this can occur by the influence of conservative activities on other countries. It is noteworthy, for example, that the recent defense of the closing of Ministry of Education by a former minister of the Collor government (Cabrera, 2018) is aligned with activities from Trump’s administration, in USA (Bauman & Read, 2018). An activity of this type, which would put the curricula and schools under the control of parents and communities, may represent “a more advanced form of ‘school without party’” (Freitas, 2018).

Anyway, from a more reactive or constructive perspective, the activities and proposals of the right need social support. In this sense, the media presents itself

as an important agent of persuasion – the “moral panic” and populist communication strategies can be used for this purpose.

Now we can only try to answer why the “Indoctrination Monitor” failed. One of the possible explanations, of more general character, can be the actual context of the situations. While in first situation there was a left-wing party in power and the criticism on the subject was directly associated with it, in the second – at the current moment, post-parliamentary coup – we are under a government that groups the center-right parties, including most of those who make up the “Evangelical bench.” Thus, there would be little interest in wearing out the current government with this theme.

A second explanatory element, more focused on the media itself, suggests that the adherence to the proposal was far from representing commercial gains to the vehicle, meaning that “indoctrination” was of little relevance to most readers. In this way, we can maybe figure out the current minority character of the form of conservative populism that projects such as ESP have in the Brazilian society, as well as the impact of the ultra-right on the country.

Another media dimension possibly related to the failure of the “Indoctrination Monitor” is the low viability of new and more radical journalistic projects of conservative character in Brazil today. In part, this occurs because the great Brazilian press is already dominated by vehicles that embrace conservative perspectives (Lima, 2015). Therefore, the competition is high. At the same time, and maybe with more importance, the “mass self-communication” phenomena occur today (Castells, 2009), through the various digital platforms in which individuals can manifest themselves politically, and through the emergence of parajournalistic digital vehicles, aimed at the production of skewed or false information. As determined in a research with supporters of School Without Party on Twitter, these people can give impact to the cause, skirting around the usually neutral or negative coverage that it receives from the traditional press, by the strong use of “information” from these new biased vehicles, for example, *JornaLivre* (Romancini, 2018, p. 13-14).

This echoes the trend, initiated or already perceived more clearly in the United States, of the emergence of a “new media regime,” driven by cultural, economic, political and technological changes, which causes a “a fundamental shift in the relationships between journalism, politics, and democracy” (Carpini, 2018, p. 18). The author cited observes, in this perspective, the fact that a research of the website BuzzFeed¹⁸ showed that the twenty major false news about the last

¹⁸ SILVERMAN, C. (2016, Nov. 16) This analysis shows how viral fake election news stories outperformed real news on Facebook. **BuzzFeed News**. Available from: <<https://goo.gl/UygU5V>>. Access on: June 22, 2018.

presidential election in the US generated more engagement (comments, shares, etc.) on Facebook than the twenty major articles on the same subject produced by major media companies.

This “new regime” perhaps has already been perceived in 2010 by Jair Bolsonaro, considering his political activities related to the use of social media in the case of “gay kit.” The aggressive form of expression adopted by him characterizes the “new regime,” as well as the strongest tendency to commercialism by the traditional media (which explains to some extent the significant press coverage received by populists). These aspects, according to Waisbord, Tucker and Zoey (2014), indicate a great break in the contemporary public communication, which favored the dissemination of false arguments and uncivil discourses in the USA, explaining the election of Donald Trump.

Thus, the way that media ecology is reflected in Brazil and becomes an inescapable context of activity of political groups of any ideology is a significant research topic to understand the political communication in a post-coup Brazil.

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