

From the Time of Rights to the Time of Intolerance. The Neoconservative Movement and the Impact of the Bolsonaro Government: Challenges for Brazilian Anthropology

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Abstract

The present article discusses the recent neo-conservative movement in Brazil led by the Agribusiness and Evangelical Congressional Caucuses. Both fronts built and consolidated a confluence of objectives and political linkages in the National Congress to confront access to human rights. Neoconservative narratives centered on the “moral agenda” and based on the manipulation of Christian religious values have grown in Brazil’s public scene, countering concepts of gender equality, sexual diversity and reproductive rights. At the same time, an agenda of “legal certainty”, based on the interests of agribusiness, has dismantled environmental protection policies and blocked indigenous and quilombola rights to access land. This movement promotes the delegitimization of anthropological knowledge and of the sciences in general, while undermining the fundamental rights referenced by the Brazilian constitution. With the inauguration of a neoconservative government, intolerance has grown. As Bauman warns, one of the conditions of the dehumanization of the “Other” is authorization by government practices. The challenges facing Brazilian anthropology have increased dramatically in this scenario.

Key words: Agribusiness and Evangelical Congressional Caucuses; Neoconservatism; Human rights; Intolerance; Dehumanization.

Do tempo dos direitos ao
tempo das intolerâncias.

A movimentação neoconservadora e o
impacto do governo Bolsonaro:
Desafios para a Antropologia Brasileira

Resumo

O artigo apresenta o percurso no Brasil da recente movimentação neoconservadora liderada por duas frentes parlamentares : a Evangélica e a Agropecuária. As duas frentes construíram e consolidam no Congresso Nacional uma concertada confluência de objetivos e de articulação política para confrontar o acesso aos direitos humanos. As narrativas neoconservadoras centradas na “pauta moral” baseada na manipulação de valores religiosos cristãos crescem na cena pública e contraditam direitos à igualdade de gênero, à diversidade sexual e aos direitos reprodutivos. Na “pauta de segurança jurídica” baseada nos interesses do agronegócio, bloqueiam a materialização dos direitos indígenas e quilombolas de acesso à terra e desmantelam as políticas de proteção ambiental. Promovem a desautorização dos saberes antropológicos e das ciências em geral. Deslegitimam os referenciais constitucionais dos direitos fundamentais. Inaugurado um governo neoconservador, crescem as intolerâncias. A desumanização do “outro”, como alerta Bauman, tem uma de suas condições: o de ser autorizada pelas práticas governamentais. Os desafios para a antropologia recrudescem.

Palavras-chave: Frentes Parlamentares Evangélica e Agropecuária; neoconservadorismo; direitos humanos; intolerância; desumanização.

From the Time of Rights to the Time of Intolerance.

The Neoconservative Movement and the Impact of the Bolsonaro Government: Challenges for Brazilian Anthropology

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Introduction

“Why do anthropologists bother people?” was the title of the speech I gave in October 2017 at the Brazilian National Meeting of the National Association for Research and Graduate Studies in Social Sciences (ANPOCS). “Who’s afraid of anthropologists?” was the question that guided the panel organized by the board of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) at this conference. As the President of ABA, I had organized the panel together with ABA Vice President Antonio Motta.

With these two questions, I sought to reverse the tensions and fears arising from the growth of a palpable “neoconservative movement” in Brazil, sustained and promoted by two Congressional Caucuses¹ in particular: the Evangelical Caucus (FPE) and the Agriculture and Livestock Caucus (FPA – which I will henceforth call the “Agribusiness Caucus”).

The two questions turn back my fears on their sources. These fears were and are concerning the negative impacts of the neo-conservative movement on human rights and on anthropology in Brazil. They inspired and guided the research for and writing of the present article.

My greatest fear was the deepening of the logic of exclusion: the increasing understanding of Otherness as those “who do not deserve to have the same rights”. Or, as Asad (2011) and Bauman (1998) point out, those who should not be recognized as “equally human”.

I begin the present article describing the fears I felt in 2017 in relation to the loss of the legitimacy of public references to human rights in Brazil. I characterize this loss as largely due to the country’s neo-conservative movement. In the article below, I present the reasons why I have labeled this movement as such. I argue that since the 2010’s, but especially in 2016 and 2017, the neoconservative movement organized under the leadership of the Evangelical Congressional Caucus (FPE) together with the Agribusiness Congressional Caucus (FPA). I follow the paths of each of these groups in their production of anti-rights rhetoric and their blocking of certain public policies that hurt their interests. I present and analyze how and why the FPA attacks the field of anthropology, charting the emergence of new challenges because of these attacks.

¹ A *Frente Parlamentar* or “congressional caucus” is a supra-party association that seeks to promote federal legislation over a given sector of Brazilian society. The Ato da Mesa Diretora nº 69, of 11/10/2005, of the *Câmara dos Deputados* (lower house of the Brazilian Congress) establishes these as associations mad up of at least 1/3rd of the Congress. Article 4 of the Ato guarantees their right to be present at certain meetings, while Article 5 guarantees the widespread transmission of their activities through Congresses’ official communications. Nacional. <https://www2.camara.leg.br/deputados/frentes-e-grupos-parlamentares>.

I demonstrate how the neoconservative narrative has consolidated and show what its effects were on the 2018 electoral campaign and the ensuing Bolsonaro government. In short, I illustrate how Brazil has moved from a “time of rights” to a “time of intolerance”.

Fears and tensions regarding the future of fundamental rights, anthropological knowledge, and the social sciences

Who’s afraid of “agro-pop/agro-tech”? is one of my questions.

“Agro-pop” and “agro-tech” are two allegorical ways of referring to the activities of Brazil’s agribusiness sector. They are nicknames that have been incorporated by the agribusiness sector into its television advertising, praising their productive capacity to put “food on the table” and sustaining the high technology and genetic improvements supported by survey Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), which increase the productive capacity of the sector. “Agro-tech” and “agro-pop” advertisements are still on the air today, expressing this sector’s desire to expand agricultural land beyond environmental limits and in contradiction of the indigenous and quilombola rights provided for by Brazil’s 1988 Constitution. They also support the indiscriminate use of pesticides.

“Who’s afraid of the Evangelical Caucus?” is the second question that expressed my fears.

These fears were clearly not just my own. This question was the title given to an article published in 2017 by the renowned sociologists of religion, Reginaldo Prandi and Renan William dos Santos. These authors were bothered by the uncertainty of the political effects generated by the visible growth of the Evangelical Caucuses’ position in Brazilian public space. They concluded by calming their fears. In their article, Prandi and Dos Santos conduct a careful analysis of the contradictions and distances lying between the political positions of congressmen and the Evangelical electoral base. Their conclusion implies a forecast that, in my view, is not supported by the data they present. This is not because I believe that Prandi and Dos Santos should have arrived at an opposite conclusion: rather, I believe that they did not allow for the paths of voters and congressmen would take in the face of the then-uncertain political configuration that followed 2017 into the election campaign scheduled for 2018. In 2017, they authors stated:

Therefore, there is no justification for the fear that the growth of Pentecostalism in Brazil threatens democracy (Mariano, 1999, p. 231). (...) The Evangelical Caucus, which undoubtedly represents a new presence in the national public scene, gives visibility to Evangelical churches, but has not yet shown itself capable of effectively and legitimately guiding any change in Brazil’s course (Prandi and Santos, 2017: 209-210).

My speech at ANPOCS affirmed that in 2016 and 2017, the weakening of the narrative hegemony of the fundamental rights frameworks enshrined in the 1988 Constitution was already well underway, thanks to the growth of a neoconservative movement sustained by political linkages between the Agribusiness and Evangelical Caucuses. If could not yet see how these neo-conservative forces would actually behave in their pursuit of political hegemony, a public space had already been constituted resulting in a notable loss of references to fundamental rights. At the end of 2015, when the first moves to impeach President Dilma were being made, it was not yet possible to openly and carelessly undermine fundamental rights in the public political scene. This, however, had become possible in the course of 2016 and ’17.

This same feeling that I expressed in my speech at the 2017 ANPOCS was also present in the analysis of anthropologist Ronaldo de Almeida in that same year. Almeida’s fears seemed to echo mine. He related a similar perception of a “loss of rights”, pointing to the formation of a conservative wave and its connection to the Evangelical Congressional Caucus.

“The broken wave - Evangelicals and conservatism” was the title of Almeida’s article. In it, he pointed out that:

In recent years, Brazil has been undergoing political processes that have led to losses of certain conquests in the universe of rights, mainly constructed after the re-democratization [of the 1980s]. In recent years, forces working in favor of the containment, restriction and withdrawal of certain rights guaranteed with the establishment of the 1988 Constitution have consolidated themselves. Such a movement has been called a “conservative wave” (Almeida, 2017: 3.)

Was the feeling that of a “conservative wave” rising or of it breaking? Would the wave(s) all hit the “same beach”, as Almeida feared? Or would their “several vectors configured as playing boards” only “partially connect”, incapable of flowing in the same direction, but taking different paths?

What is configured as a “wave” is thus a tangle of several actors on different gameboards. It is divided into lines of force resulting from social processes which are by definition uneven, asymmetrical and with different temporalities. They are the social vectors of change operating across Brazil. I do not intend to attribute causality to any of these vectors for the current crisis, but rather seek to analyze how they connect to and configure the current conjuncture (Almeida, 2017: 25).

Almeida was aware of the crisis that the “conservative wave” caused and the uncertainty of the directions in which it would flow. However, what does a “wave” evoke? For me, it recalls movements that come and go, not necessarily the strength of a social movement that seeks to establish itself as permanent. Is the term “conservative” enough to express the current movement, its causes and consequences?

The neoconservative “movimentation”² (and why I name it as such)

“Wave” didn’t seem to be an appropriate term any longer. I thus began to employ “*movimentação*”.

The usual metaphors in the political and intellectual fields call for either the employment of “wave” or “rhizome” when one wants to emphasize different temporalities in the linkages between certain similar concepts. When one talks of “waves”, temporal configurations of close but distinct political conceptions come and go, with variable degrees of permanence. When talking about “rhizomes” (see Costa, SG, 2009; Koselleck, R. 2006. and Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F, 2006.), political conceptions are organized in different temporalities through the intertwining of diverse conjunctural roots: they are not the product of single roots that split into different rootlets. I agree that these are both good metaphors for us to think about politics. However, I prefer to use more traditional terms drawn from the social sciences when referring to how segments and social groups go about achieving their proposed objectives.

The consecrated term for this in the social sciences is “social movement”. One talks about “social movements” when one encounters social subjects organized to achieve certain goals. This term was and is especially used in Brazil and in the world to indicate progressive mobilizations in favor of the expansion of citizens’ rights. (Dagnino, 1994, Gohn, 2013). I use “*movimentação*”, a word derived from “movement” which literally means “movimentation” (but which we will here gloss as “movement” in English). On the one hand, this neologism retains the idea of a socially organized form of reaching towards goals; on the other, it emphasizes the polyvocal and disparate character of a confluence of actors in reaching towards these goals. Alliances and articulations constitute ways in which social movements operate. Unlike the more common use of “movement” in referring to progressive movements, I use the word here to describe conservative mobilizations.

² N.T. *Movimentação* in the original Portuguese – literally “movimentation” – which means more of a “moving” or “shifting”. In this case it is derived from strategies to link together movements to achieve common goals.

The objectives of these movements are antagonistic, but they act to link their leaders to broader bases while defending defined political objectives.

The concepts of social movement and social movements emphasize processes of social organization, whereas the metaphors of waves and rhizomes shift social subjects and the organization of social forces at the side.

Why a neoconservative movement?

Simply because “conservative” does not seem adequate.

I use the expression “neoconservative” because “conservative”, fails to express the distinctions between conservative thought prior to and after redemocratization and the 1988 Constitution. These distinctions are both in relation to conservative economic and moral thinking and in relation to the social changes that have resulted in the transformations of the capitalism’s material base.

Since the 1990s, new economic interests of different business sectors and their elites have been built in the face of the advance of a neoliberal and rentier economic policy. This has taken place alongside an escalation in the valorization of identity (Fraser and Honneth, 2003) that increasingly -- and contradictorily -- demands policies of social protection.

The basis of the movement I am describing here is conservative and right-wing. Conservative thinking in the Brazilian political arena has lost ground since the redemocratization period, however. In the public arena general, the rhetoric of human rights that has become the legitimate reference that has occupied this space, even if only to invoke future paths while acknowledging a profoundly unequal present. In the face of this, the conservative narrative had to be rebuilt, being transformed into a “neoconservative” variant capable of confronting the legitimacy of the human rights narrative. This neoconservative narrative is also capable of confronting the perception that the State is properly a space for social protection. The new financial capitalist and rentier economic forms labeled as “neoliberal” need to produce social subjects that fail to legitimize the State as a provider of rights.

The Brazilian capitalist base of the ‘40s-‘60s was founded on large rural properties and industrial concerns that gained space through an “import substitution model”. The conservative movement that led to the 1964 dictatorship was based on the interests of class elites in opposition to labor movements, agrarian reform, and the leftist forces that were strongly anchored in sectors of the Brazilian middle class.

In the name of threatened conservatism, the conservative movement established a dictatorial authoritarian power that brutally confronted leftist movements head on. This conservatism maintained a developmental project that boosted industrial diversification and the national technological innovation, however.

In the 1990s, an economic restructuring took place in Brazil, linked to adherence to the Washington Consensus, driven by neoliberal globalization and rentier financial capitalism (Bresser Pereira, 2018). This drastically limited the expansion and diversification of public services and changed the interests of economic elites in view of the growing powers of financiers and rentiers.

The PT (Workers’ Party) governments between 2004-2013 took place during a commodity boom that strengthened particular sectors of Brazilian agribusiness: the agricultural production, livestock, and extractive industries, geared towards domestic markets and exports. The agribusiness sector and its rentier interests moved to occupy a strategic position in the Brazilian political economy, which is dependent on the financial sectors and benefits from the state sector (Martins, 2019).

The years 2016 and 2017 saw an agglutination of two neoconservative matrices: the rentier neoliberal and the moralist neoconservative. These two matrices were separated in the social movements of economic and political elites, as pointed out by Weyland (2004), Solano (2018) and Gonçalves (2019) but they tended to move closer through political articulations. This was the case with the link between the Evangelical and Agribusiness Caucuses.

In the resulting “entrepreneurship boom”, the advantages and interests of new forms of organization of Evangelical churches as enterprises are growing. Their rentier interests are growing, as they are dependent on benefits and new tax exemptions.

The Agribusiness sector, represented by the FPA from 2008 onwards, understands the risks of not achieving its objectives and of losing its privileges. The members of this sector oppose the expansion of the demarcation of lands and territories of indigenous and quilombola³ peoples. They want to block this. They also want to curb the environmental sectors’ goals of limiting and monitoring deforestation and fires, while creating and maintaining parks and protected areas. The Agribusiness sector’s narratives are explicitly against constitutional environmental rights and indigenous and quilombola rights.

I call these forces “neoconservative” because they do not seek the long-term permanence of conservative economic, social, or religious thinking. Since the human rights movements (identity movements) erupted, the conservative forces that have wanted (or want) to oppose the secularization of Brazilian society and the growth of social movements for human rights, needed (or need) to organize themselves as a social movement. A reconfiguration of their agendas has become necessary for the production speech that is directly antagonistic to and critical of respectful references to fundamental rights.

In the political-electoral field and in the daily relationships of congressmen with the electorate, new social bases and new methods of “conversion” were necessary to break the legitimacy – at that point hegemonic -- of the rights to a diversity of lifeways and styles. The advance of secularization had largely eroded the conservative idea of a single and univocal model of family, morality, gender, and culture. The human rights narrative calls for subjectivity and self-identification and legitimizes plurality⁴.

In the face of this, Christian religious references have gained a visibility that they did not previously have in the Brazilian political scene.

We need to pause and reflect here, in order to show the distinction between present religious values and those of the past in conservative movements in Brazil.

Conservative religious elites (predominantly Catholic) remained comfortable until the years before the Constituent Assembly due to their close relationship with the State. They coexisted, albeit in conflict, with the heterogeneous political positions then prominent among Catholics. The Catholic Church, represented by the National Council of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), had privileged (although differentiated) access to Brazilian governments throughout the dictatorship and redemocratization. The Catholicism that covered the majority of the Brazilian population remained divided between narratives of the “traditional Catholicism” of the elites, the “popular Catholicism” of the working classes and rural communities, and “liberation theology”, which “favored the left-wing” and was based in grassroots ecclesial communities (Boff, 1996 and Noronha, 2012). Catholic Bishops’ and Fathers’ positions were diverse. Some supported or mediated for the leftist forces that opposed the military coup while others clearly supported conservative movements.

“Tradition, Family and Property” was the slogan of the Brazilian conservative movement of the ‘60s. The term “tradition” indicated, in part, the religious character of the conservative Catholic bases that mobilized in favor of the military coup in the 1960s. This is in no way comparable to the strength of (Evangelical) Christian religious arguments today, however.

3 Quilombolas are the current inhabitants of the rural black communities formed by descendants of enslaved Africans. They mostly live through subsistence agriculture on land that was donated, purchased, or occupied land a long time ago.

4 The neoconservative religious narrative opposes plurality, but it invokes the constitution of subjectivity, self-identification, and identification as something exclusively directed to subjects similar to oneself (one’s brothers). My hypothesis is that the manipulation/incorporation of the religious in the neoconservative narrative has led to its absorption by a large part of Brazil’s social segments. Perhaps for this reason, it has been successful for some (or many) of those who have incorporated the religious narrative into their and their “relatives” lives, moving away from the human rights narrative that refers to the plurality of “all”.

The technological possibilities of virtual social networks serve the interests of both the Evangelical and the Agricultural Caucuses. They allow exacerbated use of rhetoric detailing “enemies”, emphasizing a war between “good” and “evil”, and the robotic reproduction of these same messages, regardless of whether they are true or false (Cesarino, 2019). In the same way, the daily use of television and radio networks (whether or not connected to political campaigns) serves to produce a positive view of Evangelical agribusiness sector ideologies. The presence of rentier interests in seeking privileges in relation to State benefits is evident in the mobilization of both the Caucuses in the characterization of religious services as businesses and enterprises.

Each group had and has own neoconservative interests, but in the course of the political situation of the last year (2010) of the Lula da Silva government of the Workers Party (PT), the two fronts linked as a movement against the human rights narrative of PT government.

In 2013, the proximity and connections between the two fronts was consolidated and negotiated. On the one hand, the FPE or “Bancada Evangélica” as it is called, managed to “gather support from other Christian groups within the National Congress, when the subject is rights of the body, or issues involving the finances of Churches as a whole” (Silva, 2014: p.79). “Interviewees in the Agricultural Congressional Caucus believe that there is a pragmatic relationship of support with the Evangelical Congressional Caucus, in which both vote together on their main issues, reinforcing a performance that aims to impose their agenda.” (Silva, 2014: p.79). The two Caucuses also began to share members during this period.

In the critical political-party conjunctures that took place between 2015 and 2017, the links between the two fronts and their common efforts grew. The need for ever more supporters in the parliamentary political field demands and accelerates traditional “vote swapping”. It also allows for and speeds up the establishment of permanent support between different agendas that are perceived as compatible and confluent. It speeds up “conversion”, favoring points agendas that were not previously on agendas and encouraging the simultaneous participation of the same congressmen in both caucuses.

From the “time of rights” to the “time of intolerance”: the Evangelical Caucus and its links to anti-human rights policies

Evangelical leaders came into the Constituent Assembly (1986-1988) aiming to defend religious freedom and to put the religious values of Evangelicals into the political scene. Although the “moral agenda” of Christian values was already present, including the defense of life from conception, their actions focused on preventing the mention to prejudice to sexual orientation as a discrimination forbidden by Constitution. (Duarte, 2011)

On September 18th 2003, at a Solemn Session in honor of the National Day of Religious Missions, the organization and formal establishment of a multiparty Congressional Caucus (FPE) took place in the National Congress. The executive board was mainly composed by congressmen affiliated with the Assembly of God. The President invoked “the mercy of God and the name of Jesus” and “pleaded for the lives of parliamentarians and for ‘unity’ among them”. (Duarte, 2011 and Duarte, 2020 : in press).

In my view, the impulse to formalize the Caucus and make a “moral agenda” prevail over the entire Brazilian nation was caused in large part by the fear of Lula da Silva’s new Workers’ Party (PT) government closer approach to identity-based social movements (Frazer and Honneth, 2003) fighting for human rights. In the year Lula began his presidency, he created three federal secretariats linked to human rights, all autonomous and given the status of Ministries.

On the first day of the new government (January 1st 2003), the Secretariat Women’s Policies (SPM) was created. This had greater expressiveness and autonomy than similar, previous institutions. It was directly linked to the President’s Office and had the status of a Ministry. The PT government recognized the need

to produce specific public policies. It aimed to coordinate and encourage actions in government agencies, with a view to promoting the transversality of engendered social issues and ensuring that the National Council for Women's Rights (created in 1985) had greater autonomy and effectiveness than in previous governments.

The Secretariat for Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR) was created as a Ministry via a provisional measure on March 21st 2003. This was also the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, established by the United Nations (UN) in memory of the Sharperville Massacre, where 69 black people were murdered during a peaceful demonstration.

The Special Secretariat for Human Rights (SEDH), also with Ministry status, was created on May 28th, 2003, providing follow-up to National Human Rights Programs. It was highly relevant in the defense of sexual diversity rights.

The creation of the Evangelical Congressional Caucus aimed to strengthen its moral agenda against the legalization of abortion, against the union of homosexuals, and against the adoption of children by homosexuals.

However, it would only be in 2005 that actions to defend this moral agenda by the Evangelical Caucus became more effective and visible. The critical event (Das, Veena, 1995) that gave rise to the boiling over of the neoconservative movement, in terms of its moral agenda, was the delivery to Congress by the Executive Branch of a draft bill that “establishes the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy, ensures the procedure will be carried out within the scope of the public health system, determines its coverage by private health care plans, and takes other measures”.

The decision to draft a bill to legalize abortion was the result of feminist movement's deliberations during the First National Conference on Public Policies for Women in 2004. The draft bill was then drawn up by a Tripartite Commission appointed by the President of the Republic and delivered in 2005 by Minister Nilceia Freire (then the head of the SPM) to the Social Security and Family Commission of the Federal Chamber of Deputies.

The Caucus, on the verge of losing one of its most dear objectives, started moving, seeking connections in Congress in order to block the legalization of abortion. It created successive and concomitant “Parliamentary caucuses against abortion” and “Caucuses in favor of the family” that have been multiplying and diversifying⁵ ever since. The Evangelical Caucus linked up and was present in all the new fronts that were formed. At the same time, it sought to trigger (that year and in the following years) a movement of social groups against abortion, mainly recruited among its followers and the members of its churches. (Machado, 2016)

In 2005, I followed the Public Hearing⁶ called by the Social Security and Family Commission, to debate the issue of the abortion legalization raised by the delivery of the bill, which was associated with debates on successive and distinct projects for and against the legalization of abortion that had already been joined by special rapporteur Jandira Feghali.

⁵ The Evangelical Caucus was established in 2003 and has been active ever since, with about 70 to 90 effective participants in Congress. It holds meetings and “Wednesday services” in the Chamber of Deputies itself. Its is listed as an official Caucus by the Chamber of Deputies (Silva, 2014). The Caucus was formalized on 10/12/2015, when it reached the necessary number of signatures to officially operate as a Congressional Caucus (69/2005). The number of Congressmen who signed up to be a part of it is larger than its frequent members: there were 199 representatives and 4 senators who signed its enabling document. In fact, in September 2016 there were only 87 representatives and 3 senators who frequented the Caucuses' meetings. In 2020, has 198 parliamentary signatories in the Chamber of Deputies and 4 in the Senate. Among the new fronts created after 2005 (and continuously recreated) that are active in 2020 are the “Mixed Parliamentary Front against abortion and in defense of life” and the “Parliamentary Front in defense of Life and the Family”. Both are umbilically linked to FPE as part of the Caucuses' expansion. The recently formed Roman Catholic Mixed Parliamentary Front has 216 signatory members in the Chamber of Deputies and 5 in the Senate. However, the significant presence of Catholics in the Evangelical Parliamentary Front means that it is the Evangelical Caucus that is most active in the Congressional moral agenda, containing those Catholics (non-Evangelical Christians) who most identified with its moral agenda. (<https://www.camara.leg.br>)

⁶ I followed watched Audience as a member of the Tripartite Commission (representative of the National Council for the Rights of Women (CNDM)) and as an participant-observer accompanied by my then-master's student mentee, Anna Lucia Cunha, who recorded the debates.

Below, I quote the speech of a Congressman who was against the legalization of abortion. He invokes the idea that Brazil's laws must conform to the religious values that he considers to be those of the majority of Brazilian society. His speech clearly shows that the objectives of the Evangelical Caucus were already established in 2005, in terms of instituting a moral agenda of national salvation in the name of a "Christian majority", as if all Christians were uniformly in favor of the criminalization of abortion⁷.

I agree when they say that the State is a secular state. And when they say that the State is secular, it is because that is in the law: it means that it is not Catholic, it is also not evangelical, but it is also not atheist. It is not? Atheism is the contradiction or denial that there is any divinity. So it is a counter position to those who have a religion. Therefore, the State's atheist situation does not contemplate any religion. I don't want an atheist dictatorship here. A dictatorship of the minority. In a country where a secular State is guaranteed, it is also guaranteed that the State should not legislate for those who profess religious beliefs, but also not only for atheists. (...) Now, if Brazil, through Evangelical Christians, through so many other sects and Catholicism, is 90% composed of people who express some sort religiosity, this is a fact that must be considered when drafting laws (Deputy Federal Durval Orlato, from PT-SP public hearing, November 2005).

The neo-conservative movement organized along these different fronts strongly contributed to the failure to legalize abortion during the debates in the Social Security and Family Commission and to the subsequent withdrawal of the abortion bill from the Congressional agenda. The loss the PT government's negotiating power due to the accusation that the Party was paying out "monthly payments" to politicians to vote in favor of executive branch projects also contributed to the bill's collapse (Machado, 2016 and 2017).

Despite this serious failure and the growing neoconservative movement, I believe that Brazil was still predominantly in the "time of rights" between 2003 and 2009.

Feminist movements have been organized in large networks in the country and, since 2004, have been seated on the National Council for the Rights of Women. Representatives of the most diverse groups and segments of women and feminists (further diversified by identification according to occupation, region, race or sexuality) also participated in the three subsequent National Conferences for Women's Policies (preceded by municipal and state conferences) alongside representatives of the various levels of government. The Public Policy Conferences for Women in 2004 and 2007 incorporated the plurality of women's identities and proposed policies to combat racism and lesbophobia. Within the remit of the SEPIR and SEDH, national conferences were also created and organized, to combat racism and defend the rights of LGBTTQI+⁸ sexual diversity.

Meetings organized by civil society movements in favor of gender and racial equality and sexual diversity increased throughout the period from 2003 to 2015. As of 2010, however, antagonistic neo-conservative movements also grew.

On December 9th, 2009, President Lula signed into law the Third National Human Rights Program (PNDH-3). The following year was marked by strong and continuous conservative mobilization against human rights.

The FPE organized a successful movement in Congress to have Minister of Human Rights Paulo Vannuchi called by the Commission of Human Rights and Minorities to "render accounts" regarding PNDH3.

The day of his appearance before Congress on April 20th 2010 became a critical event (Das, Veena, 1995), making visible the political linkages between the Evangelical and Agribusiness Caucuses and the parliamentary representatives of the Brazilian Armed Forces.

⁷ A National Survey on abortion, conducted in 2016, shows how married, single, Catholic, Evangelical, and non-religious women clandestinely abort (Diniz; Medeiros & Madeiro, 2017).

⁸ Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, *Travestis*, Transsexuals, Intersex and Queer.

In April 2010, just a few months before the presidential elections, there was a public clash between the “human rights narrative” and the “religious moralities narrative” in the heart of the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative Branches.

PNDH3 received harsh criticism from the Evangelical Caucuses, as well as the Fronts in favor of the Family and against abortion, as well as the Agribusiness Caucus. The FPA was radically opposed to the proposal for “mediation” in judicial conflicts regarding the recognition of property rights based on traditional (purchased) occupation versus land rights based on occupation or invasion. If it had been introduced, mediation would not have favored Agribusiness.

Despite the fact that the three National Human Rights Programs (the first two in the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Government (Brazilian Social Democracy Party / PSDB in 1996 and 2002) maintained continuities with one another, Sergio Adorno (2010), points out the most controversial proposals that contradicted the interests of Neoconservative caucuses were presented in the third:

PNDH-3 introduced several innovations in response to the growing demands of civil society. Some of these provoked noisy controversy, such as the proposals to create the National Truth Commission, decriminalize abortion, ratify civil union between people of the same sex, consecrate the right of adoption for same-sex couples, banning the display of religious symbols in public government establishments, “media control”, and the adoption of judicial mediation mechanisms for urban and rural conflicts (...) (Adorno, 2010:13-14)

Quote an excerpt from the PNDH 3 that clarifies what conflict resolution (the proposal most rejected by the Agricultural Front) meant:

[...] prioritizing the holding of a collective hearing with those involved, with the presence of the Public Ministry, local government, specialized agencies, and the Military Police, as a preliminary measure to assessing granting of preliminary injunctions, without prejudice to other institutional means for conflict resolution (Axis IV, guideline 17, strategic objective VI - Access to justice in the countryside and in the city). In: Adorno, 2010:14.

The President of the National Agribusiness Confederation (CNA), linked to the Agribusiness Congressional Caucus strongly criticized these proposals.

Resistance from the Armed Forces was triggered by the creation of the National Truth Commission, composed in a plural and supra-party form, with defined mandates and deadlines,

[...]to examine human rights violations in the context of political repression in the period mentioned”. (...) and “to propose national legislation prohibiting that public places, acts and national and public buildings receive names of people who committed crimes against humanity, as well as determine changing such names as have already been given to these places” (Axis 6 - Right to Memory and Truth, Guideline 25, programmatic action c). In Adorno, 2010:17.

Based upon observations she made in master’s research (2011) that she undertook under my guidance, Duarte says that:

The meeting took place in a large hall of the Chamber of Deputies and an opposing and strong reaction came not only from Christian parliamentarians (Evangelicals, Catholics and Spiritists) but also from military and ruralist sectors and large media corporations. The meeting was already very heated and by the time the Memory and Truth Commission entered the discussion’s agenda, parliamentary representatives of the Armed Forces entered the hall, requesting the floor to dispute historical truth. Bolsonaro⁹ was one of these representatives and he made a point of

9 Jair Messias Bolsonaro is today the President of Brazil. At the time, he had been a federal representative for the State of Rio de Janeiro since 1991, having passed through five different political parties. From 2016 to 2018, he was a member of the Social Christian Party (Partido Social Cristão -- PSC). When he ran for President in 2018, he was a member of the Social Liberal Party (Partido Social Liberal -- PSL). Profession: retired captain of the Brazilian Army (<https://www.camara.leg.br/deputados/74847/biografia>)

stating that it was a “slander commission” that would establish revanchism against the military. He also claimed that the Workers Party had political ties to terrorist groups and that their then-candidate for the Presidency, Dilma Rousseff, was a terrorist (Duarte, personal communication, 2020, partially published in Duarte, 2020: in press presented in this dossier).

Sectors of the Armed Forces strongly resisted the establishment of a Commission for Memory and Truth. There was also strong criticism against the control and ranking of media sources that violated human rights.

Strong neoconservative caucuses with moral programs aligned themselves in opposition to the Third National Human Rights Program¹⁰. These Evangelical and associated caucuses, the Agricultural Caucus and parliamentarians representing the interests of the Armed Forces. In the face of this pressure, President Lula withdrew the most controversial proposals in May 2010.

My hypothesis is that this episode surrounding the PNDH3 human rights narrative made visible and promoted the political articulation of interests of the parliamentary fronts, triggering the formation a neoconservative movement that was more entrenched in Congress and rooted throughout electoral bases. Its agenda: combating and undermining human rights narratives and forming a more right-wing government, refractory to the expansion of fundamental rights.

In 2010, the conditions for the formation of an anti-human rights government were still not in place, in my opinion. The presidential electoral disputes of 2010 and 2014 took place between two parties – the PT and the PSDB – that historically did not oppose human rights narratives in their previous governments, even though these were contemplated with very different public policies. The parliamentary leaders of the Evangelical Caucus and their associated religious fronts and conservative social segments were divided between one campaign and another. However, they managed to keep the abortion agenda repressed in the two main candidates’ political platforms, in both the 2010 and 2014 elections. The objective of banning civil unions between homosexuals was no longer attainable in 2014, because in 2011 the Federal Supreme Court equated same-sex relationships to stable unions (secular marriage) between men and women.

The neoconservative movement sought to unite the pulpit and legislature by “converting” parliamentarians to their agendas and “converting” religious groups into electoral bases. An attack on gender theories and studies began, with the objective of “bringing women back to their traditional roles of helpmate wife and balancing family harmony” (Machado, 2016 and 2017).

Throughout the period from 2010 to 2015, there were permanent clashes between narratives founded on the social movements for identity rights (anti-racist, gender equality, and sexual diversity) and the “moralist” narrative (against abortion and against homosexuality), accompanied by the “anti-gender” narrative and the “school without a party” narrative¹¹.

During 2015, the Evangelical Congressional Caucuses obtained not only the support of the Education Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, but also the subsequent approval by Congress of a ban on the word “gender” in the National Education Plan (PNE 2014-2024). In November 2015, the Education Commission summoned the Minister of Education in front of Congress through Motion¹⁵, accusing the “State of committing a crime by inducing the elaboration of state and municipal plans in line with the final document of the National Conference on Education (CONAE) and in dissonance with what Congress has decided”.

¹⁰ The First National Human Rights Program was enacted in 1996 by the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government. The Second Program was enacted by the same government in 2002. “PNDH-2 is recognized for two approaches: the incorporation of economic, social, and cultural rights that had been overshadowed in PNDH-1 for political reasons and the rights of Afro-descendants” (Adorno, 2010:12).

¹¹ These questions are developed in Junqueira, 2017; Biroli, 2018; Carrara, França and Simões, 2018, Lima, Márcia, 2018, Machado, Motta and Facchini, 2018 e Machado and Motta, 2019.

¹² <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=1515623>. I participated in this public audience, invited by congressmen to testify as a specialist in the anthropological study of gender in opposition to the withdrawal of the word “gender” from PNE2014/2024.

In November 2015, the final document prepared by CONAE in 2014 (containing the word gender in the PNE proposal), had been published and disseminated by the National Education Forum as a subsidy for the preparation of State and Municipal Education Plans. There were instances where multiple public policies to combat discrimination and gender violence had originally been approved. In this clash, the neo-conservative positions clearly demonstrated their progress towards imposing their agenda in Congress, intensifying disputes with the Executive Branch and fighting against the CONAE and the National Education Forum as participative and deliberative institutions.

From 2015 to 2017, the Evangelical Caucus also prioritized the approval of the “Statute of the Family” and the “Statute of the Unborn Child”. These projects focused on defending the so-called “traditional family” and combating abortion, respectively. Of the 36 Evangelical Caucus proposals that went in front the Chamber of Deputies in 2016, five sought to transform the termination of pregnancy into a felony crime. These projects were supported by the other pro-life and pro-family fronts in Congress.

During 2015, the first year of the second Dilma presidency, neoconservative pressure and the two caucuses connections with other parliamentarians who opposed the PT government intensified. Eduardo Cunha, the President of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Evangelical Caucus was being accused of corruption, which threatened to impact upon his mandate. Failing to get the support he needed to stop the action against himself, he decided on December 2nd 2015 to accept and move an impeachment action request that was on his desk.

The pressures against the second Dilma government grew and the neoconservative forces were no longer content with what they could achieve through pressure alone. Financial, business, and Agribusiness sectors increasingly believed that their demands were not being met by the government¹³.

On April 17th 2016, the Chamber of Deputies moved to activate the impeachment process¹⁴. “Family and God” became the neoconservative slogan. These are the words that were repeatedly spoken by the almost absolute majority of deputies in favor of impeachment in their explanations for their vote. On May 12th, the Senate authorized the opening of the impeachment process and ordered the removal of Dilma Rousseff from the Presidency for a period of up to 180 days.

With Vice President Temer installed as an interim government, in June 2016, the President of the FPE explained and reiterated what he expected from the Evangelical religious presence in politics. Their objective would be to “confront the world”:

As the Lord’s church, we cannot accept the distorted concept of the secular State that they are trying to apply to Brazil. If we shut up, there will come days when we can only worship the Lord inside our homes. God called us to confront the world and not settle for it”, concluded João Campos. Pastor José Wellington thanked the presence of the President of the FPE, affirming that the church grew up with aversion to politics, but today, through well-prepared, honorable and capable people, it needs to have its legitimate representatives in all spheres of the nation. (President of the Evangelical Congressional Caucus speaks to AD workers in SP, Pastor João Campos (PRB-GO) (Tiago Bertulino 06/07/2016). <http://www.cleitonalbino.com/2016/06/presidente-da-frente-parlamentar.html>

The secular nature of the Brazilian State was clearly jeopardized. In “confronting the world” based on religious fundamentals, the hope-for result was clearly the democratic legitimization of said (religious) fundamentals as part of State power.

¹³ The FPE (representing both the Evangelical Christian political leadership as well as the leadership of the Evangelical churches) and the FPA (representing the agribusiness sectors) constantly pressured and confronted the PT governments. Throughout 2015 and the beginning of 2016, they organized in favor of the impeachment of PT President Dilma. Elites of the financial and industrial sectors also organized against the PT’s economic policies in the “backrooms” and in the National Congress, taking their followers to the streets. Emplacing a huge yellow “rubber duckie” in the middle of Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, in front of the São Paulo State Industrial Federation (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo, FIESP) on March 16th 2016, groups of businessmen and their supporters demonstrated in favor of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. Several demonstrations for and against impeachment followed in this same space. (Cruz and Moreira, 2016. Agência Brasil).

¹⁴ 367 representatives voted in favor of impeachment against 137 out of a total of 513.

The State's secular character is initially related to the affirmation of democratic legitimacy of power and not on religious grounds (...). The determination of the institutional separation between State and Church makes up the context of Constitutional protection at the (secular) principle, but it, should not to be confused with it. (Zylbersztajn, 2016:207).

Passing Constitutional Amendment / PEC 99/2011 became one of the Caucuses' priority projects. If approved, this would allow a series of churches to be included in the list of entities that have the power to propose Direct Actions of Unconstitutionality and Declaratory Actions of Constitutionality to the Supreme Federal Court (STF). Currently, this is only the prerogative of political parties, heads of the Executive and Legislative Branches, and the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB), among others. PEC 99/2011 would significantly weaken the separation between Church and State in Brazil.

On August 31st 2016, the Senate voted in favor of impeachment. Dilma lost her mandate to an accusation of "fiscal maneuvering" that, in other cases, would (and did) not lead to impeachment.

2016 and 2017 saw the continued approximation of the Evangelical and Agribusiness Caucuses with the Temer government, which resulted not only in the end of the expansion of human rights in Brazil, but also in gains for the two Caucuses in terms of tax privileges.

In 2016, the Evangelical Caucus organized the approval of an increase in tax exemptions for churches and obtained amnesty from fines imposed by the Revenue Service against churches - a total of more than 300 million reais. The principle that the State does not subsidize religious institutions was thus breached. Likewise, the concession of proselytizing broadcasting and television channels weakened compliance with the principle that the State should not subsidize religious institutions. Religious proselytism expanded through the use of the media power obtained through concessions from public authorities. (Zylbersztajn, 2008)

In the 2018 presidential election campaigns, the polarization that was already growing between the PT and neo-conservative positions was increased. No center party reached the second round of elections. The traditional opposition between PT and PSDB in the second round was also not maintained. This second round of elections took place between the PT candidate, Haddad, and Jair Bolsonaro, then the candidate of the Social Liberal Party / PSL (today without a party).

It's impossible to know, with certainty, how many votes were cast in favor of Bolsonaro, the winning candidate, in the name of the "moral agenda", how many in favor of him opposing the "human rights" agenda, and how many against the continuation of the PT governments for being perceived as left-wing or as corrupt. What is known, according to Pesquisa DataFolha , is that in the second round of the elections (taking into consideration the religious self-declaration among those who voted and excluding those who abstained or voted null), two thirds of Evangelical electors (21,795, 232) voted for Bolsonaro¹⁵ and only a third for the PT candidate, Haddad (10,042,504). Contrary to what Prandi and Santos (2017) foresaw, the evangelical bases mostly followed the positions of the political leaders of the Evangelical Congressional Caucus, in spite of said bases' heterogeneity.

Among Catholics, the distribution was more equitable: those who voted for the winning candidate were only slightly more than half (29,795,232 compared to 29,630,786). Among Spiritists, the largest proportion favored Bolsonaro, although without a big difference (1,721,363 to 1,457,783). Among those who claim to have other religions, Bolsonaro also won (709,410 to 345,549)

The proportions are reversed in favor of Haddad among those without religion (4,157,381 to 3,286,239), atheists (691,097 to 375,570), and among members of Afro-Brazilian religions (755,887 to 312,975) (Almeida, 2019)

¹⁵ See the political parties that has been a part of Bolsonaro's at: https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2018/01/06/interna_politica,651711/pulando-de-partidos-desde-1988-bolsonaro-fecha-com-o-nanico-psl.shtml

The authoritarian power of the Bolsonaro government is largely based on its manipulation of religion. This has been electorally successful through a very well-conducted strategy¹⁶ of speaking on behalf of (Evangelical) Christians to all Christians (without restricting Christians to Evangelicals). In the “religious” vocabulary, it is also easier to demonize the PT, be it for corruption and “old politics”, or for its “anti-religious” and “anti-Evangelical” stances in favor of homosexuality and the legalization of abortion.

The Agribusiness Caucus pushes the “time of rights” into the past

The beginnings of the Agricultural Congressional Caucus can be found in the groupings of parliamentarians linked to agriculture during the National Constituent Assembly from 1986 to 1988. These organized themselves in the self-titled Ruralist Broad Front (Frente Ampla Ruralista -- FRA).

The objective sought and achieved by the FRA in the Constituent Assembly (1986-1988) was the preservation of rural property rights in productive lands. At that historic moment, many landowners feared losing their right to rural property due to Agrarian Reform movements that sought to confiscate unproductive lands.

The objectives of the Front have expanded significantly over the following decades.

The ruralist caucus remained informal from 1990 to 1995, when it was officially registered as the Agricultural Congressional Caucus. In 2002, it changed its name to the Congressional Caucus in support of Agriculture and, six years later, it became the Congressional Caucus for Agriculture and Livestock (FPA)¹⁷, collecting signatures of at least one third of the federal legislative branch.

In the 55th legislature (2015/2018), 217 deputies and 24 senators were registered as part of the FPA. In the current legislature (2019/2022), it has 284 members: 245 deputies and 39 senators.

The 1988 Constitution introduced new rights for indigenous¹⁸ and quilombola¹⁹ peoples and previous environmental protection policies²⁰ were reinterpreted in accordance with environmental constitutional rights inducing governments to more precisely uphold environmental laws. In other words, the 1988 Constitution put some real teeth behind earlier environmental laws. Also important in this regard were the actions of the Public Ministry²¹, an innovative institution created by the 1988 Constitution.

The Brazilian agribusiness sectors mostly depend upon productive expansion, through the advancement of technology, but also through the intensification of exploitation of natural resources and land stocks. Because of this, these sectors have systematically confronted Brazil’s environmental legislation throughout the period following the 1988 Constitution, but especially from 2008 on.

16 For example, on election day, messages were sent out via whatsapp by pastors telling their “flock” how they should vote. (Of course, religious power only increased the appeal of this personalized virtual method of campaigning on electoral day).

17 Gustavo Silva conducted research in 2013 within the FPA (54th legislature) and describes the politics of the FPA as follows: “In its majority, it is made up of congressmen from center-right districts. It seeks to become an agribusiness lobby primarily directed towards maintaining agriculture as it is (and pushing away discussions with social movements within Congress), as large-scale production geared towards export to agribusiness multinationals. To this end, the FPA created the Agribusiness Thinktank Institute (Instituto Pensar Agropecuária)”. Silva, 2014: p.72

18 1988 Federal Constitution: Art.231. “Indians are recognized as having their own social organization, customs, languages, beliefs, traditions and rights as the original occupiers of the lands they traditionally occupy. It is the Union’s duty to demarcate, protect, and generate respect for all of their goods”. According to Carneiro: “Indigenous original rights should prevail over those of other sectors that later occupy their lands, according to the 1988 Constitution” (Carneiro da Cunha ,2018)

19 1988 Federal Constitution: Art. 68. “To the remnants of the quilombola communities that are occupying their lands, definitive ownership of these is recognized, it being the duty of the State to emit land titles to them”.

20 1988 Federal Constitution: Art. 225. “All have the right to an ecologically balanced environment, a good that is to be of common use by the people and which is essential to the healthy quality of life, it being incumbent upon the Public Power the collective duty of defending and preserving this environment for future generations”.

21 1988 Federal Constitution: Art.127: Caput: The Public Ministry is a permanent institution, essential to the jurisdictional function of the State, task with defending the legal order, the democratic order, and the social and individual interests that are unable to defend themselves.

Since the commodities boom of 2004, the agribusiness sector has expanded and its “concentrating, predatory, expropriating and excluding nature” has intensified (Fernandes, 2008). At the same time, it built up its public image of productivity, its adoption of new technologies in the countryside, and its generation of wealth for the country, all the while hiding its expanding concentration of power and wealth.

Sevá’s study (2016) on the progress made in Congress in the 2009-2011 period by the proposal for the new Forest Code sheds light on the political force and objectives of the FPA in changing environmental legislation, which the Caucus has developed since 1999.

In the Fernando Henrique government, changes in environmental laws reconfigured the Forest Code of 1965, introducing new restrictions and sanctions. One of these was the Environmental Crimes Law (9605/98), which imposes penalties and fines for noncompliance with environmental legislation and for lack of maintenance of legal reserves and permanent preservation areas.

In 1999, in reaction to the Environmental Crimes Law and other measures, Congressman Sérgio Carvalho (PSDB), a ruralist, aimed to make the Forest Code more flexible by presenting Bill (PL) n.1876 / 1999, providing for preservation areas, permanent reserve, legal reserves and forest exploitation. The Bill was discussed in committees and languished there for several years. The new requirements of the 2001 Provisional Measure to reforest cleared areas, which linked access to credit with compliance with environmental legislation, produced new tensions during this period (Sevá, 2016).

The decisions taken by the PT governments also increased tensions. Decree 6321/2007 prevented rural property certification (CAR) for those who practice irregular deforestation or caused environmental damage. Without a CAR, loans cannot be received for rural properties. Decree n.6514 / 2008 characterizes further violations of the Forest Code and produced even more discontent among Agribusiness sectors.

In the high-tension climate of 2008, the 1999 bill was untabled and taken up once again. Related projects were attached to it. In 2009, Valdir Colatto, a prominent FPA Congressman, presented Bill n.5367 / 2009 along with 46 co-authors on behalf of the Agribusiness Caucus. This aimed to institute a “Brazilian Environmental Code”. The FPA resists the idea that this project be “one more” rider attached to the 1999 Bill. It wanted an autonomous bill, but agreed to remove its proposal from the Congressional agenda in exchange for the creation of a Special Commission (installed on September 29th 2009) for the reform of the Forest Code. It argued that the formation of the Special Commission should take place with the ambience of the Permanent Commissions, allowing the FPA to have a large number of its members assigned to the Special Commission (Sevá, 2016)

The Commission had already been installed when, on May 5th 2010, long before its vote, *Revista Veja* published an extensive article entitled: “The Farce of Opportunistic Anthropology” (Coutinho, Paulin and Medeiros, 2010: p.54 -61) This was a direct attack by agribusiness on anthropologists, indigenous peoples, quilombolas and environmental rights. Its political objective seemed clear: it aimed to raise public opinion in favor of proposed changes in the Forest Code, producing an opinion contrary to the rights expressed in PNDH3. It was an attempt to gain special prominence for this debate during an election year for the Presidency of the Republic.

The interests of the agribusiness sector were made absolutely clear in this article, stating that Agribusiness needed territory to expand and situating it as an active subject in the “present and future prosperity of the country”. The article states:

Brazil’s continental dimensions are usually pointed to as one of the foundations for the present and future prosperity of the country. The fertile and unexplored expanses [of our hinterlands] could guarantee the expansion of Agribusiness and increase the nation’s weight in world trade. But these assessments never take into account the

part of the territory that is not and will not be exploited, because it has already been demarcated for environmental protection or for the use of specific population groups. Ecological preservation areas, indigenous reserves, and supposed old quilombolas today cover 77.6% of the extension of Brazil (Coutinho et al., 2010: p.54 in VEJA).

The falsely and unscrupulously claimed that ecological preservation areas, indigenous reserves, and “supposedly old quilombos” today cover 77.6% of Brazil’s territory. Official EMBRAPA²² data shows that indigenous areas represent 13.8% of Brazil while permanent environmental preservation areas represent a further 10.4%. Quilombola communities take up 0.4% of the nation’s territory. This is a total of 24.6%: less than 1/3rd of what *Veja* claimed. .

The article went on to falsely claim that “non-governmental organizations receive cash for the number of Indians or quilombolas they claim to defend” and that “anthropologists invent resurgent Indian groups, without investigating their historical ties”. (Coutinho et al., 2010: p.56 in VEJA)

This spurious story revealed that Agribusiness wants to expand at any cost in Brazil, be these costs environmental damage or the loss of rights of vulnerable indigenous and quilombola populations -- the same human groups that best follow national environmental protection directives²³.

The final report on the Forest Code was presented by Aldo Rebelo and included the proposals of the Agricultural Parliamentary Front²⁴. It was approved in a voting session of the Special Committee in the Chamber of Deputies²⁵ on May 24th 2011, and approved by the Senate in December of that year, being sanctioned by President Dilma in May 2012. It reduced the requirements for environmental protection measures and repealed the old Forest Code²⁶.

The Caucus had been putting pressure on the Lula and Dilma Governments and succeeded in significantly reducing approvals indigenous quilombola land demarcation. This did not seem to be enough for the members of the Caucus, however.

The Caucus thus acted decisively to block the expansion of indigenous lands and quilombola territories. At the end of 2015 and throughout 2016 and 2017, it created and installed the first Parliamentary Inquiry Committee for the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the Colonization and Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA) (CPI FUNAI / INCRA I)²⁷ and, subsequently, CPI FUNAI / INCRA II²⁸. The congressmen requesting the two CPIs were leaders of the Agribusiness Congressional Caucus: their President was Congressman Alceu Moreira (PMDB / RS) and their Rapporteur was Congressman Nilson Leitão (PSDB / MT). I will return, below, to a description and analysis of these CPIs in a specific topic, because I want to emphasize their impact on Brazilian anthropology.

22 <https://www.embrapa.br/car/sintese>

23 The *Veja* article reveals that in 2010 maneuvers were already taking place that would result in a Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (CPI) attacking anthropologists, the institutions responsible for the demarcation of indigenous and quilombola lands, and even federal attorney generals.

24 Gustavo Silva corroborates the FPA’s role in this, saying: “The discussions that took place around the Forest Code were the greatest demonstration of how a Caucus operates. The FPA operated more effectively than the political parties or the Federal Government in directly negotiating the changes to the Forest Code with members of congress” (Silva, 2014: p.66).

25 Paulo Cunha researched campaign donation made by “agribusiness and associated companies” to congressmen on the Special Commission. He found that of the 13 congressmen who voted in favor of the report, 11 had received agribusiness donations for their 2006 electoral campaigns – among these Aldo Rebelo, who received the greatest amount of cash (Cunha, 2017).

26 “(...)The new law is considered to represent a significant environmental setback for all of Brazilian society. Comparing Federal Law 12.651 / 2012 with the revoked CFB / 1965, there is a reduction in environmental liability from approximately 50 to 21 million hectares across the country. (...) deforested Legal Reserves no longer need to be recovered (art. 68); rural properties with up to 4 fiscal modules that held Legal Reserves at a percentage lower than the established minimum on July 22nd 2008, do not need to recover this deficit (art. 67) (Cunha, 2017: p.5). See also Campanha SOS Florestas_ Technical note, 2012 and Silva Junior et al., 2017.

27 CPI FUNAI-INCRA initiating act, April 6th, 2015. Creation Act, October 28th 2015. Constitutive Act, November 4th 2015. First meeting and elections, November 11th, 2015. Lifespan (with extensions): 11/11/2015 to 08/17/2016.

28 CPI FUNAI-INCRA II initiating act, August 24th 2016. Creation Act, August 30th 2016. Constitutive Act, October 13th 2016. First meeting and elections, October 25th 2016. Lifespan (with extensions): 10/18/2016 to 06/25/2017.

As an Agribusiness congressional caucus, the FPA's political leadership decided that it was not enough to simply obtain privileges or to delay land demarcations: it was necessary to overturn the laws that regulated access to land by indigenous and quilombolas populations. They also felt they needed to end Agrarian Reform.

At the end of 2015, together with the FPE and other politician groups unhappy with the PT government, the FPA mobilized in favor of opening the impeachment process and the subsequent decisions to continue and approve the impeachment of President Dilma Rouseff.

This discontent with the Dilma government the FPE, FPA and other political representatives of Brazil's economic elites in Congress and the resulting political instability of late 2015 have similarities to the conservative movement of the 1960s that supported and participated in '64 coup, as described by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos in 1962. (Santos, 1962)

The FPA's closer relationship with the Temer government allowed it to increase its demands and pressures and achieve further positive government responses in terms of obtaining rentier privileges. But these gains still seemed to be far from satiating the FPA.

Under the Temer government in 2016 and 2017, following its declared goals of stimulating the expansion of public policies for the development of national agribusiness, the following objectives were listed on the FPA website²⁹: 1) modernization of legislation regarding labor; 2) regarding land; 3) regarding taxes and 4) regarding rules for access to indigenous lands and to quilombola territories in order to guarantee the "legal certainty" necessary for the sector's competitiveness.

"Labor modernization" was translated into proposals eliminating inspections for slave labor. The Agribusiness did not accept the understanding of the International Labor Organization (ILO) regarding this issue, publicly proclaiming in 2017 that "small mistakes by some" had resulted in disproportionate impediments for producers in obtaining credit, as well as damaging their reputations. In 2017, the FPA also tried to change legislation on the inspection of slave labor through a new ordinance, but they had to back off from this goal (Rover, Tadeu, 2017).

"Land law modernization" was translated into the objective of increasing Agribusiness control of arable land from 45% to 90%. This resulted in pressures on disputed lands or those under judicial review, upon lands that could be demarcated for indigenous or quilombola groups, and on lands be understood as protected areas or limited in their use according to environmental legislation.

The "legal certainty" sought by Agribusiness required the restriction of indigenous rights. The introduction of adversary reports in studies of indigenous land rights recognition wasn't enough to satiate the interests of agribusiness. The number of judicialized land cases in Brazil was growing since the legislative requirement of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government for the State to introduce the contradictory principle (presuming the expression of divergent interest) before the State giving its final decision. The agribusiness sectors began to call for "legal certainty".

One way to block indigenous demands that was soon proposed by the FPA and then instituted by Temer's Advocacy General's Office (AGU) was the generalization of "time frame" limitations: a decision that had been taken by the Supreme Federal Court (STF) in the case of the demarcation of the Raposa / Serra do Sol indigenous land and which had been declared to be specific to that case³⁰. With the AGU's generalization of this measure, indigenous peoples who were not on their original lands up to 1988 would lose all right to those lands, causing

29 <https://fpagropecuaria.org.br/historia-da-fpa/> See "about FPA" : "history" and "goals". The objectives I mention were specified there during the years 2016 and 2017.

30 Cristhian Teófilo da Silva has analyzed the case of the vote on the Raposa Serra do Sol lands with regards to these time constraints. Silva, 2018.

previous jurisprudence to fall. Previously, the law presumed that indigenous people who had been displaced through coercion or had been expelled by the State did not lose the rights to claim and have their original lands recognized. This generalization of the “time frame” for indigenous land rights by the AGU is currently in front of the Superior Federal Court and has not yet been ruled upon (see Candido, Marcos, 2020).

“Tax law modernization” was translated into several measures, all of them conferring privileges on Agribusiness. One of these was the proposal that the Executive Order made by the Temer government for the benefit of rural producers be converted into a law “that would benefit the entire productive career” with a 40% reduction in contributions to the Rural Worker Assistance Fund (Funrural). This is a social security contribution tax levied on gross revenue from the sale of rural production and based on payrolls. Another measure was forgiving the rural sector’s 21 billion in social security debts as of in 2017. A third was the reduction from 60% to 40% the fine due to the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), created in 1989, for the environmental recovery areas impacted by agricultural activities. The FPA obtained these measures with no visible delay and the Caucus decided that it was thus “one of the most powerful and successful lobbies in Congress”.

In 2016 and 2017, the FPA advocated for faster and less stringent environmental licensing (fast tracking) and defended these proposals in Congress. The Caucus feared environmental inspection because not meeting environmental responsibilities were meant companies could not acquire financing. When Congressman Nilson Leitão assumed the Presidency of the FPA in February 2017, he explicitly stated that his objective was “accelerating the processes of environmental licensing”. (Canal Rural, 2017). A government needed to be built that was more in line with the interests of the FPA, so the Caucus worked in favor of the Bolsonaro campaign in 2018.

The FPA’s “goals” appear on its official website, entitled *About the FPA*³¹. But if the record of the Caucuses’ history remains, the goals themselves change over time. When I returned to the site in 2020, I found that the stated objectives were not as clear as they had been before. They are currently formulated in a generic way as “following the official national agricultural policy” and “seeking the improvement of legislation”. They seem to consider that the objectives of 2016 and 2017 have been achieved. They demonstrate that the Caucus is attentive to its role as an active political force, but that it is also aware that Agribusiness interests have been included in Bolsonarist policies, with their “anti-environmental”, “anti-indigenous” and “anti-quilombola” rhetoric (2019/2022). The Caucus is also aware that the “anti-science” Bolsonarist beliefs contradict the scientific alert that “climate warming” results from human interventions. They know that contemporary neo-conservative negationist narratives are extremely favorable to the unlimited exploitation of natural resources, sans environmental protection. In the long or short term, the Caucus will have to face the negative results of environmental damage to their own future productive activities.

From the attack on anthropology to the challenges facing anthropology in times of intolerance

Why and how did anthropologists and the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) become targets of Congressional Inquiry Committees (CPIs)?

Anthropologists are part of the working groups responsible for the identification and delimitation of indigenous lands and quilombola territories, within the limits of the administrative frameworks of the organs that have been delegated for this task: the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI - the official indigenist organ of the Brazilian State created in 1967) and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA -- an organ created in 1970). These demarcations are, in turn, dependent on the final word of the Federal Executive

³¹ <https://fpagropecuaria.org.br/historia-da-fpa/>

Branch in accordance with the rights registered in the 1988 Constitution. FUNAI is responsible for guaranteeing indigenous rights and the management of indigenous land identification processes. INCRA is responsible for the administration of public lands in the Union, for managing the allocation of land to Agrarian Reform, and for managing the recognition of rights to quilombola territories.

The attack on anthropologists was a strategic part of the confrontation over the performance of the Brazilian federal government. ABA (the Brazilian Anthropological Association) is often the organ that, at the request of the Public Ministry, indicates and certifies the qualification of the anthropologists who studies indigenous land requests and produce reports³². It therefore became a target in the eyes of the FPA.

Souza Lima (2005a) traces the term “identification”³³ and records that FUNAI Ordinance No. 255 of June 2nd 1975 was the first regulation that points out the need for the presence of a “surveying engineer or surveyor”, an “anthropologist”, and a “agronomical engineer” as members of a permanent Commission to define the limits of all proposals for the creation of indigenous reserves and parks. Soon, a law was promulgated following in these footsteps: Presidential Decree 76,999 of January 8th, 1976, wherein it is stipulated that the Working Group must be instituted with an “anthropologist” and a “surveying engineer”. (Souza Lima, 2005a).

The recognition of indigenous lands between the 1960s and ‘80s by the Union was followed by various lawsuits by the states against the federation, claiming compensation from the Federal Government for lands that were within state borders. In 1987, there were some 70 lawsuits of this type (56 in front of the Federal Supreme Court).

During these actions, expert reports were requested and made by engineers and other professionals, often without recognized qualifications. At that time, then Attorney Gilmar Mendes was also the Federal Defense Attorney (before the Federal Constitution of 1988) and defended the Union against the suit of the State of Mato Grosso, which asked for compensation regarding the Xingu’s indigenous lands. Mendes asked the Brazilian Anthropological Association to indicate a suitable professional to carry out a broad study on the subject. He considered that:

XXV. In view of the complexity of the matter and considering the possibility, quite plausible, that some expert reports are being distorted in order to end the indigenous presence in the vast Xingu territory, the Attorney General’s Office requested that the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) designate a suitable professional to carry out a comprehensive study on the subject. Accepting the indication, Dr. Bruna Franchetto presented a detailed report on the indigenous occupation of the Xingu. (Mendes, 1988: p.146)

And he adds:

376. The Union is also asking that anthropological and archaeological surveys be carried out by professionals of recognized professional and moral integrity ...” (Mendes, 1988: p.152).

This is the origin of the subsequent protocols and agreements between the Federal Public Ministry (to which the Federal Constitution of 1988 attributed the defense of indigenous rights and interests) and the Brazilian Anthropological Association. These agreements that have come to be characterized by plaintiffs in the CPIs “collusion”. (Chamber of Deputies, Parallel Report, 2017a)

In 1996, then President of the Republic Fernando Henrique Cardoso signed Decree No. 1,775, consolidating the need for anthropological work. In its 2nd Article, the indicates that “The demarcation of lands traditionally occupied by the Indians will be based on works developed by an anthropologist of recognized qualification (...)”.

32 See Souza Lima, A. C. and Barretto Filho, Henyo (orgs.) 2005 for clear analyses regarding the identification processes from 1977 to 2002.

33 Souza Lima has tracked the historical use of the terms “identification” and “delimitation” of indigenous lands, which maintain some similarities to their current usages, such as in the constitution of working groups made up of professionals and whose objectives are similar to those who believe that indigenous lands reinforce the “cultural preservation” of indigenous groups (Souza Lima, 2005a e 2005b).

The same Decree modified the procedure for demarcating indigenous lands (TIs) in Brazil. According to Minister (Jobim), the amendments aimed to legally remedy this procedure, introducing the principle of adversarial reports (*audi alteram partem*), which means the opening of a deadline in the demarcation process for the contestation of the limits identified for indigenous lands by interested third parties, including miners, squatters and farmers invading indigenous lands (SANTILLI, 1997: 07)

Anthropologists are also required to work together with other professionals on identification reports for quilombola areas. (See Oliveira, Oswaldo M., 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018 and the Associação Brasileira de Antropologia, ABA, 2015).

Whether in the public notification for the selection of coordinators of working groups for the identification of indigenous lands, or in the appointment of experts by the Brazilian Anthropological Association³⁴ for the Federal Public Ministry (when so requested), the requirements for recognized qualification are the same. These are based having a graduate degree in anthropology, experience in indigenous ethnology, knowledge of the process of land regularization of indigenous lands in Brazil and, preferably, specific knowledge about the territory, ethnic group and /or indigenous community to be studied.

In the documents required for the constitution of the CPIs as well as in their summons of anthropologists as witnesses, accusations of “fraud” and “collusion” appear in different forms. There is the accusation in CPI Funai / Incra 2 Application No. 86/2016, addressed to the ABA (Câmara dos Deputados, 2016) that “anthropologists have no ethical, legal limit or even respect for the people illegally affected by their reckless, fraudulent and tyrannical behavior”. This accusation of anthropological “tyranny” was made in the name of the defense of colonists who had occupied indigenous lands still under study for official recognition or who had even occupied already demarcated lands. If the land were declared to be non-indigenous, its future was open so that it could be bought and sold on the market. This was a result that was directly in line with the interests of expanding Agribusiness. Even though “tyranny” and “ethics” are accusations that appear in these CPIs in the name of “colonists”, they cannot, by themselves, be the basis for a CPI.

The charge was “fraud” and “collusion”. By “fraud”, it was understood that anthropologists were always partial to indigenous and quilombola interests. “Collusion” meant the meetings of the Brazilian Anthropological Association with the Federal Public Ministry of the Sixth Chamber (legally responsible for monitoring indigenous constitutional rights) or with the Ford Foundation, which financed proposed, and approved human rights projects. Photos of these meetings became “evidence” of the internationalization of Brazilian resources in illicit and fraudulent activities. According to the CPI, these meetings were illegal because they favored indigenous interests before the reports were conducted. The function of anthropologists in making reports

34 At the end of 2015, then President of the Brazilian Anthropological Association, Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, was called before the CPI and the bank account and fiscal secrecy of ABA and its President were to be broken. President Souza Lima made every effort to prevent these breaches of banking and fiscal secrecy. He successfully filed an injunction on July 12th 2016 and he organized the defense of ABA. He was present for his summons on December 8th 2015, but due to the progress of the hearings, he was not called to testify. When I took over the presidency of ABA in January 2017, my efforts were to ensure that the second CPI, installed on October 25th 2016 and in force until June 2017, would not once again call for a breach of fiscal secrecy, nor summon the President of ABA. At the same time, we continue to prepare the defense of ABA and of anthropologists, if called upon. We participated, together with the non-governmental organizations cited and convened by the CPI, in the defense of anthropologists, indigenous, quilombola, and environmental interests. I appealed to congressmen outside and inside of the CPI, particularly those who were not aligned with the interests of the CPI and who recognized ABA as a scientific institution. I am grateful to these parliamentarians and I understand that the in-session invocation by one of the parliamentarians of anthropologist Ruth Cardoso, first lady in the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration, helped in this political space, creating for some for a more positive view of ABA. There were countless meetings that held between myself as ABA president, the ABA General Secretary (Cristhian Teófilo da Silva) and the ABA Indigenous Affairs Commission Coordinator (Henyó Trindade Barreto Filho) with various non-governmental organizations and with the parliamentarians of the CPI who were contrary to the majority position. We were present at public meetings of the CPI and in corridors and antechambers and we were thus able to observe the FPA congressmen who were in charge of the CPI. Henyó was instrumental in drafting the Report in defense of ABA, which appears as an annex to the Separate Vote of Deputies Nilto Tatto and the others (Câmara dos Deputados, 2017a) who opposed the Final Report Opinion. In the Final Report of the Commission, Nilson Leitão and others (Câmara dos Deputados, 2017b) propose the indictment of 25 anthropologists and several civil servants from FUNAI, INCRA, and non-governmental organizations.

and studies is not to favor indigenous interests, but rather to verify whether or not there is compatibility between the concrete conditions experienced by indigenous communities and peoples in their lands and the conditions put in place and instituted by the constitutional formulation that established indigenous rights to traditionally occupied lands. Likewise, the territorial rights of quilombolas depend on anthropological verification as to whether there is compatibility between the concrete conditions of traditional occupation by an organized community, originating from ex-slaves, and the constitutional requirements for the recognition of rights to quilombola territories.

CPI Application No. 16/2015 is definitive: “the Circumstantial Report that was produced by anthropologist Flávia Cristina de Mello is a fraud”; “In carrying out her work, it was proven that the anthropologist falsified information”; “Her performance as an anthropologist was totally unethical” (Câmara dos Deputados, 2015: 6-7).

On December 1, 2015, the first public hearing was held, with Flávia Cristina de Mello, responsible for the anthropological report that identified the Indigenous Lands of Mato Preto, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, being summoned before Congress. (For a detailed analysis of the deposition of Flávia de Mello and the entire CPI FUNAI / INCRA, see Dalla Costa’s Master’s dissertation, 2019).

In the CPI session, one of the congressmen asked the anthropologist “Before you did the job, you already had ties to this community there, right?”

The anthropologist replied:

Yes, that was one of the prerequisites of the call for employment. (..) It required an undergraduate degree in social sciences and a graduate degree in anthropology. (...) experience in indigenous ethnology, knowledge about the process of land tenure regularization of indigenous lands in Brazil and, “preferably, specific knowledge about the territory, ethnic group and / or the indigenous community to be studied”. That is, these prerequisites are being used to accuse me of bias, when, in fact they were a request [by the government itself]. These were the requirements of the call. The anthropologist to be hired was expected to have knowledge of the ethnic group in question and -- here I quote literally -- “and / or the indigenous community to be studied”. And this announcement was a public announcement, published in the Official Gazette, and people who could meet these qualification requirements signed up. (...)

The anthropologist also listened to the non-indigenous occupants of the land in question and this made up the adversarial position that needed to be in the report. According to Mello :

The farmers were heard, there were meetings and interviews, and there was a public meeting (...) which was broadcast on the radio (...). This meeting was also attended by the Mayor of the city (...) and the Union of Farmers. Anyway, the technical group made a point of listening to all parties, (...) And the right of contradiction, it seems to me, was fully exercised. (...) The technical group made a point of listening to all parties and, in that meeting, I obviously informed [all] about the rights to a adversarial opinion, which start from the first day of the promulgation of the ordinance that instituted the WG, up to 90 days after the approval of the report. And that right of contradiction, it seems to me, has been fully exercised.

The CPI thus not only accused the technical studies of land and territory delimitation of producing “partial” reports and, therefore, of being “fraudulent”, but also ended up criticizing anthropological methodologies as such deep ethnographic study, which requires sustained contact with the population in question. Previous studies of medium or long duration, which are required for the indication or selection of an anthropologist to make a report, are required in the academic and scientific world for the production of dissertations, doctoral theses, and academic research.

For Deborah Duprat, the Deputy Attorney General of the Republic in 2006 and coordinator of the 6th Coordination and Review Chamber of the Federal Public Ministry responsible for guaranteeing indigenous rights, the establishment of a link between the anthropologist and the studied group is essential to be able to understand and translate the indigenous group's forms of lived existence. This is necessary to avoid reproducing an ethnocentric vision of the group:

It is important to point out that anthropologist does not and cannot have a neutral position in relation to his research, in the sense of objectifying and defining a certain domain based on norms or standards external to the group being studied, as this would deprive them of their normative strength. Thus, the anthropological study aimed at identifying a traditional territory presupposes understanding and translating the ways in which the group sees itself according to its existential trajectory; how it sees and knows the world, how it is organized in it. Duprat, 2006).

In making their reports, anthropologists also consult historical documents regarding the occupation of the disputed lands. They describe whether or not the indigenous peoples in question were expelled or forcibly removed and whether or not there was occupation of the land by colonists with or without State incentives. They also indicate whether or not expelled populations migrated to territories around their original area.

At the end of the session, opposition deputy Erika Kokay (PT / DF), who did not belong to the Agribusiness Caucus but was a member of the CPI, revealed her indignation as to how the application for a CPI was constructed without any concrete basis to justify the investigation:

An accusation by farmers who wanted to have the right to the land against the decision of the report was simply copied and became the demand for the constitution of a CPI!

A counter-narrative opposing indigenous, quilombola, and environmental rights was organized in the CPI, settled, and solidified and was solidified under the Temer and Bolsonaro governments (See Chiaretti and Souza, 2020). Since then, there have been changes in legislation, the dismantling and weakening of the state institutions responsible for indigenous rights (FUNAI), quilombola rights and access to Agrarian Reform (INCRA), and the weakening of the state institutions responsible for the inspection of environmental rights and obligations (IBAMA) and for the conservation of biodiversity in conservation areas (the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBIO) created in 2007).

In the same way, a counter-narrative of anthropological and anthropological practices was constituted, accusing anthropologists of unscientific partiality and ignoring the fact that anthropological research is based on scientific evidence and on deep ethnographic methods that are fully compatible with the perspective of anthropologists who ethically perceive indigenous otherness as fully human, with access to rights.

In 2019, already under the Bolsonaro government, anthropologist Ricardo Verdum, then Deputy Coordinator of the ABA Commission on Indigenous Affairs, pointed out the extreme difficulty of the conditions anthropologists face in relation to the demand for recognition of indigenous lands:

There are 400 demands for indigenous land identification currently backed up in FUNAI and the situation has worsened considerably due to the explicit orientation of [the current government] to not recognize indigenous territories. A series of indigenous lands are being invaded. The best known and most serious case is that of the Yanomami, in which there are thousands of prospectors occupying Native lands and the government stopped doing anything about it. One must recall that the President, when he was a federal deputy in 1993, presented a bill that asked for recognition of Yanomami territory to be nullified. Each time the deadline expired, he presented it again. In other words, he spent more than 25 years presenting bills to reverse the process of recognizing Yanomami land.

In the National Congress there are sectors that want to review indigenous lands. There is PEC (Constitutional Amendment Proposal) 215, which proposes that, after FUNAI's work is done, all demarcations of indigenous lands be forwarded to the National Congress for approval. It seems democratic, but the people behind it are the Agribusiness folks and the mining companies, because whatever ends up there in Congress will be stopped. [PEC 215] also opens up the possibility of revising indigenous lands that have already demarcated or ratified. If that happens, depending on the correlation of forces and interests, things will become very difficult (interview with Ricardo Verдум published in the online newspaper *apublica* by Oliveira, 2019).

Anthropologists were soon removed from their activities in preparing reports and technical studies. The current government not only blocks the progress of new land recognition processes but has also blocked those underway. Anthropologists in the working groups have been replaced with other professionals. On November 4th 2019, the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) used its “abant, org.br” portal to release a note denouncing that “people without the minimum qualifications or legitimacy, and without any legal protection, are being nominated in the National Foundation of the Indian (FUNAI) to coordinate and carry out studies for the identification and delimitation of Indigenous Lands”.

“It's the indigenous people are going to bear the damage. (...) There is already a general orientation in this government to not to delimit, demarcate, or recognize any indigenous or quilombola territories. If these groups go to the field, what may happen is that they will consider that those people are not indigenous and thus have no right to land”, it explains. Recent changes at FUNAI corroborate what the ABA representative says. In the Tuxi Working Group, created on August 15th, anthropologists were replaced by agronomists in addition to (...) philosophy graduates. (interview by Ricardo Verдум published in the online newspaper *apublica* by Oliveira, 2019).

The impact of a government that is dehumanizing and averse to human rights, because it does not consider affected populations as subject to protection, has been devastating. This is particularly true for a large part of the field of Anthropology that works directly with the communities affected by the dismantling of the State organs responsible for the defense of their rights. Costa Filho (2020), for example, feels out of place even without having left the same work space he has always occupied in field research with quilombola communities and the university.

How can we reflect and think about our relationships with the communities we study?

The anthropology of indigenous groups in Brazil in the 20th century occurs in conditions in which indigenous groups were a minority in relation to the nation state. While in Africa there was -- and still is -- an often fragmented struggle between indigenous groups and other social segments concerning policies for the creation of “native states”, indigenous groups in Brazil are a distinct minority (Castro, Josué, 2008). In the period of democratization consolidated in the 1988 Constitution, anthropologists who studied indigenous and quilombola communities focused almost inexorably on the indigenous rights that needed to be recognized by the State (Barretto Filho, 2018; Barretto Filho and Ramos, 2019; and O'Dwyer and Silva, 2020). They often became “cultural mediators”, in the words of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (2006).

Castro's 2008 reflections regarding this situation remain current:

(...) [we must] reinforce all necessary care so that we are not caught by the methodological traps of the ethnographic process, or be deceived by the blurred images of the ethnographic experience. Both dangers can only be minimized by the ethnographic effort itself. It is in the field, in daily contact with our dilemmas, that we can improve the quality of such images and reflect on new methodological constructions (Castro, 2008: p.89-90)

Anthropological studies related to gender and the intersectionalities of gender, race, class, and sexual diversity begin with the existence of bonds with the groups studied, or produce them in the course of their research. Almost always, they end up expressing the demand for rights of the groups studied within a scenario of high politicization of these rights in Brazilian society (Carrara, S., 2016; Lima, Márcia, 2018 and Moutinho, Buarque and Simões, 2020).

For a large part of Brazilian anthropology, it is almost impossible to stop making links with the communities anthropologists study; impossible not to be inserted in their social relations. It is impossible to consider political neutrality or a positivist neutrality in these situations. Even Max Weber (1999 and 2003), who proposed an “axiological neutrality”, declared that insertion in the world of the senses and social relations is necessary to be able to build knowledge from a meaningful perspective.

There is no social science that looks on the world from “nowhere” or that observes reality from a higher (or divine) place (Haraway, 1995). The situated gaze of anthropology, however, is a gaze that obeys scientific methodologies shared among researchers. It is not a fiction. The postmodern debate in anthropology has strongly insisted on the need to reveal this situated view (Clifford, James, 1986). But in this refocusing of attention on the researcher who writes, a caricature has been created that anthropology is a fiction: it is not and never has been. In this moment of war between truths and lies, this point must deserve special attention from the anthropological community.

The revealing of a researcher’s positionality is of fundamental importance, not so that we may imagine that one is gazing out from nowhere (a presumptive neutral space) or that one is fixed in place or embedded, without any distance from the community being researched. Positionality is necessary to propose and show what occurs when the researcher’s analytical gaze meets the subjects taken as the object of research, and in what positions everyone occupies in the sea of the social relations in which they are immersed. Analytical research makes the researcher subject to new knowledge, but this may be full of the perception of the rights of the communities she studies.

Indigenous, black and quilombola anthropologists are increasingly essential for the continuity and renewal of Brazilian anthropology. In large part, they will be located in the tradition of the studies of rights in Brazilian society, which are increasingly being put at risk.

In the time of intolerance: towards the dehumanization of the Other

The human rights framework³⁵ presented in the Brazilian Constitution since 1988 has increasingly lost space in the narratives and public policies of the Bolsonaro government. Intolerance of gender, race, and ethnicity increases in Brazil and things are moving towards increasing dehumanization. Based on State power exercised in the name of a neo-conservative government increased intolerance and dehumanization of segments of Brazilian society is invoked and provoked.

To better understand what is happening in Brazil, it is first of all necessary to reflect (albeit briefly) upon the concepts of intolerance and dehumanization.

It was the religious wars of the 16th century that made the terms “tolerance” and “intolerance” extremely relevant for the construction of co-existence between religions. With regards to the 19th century, Wismann reminds us of Goethe’s relativization of tolerance: “tolerating is injurious” (Goethe, Apud Wismann, 2000: 100). Tolerance should be the first step towards understanding otherness. The recognition of the Other and the recognition of otherness demands more: it demands that the Other be seen face-to-face (Levinas, 1997). It demands respect for the similarity of humanity and “differences” that, by themselves, do not have explanations.

³⁵ This was always present in governmental narratives that delineated public policies following the 1988 Constitution, although its effectiveness varied from government to government and always fell short of its goals.

This face-to-face encounter should not take place in a specular way, as if the Other were “less” than the “self”: a “fallen self”, or a “lower self”. Such a view of the Other is the basis of the concept of intolerance. Meetings need to take place between humans who face each other, not only within the same society or social segment but between different cultures and social segments.

The concept of intolerance can be philosophically linked (Fuks, 2007) to the Freudian psychoanalytic concept of the “narcissism of small differences”. (Freud, Sigmund {1918} (1976). This concept makes us think of the intolerance that appears in the face of the Other over a small difference. The Other’s small differences give us a mirror for our own fear of not being perfect. Freud leads us to think that imperfection is not only the intolerance (and superiority) of the male in relation to the female over what he sees as “lack of a penis”, but also the male fear of having an “imperfect penis”, or of “misusing one’s penis”, as the contemporary conservative homophobic language, so revered by the neo-conservative movement, describes it.

Freud goes further. His writings ({1939}, 1976, and 1982) point out how intolerance towards the Jewish people is based upon and seems to be justified by the symbol of the circumcised penis, seen as imperfect and frightening. In the era of Nazi racism, other fears arose from the specular image of the Jews: their supposed wandering character (without fixation on a soil) and tendency towards miscegenation (lack of blood uniqueness). This specular image was opposed to the belief that Nazism built of itself: a German race born from the same soil and with the same blood. Jews were first separated and confined by Nazi politics, then led into extreme pauperization before, in the end, being exterminated.

If its starting point was intolerance, Nazism eventually led to dehumanization in the sense described by Agamben (2013) and Bauman (1998). Agamben names “homo sacer” those human beings who, through language that disqualifies them and the treatment to which they are submitted, are understood to be as socially dead and whose death does not entail legal sanction against their murderers. Dehumanization takes place through discourses that attributes to an “Other” an essential lack of humanity, making them disposable, killable, and sacrificable (Rego, Patrique, 2014).

Bauman believes that “the negative impacts of dehumanization are much more common than the habit of almost entirely identifying through its genocidal effects would suggest”. It is present in the technical reification of the bureaucratic language of modernity, in which it is difficult to see the human through the regulations. (Bauman, 1998: 128-129). However, Bauman also understands that in order for moral inhibitions against violence to be lifted, one precondition is the dehumanization of a social segment, oppressed by ideological definitions and indoctrinations, must have already occurred and that a narrative of and treatment by violence is authorized by government practices (Bauman, 1998, p. 41).

The recognition of the dignity of all men and women must be independent of sex, race, religion, ethnicity, and lifestyle, as laid down in the Charter of Universal Rights of Men in 1948 and as confirmed by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988. Statements that aim to socially fix an agreement to confront intolerances and the hierarchization of human beings have been made and are present in international and national contemporary politics.

Two ministers³⁶ chosen at the beginning of the Bolsonaro government point out the importance of the two Parliamentary Caucuses³⁷ analyzed here being linked in the neoconservative movement. Damares Regina Alves became Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights, taking over the relative power of the former portfolios

36 Considered to be misogynistic by many of his opponents, Bolsonaro has been criticized for giving little space to women and blacks in his first echelon. This is a predominantly male, white and military government. Bolsonaro still joked about the topic: “For the first time in my life, the number of ministers is balanced in our government. We have 22 ministries, 20 men and two women. Just a small detail: each of these women here is equivalent to ten men,” he said. Published in EL PAÍS, March 8, by Benites, 2019.

37 The two Ministers have so far remained in the government, unlike the “revolving door” that has characterized various other ministries and presidencies of State institutions with nominees who sometimes do not last even a week. On the one hand, we have the Minister of Agriculture, Tereza Cristina, a member of the FPA and a sub-rapporteur of the Funai/Incrá CPI in 2015 and 2016. On the other hand, there’s Minister Damares Regina Alves, a lawyer and pastor, previously an adviser to Senator Magno Malta and the Evangelical Caucus since its inception.

of the SPM, SEPPPIR and SEDH and inverting their agenda of defending human rights, replacing this with the principle of “morality”. Tereza Cristina Corrêa da Costa Dias, a Congresswoman of the Agribusiness Caucus, was also named Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister of the Environment and the Presidents of FUNAI, INCRA, and of State environmental institutions (IBAMA and ICMBIO) were chosen from among those who publicly proposed to paralyze the demarcations of indigenous lands and quilombola territories and block environmental rights. These nominations weakened Brazil’s capacity to inspect forest fires and illegal logging, while reducing restrictions on environmental licensing resolutions.

FUNAI is now being dismantled. New hires are not being made. Current functionaries are not allowed to travel to regions where there is a conflict. They are ordered not to defend indigenous rights, not only in relation to land demarcation, but also to not to carry out removals of illegal miners from indigenous land. They have been given orders that compromise the health and food security of indigenous people during the pandemic.

In a live internet cast on September 24th 2020, President Jair Bolsonaro declared that a type of “evolved Indian” exists in Brazil who can have “more freedom over his land”. He continued hierarchizing indigenous people in these terms, describing those engaged in monocultural cultivation as those who “already plant” and who are “similar to us” -- that is, are (becoming human) like “whites”. He referred to other groups as “not evolved” and identified them as similar to “bandits” and thus dehumanized. Bolsonaro characterized the unlawful acts taking place in the large indigenous reservations as if they derive from the existence of indigenous reservations themselves, when, in fact, the repression of land invasions and other predatory activities in these territories is the responsibility of the Brazilian State. Indians on reservations have thus been dehumanized in Bolsonaro’s rhetoric. In his words (according to a journalist’s account):

“Look at the Indians in the north of the state of Mato Grosso, the Parecis. They are in a situation similar to ours. They plant and cultivate”, said Bolsonaro. Salles said [they have] “12 thousand hectares”. Then Bolsonaro passed on to a third topic, lamenting the so-called difficulties in policing “big indigenous reservations”, where “there inside rule [sic] lawless and illicit people, who steal biodiversity and predatorily exploit the natural means [sic] that exist there...” (Valente, Rubens, 2020)

On September 30th, an article was published in the *Folha de São Paulo*, signed by a prosecutor from the Federal Public Ministry and an anthropological advisor entitled “The unprotection of lands and the genocide of indigenous peoples”.

“The Middle Xingu region in Pará is one of the most affected. Ituna, Itatá, Apyterewa, Cachoeira Seca and Trincheira Bacajá recorded alarming rates of deforestation, with percentage increases of 754%, 437%, 113% and 271%, respectively, compared to 2018(...) Impunity and the expectation of regularization of illegal land has provided fuel for the intensification of illegal activities in the Amazon. (...) The overwhelming arrival of the pandemic among the indigenous peoples reveals their vulnerability (...) and the self-evident connections between the unprotection of these territories and the concrete risk of genocide. (Zollinger and Palmquist, 2020: p.A3)

Here, the lack of protection of the indigenous peoples is associated with the strongest form of dehumanization that leads to death. Are the Indians so disposable that they can be left “to their own devices”? In fact, this has not been a random event. The human actions of land grabbers have been encouraged by government rhetoric. Governmental inaction in the face of these invasions and the incidence of the pandemic among indigenous people has created a tragedy that could be easily foreseen and prevented – if there was a will to prevent it.

On September 28th 2020, the National Environment Council (CONAMA), responsible for establishing the criteria for environmental licensing and quality standards decided to overturn resolutions in the name of the short-term interests of the National Confederation of Agriculture and the Confederation of Industries and real

estate interests, after having removed all civil society members from its ranks (only four members without voting rights remained among the representatives of government agencies and companies).

CONAMA overturned the resolution that restricted deforestation and occupation in areas of environmental preservation such mangroves, bayous and near water reservoirs. It overturned the criteria for irrigation projects in agriculture, allowing for the burning of toxic waste in ovens used to manufacture cement, hitherto prevented because of the danger this practice represents to human health (Globo G1, 2020) These actions do not take into account how many people will be immediately placed in areas of health risk, with loss of access to water, if no responsibility is demanded of the large enterprises that use irrigation. Disposable people? Dehumanized...?

Intolerance towards women and girls who have abortions achieved great media visibility in August 2020 in the form of a ten-year-old girl, raped and impregnated by her grandfather and uncle, whom neo-conservative Evangelical groups call a “killer” while protesting in front of the Hospital, attempting to block her entry. The girl only managed to have a legal abortion, allowed since 1940s by the Brazilian Penal Code in cases of rape, by hiding in car trunks and being supported by health professionals. Her life was still at risk. Could this be due to insensitivity arising from religious beliefs in which religious principles makes it necessary to inflict suffering on the Other who does not accept these principles? Or is it a secular result (Asad, 2003) of the dehumanization of the Other, which seeks to make her suffer out of the need to maintain a certain social order, as mentioned by Talal Asad? Asad (2011) reminds us that in secular modernity, it is legitimate to inflict suffering up to a certain amount as long as this is justified by need. He claims that the Geneva Agreement had the effect of legitimizing the infliction of pain, as long as this is in the name of acquiring a given end. This is the secular form of dehumanization, which produces insensitivity to certain social segments in certain circumstances.

The Minister for Women, Family, and Human Rights is insensitive to the girl’s needs. She claims that preventing her from having an abortion means neither suffering nor risk of death for the ten-year-old. Secular or religious, or secular and religious, dehumanization occurs as a consequence of the neoconservative stance.

This intolerance of the rights of women and girls is based on the new policies that have been implemented by the Bolsonaro government. These have dismantled the legal abortion services created since the ‘90s to provide for abortions under the two conditions that have not been crimes in Brazil since 1940 (pregnancy resulting from rape and pregnancy with risk of maternal death) and to the new legal condition that has been in place since 2012 (fetal anencephaly). In August 2020, the previous resolutions that regulated legal abortion services in the Unified Health System since the 2000s were revoked. These now force women, girls, and health professionals to report rape to the police whether they want to or not, attacking women and girls’ rights of autonomy, dignity, and health of and assaulting the principle of professional secrecy of health professionals. (Adams, 2020)

Intolerance towards homosexual rights and racial equality has been manifested in the public scene in the speech of different Ministers of Education. The current Minister, Milton Ribeiro, affirmed in an interview that homosexuality comes from “maladjusted families” and pushed for the Evangelical proposal of a “cure for gayness”. A few days after he left the Ministry, former Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub signed a resolution blocking the policy of racial and indigenous affirmative action quotas in undergraduate and graduate level university entrance exams. These policies made a positive difference in the entry of black, brown, and indigenous people in public and private universities during PT governments. Although the resolution lost effect with Wientraub’s departure, it gave visibility to racial intolerance and the dehumanization of the black population that exists in segments of Brazilian society. This is due to the structural racism³⁸ that produces a continuous differential of power that is disadvantageous to the black and brown who make up just over half of the Brazilian population.

³⁸ In the face of the neo-conservative offensive, structural racism and sexism are being analyzed in the social sciences through intersectional methodologies such as those present in the work of Ana Paula Silva (Silva, 2018).

Against the neo-conservative movements supported and sustained by the Bolsonaro government, indigenous movements, quilombolas, feminists, movements in favor of the legalization of abortion, LGBTTIQ + movements, anti-racist movements, groups who oppose structural racism and sexism and environmental movements are multiplying. They open up possibilities, but the forces in play are unequal.

Within the Evangelical field, heterogeneity continues. A minority of churches favor rights to sexual diversity. Among the churches in Brazil's urban peripheries are found those that are most closely linked to the left. Political polarizations are occurring, involving pastors who do not adhere to the guidelines of FPE leaders or the leaders of the large churches of greater political strength. Again, this opens up possibilities, but the forces in play are unequal.

Final considerations

The paths taken by the two parliamentary caucuses allow us to conclude that, based on specific stimuli and interests, the two fronts converged and organized themselves against the human rights agenda and in defense of their rentier interests and State benefits (although each caucus had and has different focuses). They have been gaining strength based upon their narratives in the public arena against the expansion of fundamental rights.

They activated crucial positions in the construction and growing consolidation of their political power in Congress, in the approval of the impeachment of Dilma Rouseff, and in the construction of a close relationship with the Executive Branch during the Temer government in 2016.

During the 2018 electoral campaign, the Evangelical Caucus achieved the political fidelity of two thirds of the evangelical bases, contradicting forecasts that the political heterogeneity of the evangelical bases would remain distinct from the interests of their political leaders in Congress. There is no way to underestimate the effects of the campaign to literally demonize the PT and the fact that the traditional second round election did not take place between the PT and the PSDB, making possible a candidacy that is not only opposed to the PT, but which was also openly against human rights.

The interests of the new "owners of economic power" -- agribusiness, rentiers, financiers, industrials and infrastructure and construction companies -- do not appear in neo-conservative slogans, but are clearly present in the bases of support of the Executive Branch. The dismantling of State institutions charged with protecting the environment and indigenous and quilombola rights clearly points to the privileged position of the Agribusiness sectors in the economic policies of the government and in its destruction of environmental policy.

The privileged place of the Evangelical sectors in their relations with the government is seen in the paralysis of policies favoring human rights, women's rights, rights to sexual diversity and racial equality. More: it is responsible for legitimizing the retreat of educational policies and the near paralysis and budgetary dismantling of organizations that promote postgraduate training and the production of science and research. It is also responsible for the current wave of criticisms against university education.

These two caucuses, through their movements and connections, have contributed to undermining the conception of the State as defined by respect for identitary and ethnic plurality and for taking positions against racism and sexism. In its place, they propose the conception of a State that believes in a unique "Truth" in the name of a "Christian majority".

"Family" and "God" were the flags of the neoconservative movement raised around the impeachment of President Dilma Rouseff.

"Brazil above all", "God above all" has been the slogan of the Bolsonaro government.

A government should view itself as representing the “State power” sustained by the Constitution. The current government wants to distance itself from this perception. Increasingly, the current government asserts that there is only the will of its government and that its government wants itself to be the only parameter to which State power should submit.

It is impossible not to fear a power that does not recognize constitutional State power, as if nothing could supersede “its truth”: a “unitary and single truth” is only true in the eyes of those who are already converted.

For the “Others”, this government holds out dehumanization, neglect, confrontation, and intolerance.

Inflicting pain on the Other; denying the presence of the Other; dehumanizing the Other... these are perennial possibilities for this government that institutes itself, focusing only on the imaginations of “its electorate”.

Dark times of intolerance surround us. Intolerances affect the scientific field. Disauthorization of anthropology and the sciences, but especially the humanities, is expressed in a lack of funding for research.

The challenges for anthropology lie in an active search for scientific evidence excavated through methods of deep ethnography capable of recognizing alterity, the Other, and diversity as fully human and with full access to rights. This is a perspective that starts from anthropologists’ positionality, because there is no social science that gazes out from “nowhere” or that looks on reality from a higher (or divine) place. The situated view of anthropology is a view that obeys the scientific methodology shared among researchers, however. It enables us to “see” and face the new knowledge arising from the relationships we forge with the subjects taken as objects of research; it is these relationships that are the very thing that make us able to see.

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