

“Beautiful, maidenlike and a housewife”.
Gender in the Rise of the Far Right in Brazil

Abstract: The last six years in Brazilian politics have been defined by tense polarization. Such polarization reached its peak during the impeachment process that removed former President Dilma Rousseff from office, often characterized by commentators as social, political and even affective turn in the country. Ample media discussions were held regarding corruption, nationalism, unemployment, inflation and even communism. Another important issue, however, related to the impeachment process is that of gender, which has not deserved the same attention, especially in mainstream media. During the course of the impeachment, a magazine article received wide public attention: “Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e do lar” [“Marcela Temer: beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’”] was published by *Veja* magazine on April 18, 2016, featuring Brazil’s then-future first lady, and circulated intensively on the Web. Against this backdrop, this paper analyzes the aforementioned article by tracking its trajectory online and by investigating how femininity is (re)performed at each entextualization until the campaign period in 2018. Partial results show that the figure of personhood projected for women by *Veja* is sharply contrasted with the one projected onto Ms Rousseff. Such figure of personhood was later picked up by right-wing extremists, who blatantly reject gender equality and emphasize the role of women in the private sphere. I argue that such conservative view of gender helped discursively construct Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016 and was later integrated into the complex neofascist politics which elected Jair Bolsonaro President of Brazil.

Keywords: *gender, impeachment, chronotope, identities, far-right, fascism*

1. Introduction

In 2018, Brazil elected far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro to be its President for the forthcoming four years. Brazil was certainly not the first country to swerve to the right, as the world has been witnessing the rise of far-right politicians and parties. In the Brazilian case, the 2018 elections seem to have been a finish-line for a process which started in 2014, after the re-election of left-wing President Dilma Rousseff (*Partido dos Trabalhadores-PT*, Workers’ Party). Displeased with that result, two months after the election, millions of people throughout the country held public demonstrations to protest against the PT government, many of which demanded Ms. Rousseff’s impeachment.

After tumultuous internal processing (with special commissions installed, reports, votings, appeals to the Supreme Court etc.), congress impeached president Dilma Rousseff on August 31, 2016, and vice-president Michel Temer took office until January 01, 2019, when Bolsonaro’s incumbency started. Former president Rousseff, members of the PT and the left-wing in general have declared that Ms. Rousseff’s removal from office was a coup d’état, arguing that there was no legal basis to justify an impeachment. Many commentators, including Ms. Rousseff,¹ have stated that this process was underpinned by misogynistic and sexist motives, not least because it was driven by an alliance formed mostly by (white) men. This means that gender is a key element in this intricate process.

¹ For Dilma Rousseff’s speech immediately after her impeachment see “Dilma Rousseff faz pronunciamento após votação final do impeachment”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKkpe53jaPk&t=3s>.

In this paper I analyse how discourses about gender have aided the rise of conservatism and right-wing extremism in Brazilian institutional politics. To do so, I centre my analysis on an article published by *Veja* magazine on April 18, 2016 titled “*Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e ‘do lar’*” [“Marcela Temer: Beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’”], featuring Brazil’s then-future first lady. Published one day after the Lower House of congress had approved the impeachment request, the article circulated intensively in the media and on the internet, reaching the country’s Trending Topics. More specifically, the analysis does not only concentrate on the *Veja* article vis-à-vis Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, but also seeks to examine its intertextual connections with other media outputs: a previous text about Dilma Rousseff’s presidency, published by *Isto É* magazine, and successive instances of recontextualization: first, when Ms. Marcela Temer (as first lady) launched a new government initiative in October 2016; second, during a campaign act in 2018 defending candidate Jair Bolsonaro (the current president).

The next section is aimed at providing some background information about the recent political scenario in Brazil, focusing specifically on Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. I argue, following several commentators, that the proceedings intensified political polarisation in Brazil, not least because the PT administrations had an impact on the enfranchisement of poor and black people, women and the LGBTIQ community. Specifically, gender was a key element in the communication of the impeachment.

In section 3, I discuss the methodological strategy of tracking textual trajectories, as I argue that the figure of personhood constructed for Marcela Temer in the *Veja* article moved across different contexts, undergoing necessary adjustments and modifications at each phase of entextualisation, from *Veja* (during the impeachment proceedings) until a campaign act of far-right politicians. The data are presented in subsections 4.1 through 4.4.

The analysis of articles published in *Veja* (subsection 4.1) and *Isto É* (subsection 4.2) shows how gender was linked to Brazilian institutional politics while the impeachment was being processed. The different kinds of femininity performed by Dilma Rousseff and Marcela Temer are explored in order to construct different realities for the country, vis-à-vis the presence (or absence) of women in positions of power. In subsection 4.3, we observe how the identity constructed for Ms. Temer was recontextualised in the launching of government programme *Criança Feliz*, i.e., during Temer’s administration. Subsection 4.4 shows an example of how the femininity previously embodied by Ms. Temer is used strategically in more radical terms under the ideology of bolsonarismo. I then provide my concluding remarks on section 5, warning against the fascist threat in Brazil, whose recent political scenario I discuss in the next section.

2. The Impeachment Process and the Macropolitical Landscape of Brazil

Dilma Rousseff’s second term in the presidency started with a sharp economic recession, as GDP shrank by 3.5%, with rising unemployment and inflation.² Moreover, the PT was facing massive corruption accusations as a result of the investigations carried out by Car Wash Operation (*Operação Lava-Jato*). Consequently Ms. Rousseff was dealing with a crisis both political and economic, as her approval rates to drop to 9% in July, 2015.³

In this scenario, as mentioned in the introduction, the impeachment process started on December 2, 2015, when the impeachment request filed by the opposition was accepted by former President of the Lower House, Eduardo Cunha (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro-PMDB*, Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement). The request argued that fiscal manoeuvres, undertaken to comply

² Laura Carvalho, *Valsa Brasileira: do Boom ao Caos Econômico* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2018), 98.

³ See Leandro Prazeres, “Aprovação ao governo Dilma é de 9%, diz Ibope”, *UOL* (2015), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2015/07/01/dilma-pesquisa-ibope.htm>.

with the surplus target, should be considered crimes committed by the president, which is the legal requirement for an impeachment. After the appropriate steps to process the request were taken, the Lower House approved the impeachment on April 17, 2016. The Senate, then, impeached Ms. Rousseff on August 31, 2016.⁴

Based on the above timeline, three important points can be raised. Firstly, several intellectuals,⁵ denounced the impeachment as a coup d'état, arguing that the budget manoeuvres mentioned above were not illegal, which meant there was no legal basis for the impeachment. This issue is controversial, but many intellectuals in the field of Law, with whom I align, agree that the reasons for the impeachment were not actually crimes.⁶ The government also defended the idea that the coup was orchestrated by the elites and carried out by congress with the goal of stopping the inclusion of social minorities seen during the PT administrations. Indeed, malnutrition dropped by 80% and Brazil left the UN Hunger Map in 2014.⁷ Efforts to enfranchise black and indigenous people, women and the LGBTQ community were also undertaken, amongst other policies. So, replacing Ms. Rousseff with her VP Michel Temer would allow for the implementation of neoliberal reforms to reduce the size of the State, thereby interrupting the expansion of social rights to groups historically marginalised. Unsurprisingly, the Temer administration did introduce neoliberal reforms while it also produced massive corruption scandals.

Secondly, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment was not a consensus within Brazilian society. The 9-month long impeachment process was accompanied by street demonstrations both pro and against the removal of president Rousseff. These two opposing political groups disputed the narrative constructing the process as either a legitimate impeachment or a coup d'état in an environment of great uncertainty and tension. This means that institutional politics⁸ has become a popular subject in Brazil, as people have been actively participating in discussions and public demonstrations, even if in offensive terms. As Borba⁹ argues, this process threw the country into an affective polarization, in which hateful and outrageous comments and speeches became more frequent and accepted in political debates, both inside and outside parliament. A famous indication of the growing hostility between such groups was a bumper sticker many attached to their car gas tank, which depicted president Rousseff with her legs spread as the gas pump metaphorically violated her. Indeed, Borba¹⁰ also argues that such radicalisation provided the "niche within which Bolsonaro was able to thrive", reaching the presidency of Brazil with nearly 58 million votes. Once in office, this discursive dynamic has become a pattern of

⁴ The Brazilian constitution establishes that both Houses of congress must approve the impeachment of a president, by a majority of 60% each.

⁵ Jessé Souza, *A Radiografia do Golpe: Entenda como e por que Você Foi Enganado* (Rio de Janeiro: Leya, 2016); Marilena Chaui, "A Nova Classe Trabalhadora Brasileira e a Ascensão do Conservadorismo", in Ivana Jinkings et al., eds., *Por que Gritamos Golpe? Para Entender o Impeachment e a Crise Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2016), 15-22; André Singer, *O Lulismo em Crise: um Quebra-cabeça do Período Dilma (2011-2016)* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018).

⁶ Marcelo Semer, "Ruptura Institucional e Desconstrução do Modelo Democrático: o Papel do Judiciário", in Ivana Jinkings et al., eds., *Por que Gritamos Golpe? Para Entender o Impeachment e a Crise Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2016) 107-114; Lenio Streck, "Lawfare", in Giovanni Alves et al., eds., *Enciclopédia do Golpe. Vol. 1* (Bauru: Canal 6, 2017), 119-126.

⁷ See FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Food Security and Nutrition* (Rome: FAO, 2014), <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4030e.pdf>.

⁸ The reason why I choose "institutional politics" (as opposed to simply "politics") is due to the fact that there is a political dimension to all aspects of life, from waking up under a roof to being stopped by the police. I use "institutional politics" to emphasize the role of so-called democratic institutions. So, this refers to talk about political parties, politicians, bills, laws etc. The growth of this kind of talk is observable in the last few years in Brazil.

⁹ Rodrigo Borba, "Disgusting Politics: Circuits of Affects and the Making of Bolsonaro", *Social Semiotics*, 31.5 (2020), 677-694.

¹⁰ Borba, "Disgusting Politics".

communication, something Silva (2020)¹¹ calls incendiary framing, i.e. consistently “being outrageous, responding to critique with slurs, and inciting the communicability ... of hate and fear”.

The third important point is the relevance of gender in the communication of the impeachment. Even though the impeachment request legally accused Ms. Rousseff of fiscal crimes, many debates in traditional and social media centred around other topics, such as corruption, economic policy and gender. Sosa argues that issues of gender and sexuality played a key role in Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment and in the consolidation of the right-wing.¹² He argues¹³ that, as president, Ms. Rousseff challenged gender norms both in her gender performance and in her policies. Of course, this is not restricted to Brazil. Even though so-called Global Right is not a unified movement, “antagonism towards feminism is both a sentiment at the heart of the right’s value system and a political strategy, a platform for organizing and for recruiting massive support” all over the globe.¹⁴

Against this backdrop, the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer, praising her as a beautiful woman who enjoys staying home and taking care of her children and husband, called attention especially because it was published only one day after the Lower House of congress had approved Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment. What this paper shows is that that specific model of femininity also played a role during Temer’s incumbency and in Bolsonaro’s election. This means that such model was recontextualised in different texts, following a text trajectory. In the next section, I lay out why and how I am tracking this text trajectory as a methodological tool of analysis.

3. Text Trajectories: The Performative Circulation of Discourse

As Blommaert argues, texts shift from one context to the other.¹⁵ The impeachment request, for example, was ‘originally’ filed on October 21, 2015 and made its way into commission discussions, reports, appeals, Supreme Court decisions and voting sessions, among others. Hence, “texts are [...] transportable ‘projectiles’ that travel across contexts”¹⁶ which means that any text is an entextualisation, i.e., a selection of forms, structures and meanings intended to circulate further. So, for example, an article about the first-lady’s beauty published on a weekly magazine will likely be received in a middle-class family living room, where it can be discussed amongst family members.¹⁷ This is possible because discourse can “be viewed not as restricted to a single, bounded context but as continually decontextualized and recontextualized—extracted from certain texts, genres, contexts, and social worlds and inserted in others”.¹⁸

In this paper, after comparing the models of femininity constructed by *Veja* for Marcela Temer and by *Isto É* for Dilma Rousseff, I show how Ms. Temer’s emphasised femininity travels into two other contexts: the launching of a government programme in 2017 and a campaign act in 2018.¹⁹ For this

¹¹ Daniel Silva, “The Pragmatics of Chaos: Parsing Bolsonaro’s Undemocratic Language”, *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 59.1 (January-April 2020), 524.

¹² Jay Sosa. “Subversive, Mother, Killjoy: Sexism against Dilma Rousseff and the Social Imaginary of Brazil’s Rightward Turn”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (July-September 2019), 738.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 719.

¹⁴ Agnieszka Graff, et al., “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (July-September 2019), 541.

¹⁵ Jan Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62.

¹⁶ Johanna Woydack and Ben Rampton, “Text Trajectories in a Multilingual Call Centre: The Linguistic Ethnography of a Calling Script”, *Working Papers on Urban Languages and Literacies*, 147 (London: King’s College, 2015), 4.

¹⁷ Any linguistic production may well involve expectations of circulation, but these expectations may not be met. For example, a phone conversation is generally expected to circulate no further than the duration of the call. However, if it leaks to the media, that conversation may be listened to in the news, corporate media websites, YouTube, vlogs etc.

¹⁸ Charles Briggs, “Anthropology, Interviewing, and Communicability in Contemporary Social Life”, *Current Anthropology*, 48 (2007), 562.

¹⁹ I provide further details on choice of data as I analyse each text.

reason, I have chosen to track textual trajectories as a methodological strategy,²⁰ as it allows for an examination of how discourse circulated creating meanings about gender, from the impeachment in 2016 to the election of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Examining discourse circulation provides a privileged position for an analysis of how the social reality of the impeachment (and its aftermaths) was constructed, and how discourses about gender were modified and adapted in different recontextualisations.

This selection of data shows how discourses about gender travelled through contexts being consistently entextualised in more conservative and reactionary terms. This process seems to be imbricated with the replacing of left-winger Dilma Rousseff with conservative Michel Temer, and then with the election of far-right extremist Jair Bolsonaro. To undertake this analysis, I now turn to data analysis, beginning with the *Veja* article about Marcela Temer.

4. Gender in Brazil's Rightward Turn

As mentioned in the introduction, I start my data analysis by examining the *Veja* article "*Marcela Temer: Bela, recatada e 'do lar'*" [beautiful, maidenlike and 'a housewife'].²¹ Then I analyse how it relates to an article about Dilma Rousseff (published in *Isto É* - see subsection 4.2); and how it was recontextualised during the Temer administration (subsection 4.3) and in the Bolsonaro campaign (subsection 4.4).

4.1 Beautiful, maidenlike and "a housewife" - the next first-family

On April 18, 2016, one day after the voting session in the Lower House, *Veja* magazine published article titled *Marcela Temer: Bela, recatada e "do lar"* [beautiful, maidenlike and 'a housewife'],²² which was the second Trending Topic on Twitter in Brazil on April 19, 2016²³ and generated a series of parodies on the internet. *Veja* is a nation-wide publication and the most sold magazine in the country.²⁴ It has a right-wing audience of conservative middle-class individuals.

²⁰ Blommaert, *Discourse*; Branca Fabricio, "Trajectories of Socialization in School Transcontexts: Discourse Journeys on Gender and Sexuality", *Working Papers on Urban Languages and Literacies*, 94 (London; King's College, 2012).

²¹ Title translation was taken from an article on *Forbes*, which covered the circulation of the *Veja* piece. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shannonsims/2016/04/20/the-hilarious-feminist-backlash-to-brazils-impeachment-fallout/#28a254f76573>.

²² See Juliana Linhares, "Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e 'do lar': A quase primeira-dama, 43 anos mais jovem que o marido, aparece pouco, gosta de vestidos na altura dos joelhos e sonha em ter mais um filho com o vice", *Veja* (2016), <https://veja.abril.com.br/brasil/marcela-temer-bela-recatada-e-do-lar/>.

²³ The most commented hashtag was #emmemoriadelas (in memory of them [feminine]), which shared information about women tortured and killed during the Brazilian military dictatorship. This is related to the homage by Jair Bolsonaro (a congressman back in 2016) to Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra (a well-known torturer). Ms. Rousseff was tortured during the dictatorship. See <https://trendogate.com/placebydate/23424768/2016-04-19>.

²⁴ Pedro Sobreiro, "Qual a revista de maior circulação no Brasil? E no mundo? Poderia ser a ME...", *Super Interessante* (2020), <https://super.abril.com.br/mundo-estranho/qual-a-revista-de-maior-circulacao-no-brasil-e-no-mundo/>.

Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e “do lar”

À quase primeira-dama, 43 anos mais jovem que o marido, aparece pouco, gosta de vestidos na altura dos joelhos e sonha em ter mais um filho com o vice

Por Juliana Linhares
18 de abril de 2016, 19h14



Marcela, mulher do vice, Michel Temer, janta romântica e apêlidos carinhosos (Bruno Polatti/Folhapress)

Marcela Temer é uma mulher de sorte. Michel Temer, seu marido há treze anos, continua a lhe dar provas de que a paixão não arrefeceu com o tempo nem com a convulsão política que vive o país – e em cujo epicentro ele mesmo se encontra. Há cerca de oito meses, por exemplo, o vice-presidente, de 75 anos, levou Marcela, de 32, para jantar na sala especial do sofisticado, caro e badalado restaurante Antiquarius, em São Paulo. Blindada nas paredes, no teto e no chão para ser à prova de som e garantir os segredos dos muitos políticos que costumam reunir-se no local, a sala tem capacidade para acomodar trinta pessoas, mas foi esvaziada para receber apenas “Mar” e “Mi”, como são chamados em família. Lá, protegido por quatro seguranças (um na cozinha, um no toalete, um na entrada da sala e outro no salão principal do restaurante), o casal desfrutou algumas horas de jantar romântico sob um céu estrelado, graças

Image 1: Title, lead and main picture in the *Veja* article

The article in question presents characteristics of both VP Michel Temer and his wife, Marcela. The *lead* in the article refers to Marcela Temer as the “almost first lady”, which implies that her becoming first lady is a matter of time, as there is no precondition required, such as “if the impeachment is indeed approved”. Hence, it was also a matter of time for Ms. Rousseff to be replaced with Mr. Temer in the presidency of Brazil. This reference together with the date when this text was published produce an intertextual link between the article and the session in the Lower House, and the former ought to be seen as a recontextualisation of the latter, even if the article does not state that explicitly.

The article mentions that the Temers go to fancy restaurants where important people are regulars (lines 5 and 6) and plan holidays at the beach (lines 23 and 24). Marcela goes to beauty parlours (line 35) and has personal stylists (lines 43 and 44). Together, these signs index a routine of a high-class family that Michel and Marcela Temer live. The whole narrative takes place in high-class environments, where everything develops in an ordered and balanced manner, with no mentions to situations of stress or fights, for example, between the Temer couple.

Bakhtin proposes the notion of chronotope, that is, time and space as one inseparable dimension (Timespace), constructing a social world that organises the narrative and selects elements and characters that fit into the timespace characteristics it builds.²⁵ Blommaert exemplifies this process with the indexical “once upon a time” in a narrative, which “prompts a timeless and geographically unidentifiable place in which princes, giants, witches, wizards, and dwarfs can be expected alongside imaginary animals (dragons, unicorns) and animated objects (talking trees or moving rocks)”.²⁶

At first, the narrative takes place in an expensive restaurant, which the article qualifies as “sophisticated, expensive and cool” (line 4). Other locations they inhabit are the north coast of São

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).

²⁶ Jan Blommaert, “Chronotopes, Scales, and Complexity in the Study of Language in Society”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44 (2015), 111.

Paulo (lines 23 and 24), beauty parlours with a fancy clientele (line 40) and the Palace of Jaburu (line 53) – which is the VP's official residence in Brasília – accompanied by habits such as smoking cigars and drinking wine. These places and habits index a chronotope of urban high-class society, since most people cannot afford to share these places and habits.

According to Blommaert and De Fina,²⁷ chronotopes work as identity frames, because “[they are] a constraint on what is possible in the way of identity work”. Agha states that certain textual forms, and I would add chronotopes, are indexically associated with figures of personhood.²⁸ So, the timespace configuration summons these figures to inhabit it and perform roles, which may or may not be in accordance with the chronotope of the narrative.

In the case under analysis here, it is necessary that characters are constructed as figures of personhood adequate to the urban high-class chronotope, of order and balance. In this sense, Marcela Temer is constructed as sophisticated (line 5), nurturing, calling her husband by his nickname “Mi” (line 9), romantic (line 12), as well as extremely polite (line 33). Such characteristics index an identity of a high-class woman, who knows how to inhabit the chronotope created for the narrative.

Under the title, the lead describes Marcela: “The almost first-lady, 43 years younger than her husband, appears little [in public], likes knee-long dresses and dreams of having another child with the vice [president]”. The parallelism is evident between title and lead: “Marcela Temer” becomes “the almost first lady”; “beautiful” becomes “43 years younger than her husband”; “maidenlike” becomes “appears little in public, likes knee-long dresses”; and “a housewife” becomes “dreams of having another child with the vice-president”. Hence, her youth indexes beauty (Marcela was 32 years-old then); staying in the private sphere and not wearing revealing clothes index good behaviour for a woman (a maiden); and being a housewife involves motherhood (having and taking care of children and therefore being a good mother). Marcela is constructed as a good woman, on the basis of her appearance, as well as her social and professional behaviour. By the same token, she is also presented as a woman loyal to her husband (line 14), a good mother (line 28), a good housewife (line 29).

It is noticeable that Marcela's femininity is constructed in strict dialogue with the model of womanhood produced within the heterosexual matrix. According to Butler, “gender ... is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality”.²⁹ The complementarity between male and female passes as a natural fact, when it is actually achieved through constant performative work. Discourse on gender does not simply inform us about men and women; it creates these very objects. So, the urban high-class chronotope, in which the actions develop in an ordered and balanced fashion, is also constructed on the basis of the performance of gender which does not disturb the heterosexual matrix, thereby not causing confusion or problems.

Unsurprisingly, VP Michel Temer's identity is constructed in such a way that complements Marcela's and works adequately in the constructed chronotope. According to *Veja*, Michel constantly proves that his passion has not “gone cold” (line 2), smokes cigars and drinks wine (line 51) and has published a poetry book (lines 53 to 58). Such qualities index a romantic and sophisticated man. He is also constructed as a hardworking man, who works to “exhaustion” (lines 50 and 51). In this chronotope, Michel Temer inhabits the desired position of man – because he has the necessary qualities – in this high-class, sophisticated and heterocisnormative world.

The construction of Michel as a hardworking man and of Marcela as a housewife reproduces the gendered division of tasks within the family. In such a division, the woman is responsible for the private sphere, and therefore has a secondary role, reinforced in line 44, when Marcela Temer is constructed as Michel's “digital hand [arm]”, constantly checking social networks to keep her husband informed. Not only is she constructed as a helper, but the metaphoric reference to her as a part of the

²⁷ Jan Blommaert and Anna De Fina, “Chronotopic Identities: On the Timespace Organization of Who We Are”, *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies*, Paper 153 (2015), 6-7.

²⁸ Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2006), 138-139.

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 194.

man's body intertextually invokes the biblical story of Adam and Eve, which cooperates in the naturalisation of gender division and hierarchization, by attributing a secondary role to women.

The aforementioned naturalisation of gender roles receives explicit evaluation in the article, as can be observed in the first and last sentences, which present parallel structures. The first sentence, under the lead, is "Marcela Temer is a lucky woman" and the last sentence in the article is "Michel Temer is a lucky man". This positive evaluation of the Temers leaves readers to imagine who the unlucky people are, those who don't inhabit this chronotope. In other words, since not everyone can inhabit the heterocisnormative high-class chronotope or performs gender in the same manner, readers ought to fill in the blanks: those excluded from the chronotope are unlucky men and women.

Readers are presented with the image of success: the clear division and hierarchy that constructs good masculinity (performed by Michel Temer) and good femininity (performed by Marcela), especially vis-à-vis the public sphere, in impressive conformity with the heterosexual matrix. So, we are left with the thought of: how was Dilma Rousseff constructed in the media when she was president? The next section tries to answer that.

4.2 A president out of her mind

The article "A president out of her mind [*Uma presidente fora de si*]"³⁰ was published in the weekly magazine *Isto É* on April 06, 2016, that is, 12 days prior to the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer. This piece was published in the same week when congressman Jovair Arantes would present his report on the impeachment (which would later be the basis for the voting). The article motivated the hashtag #IstoÉMachismo (literally, this is sexism, which is a pun on the magazine name), which entered the Brazilian Trending Topics.

The article begins with the sentence: "The last few days in the *Planalto* have been marked by moments of extreme tension and absolute disorder with a president dominated by constant nervous explosions, when, in addition to irritability, she exhibits total disconnection with the reality of the country"³¹ (lines 1 to 3). Other predications attributed to Ms. Rousseff include "out of her mind" (lines 6 and 27-28), out of sync with reality (lines 3 and 39), "emotionally dismantled" (lines 65 and 66), "out of whack" (line 75). She is also said to be taking prescription drugs, including one to treat schizophrenia (lines 18 and 19).³² All these predications index a diagnosis of psychological disease, which means that *Isto É* constructs Ms. Rousseff as a clinically insane woman.

The publication also states that the president was "irascible" (line 6), "aggressive" (line 7), "vindictive" (line 57), "desperate" (line 58), "irresponsible" (line 58), impatient (line 31), which are feelings evaluated negatively that index lack of capacity to govern a country. These feelings may be understood as symptoms of the state of madness Ms. Rousseff was supposedly in. The symptoms also include actions negatively evaluated, such as yelling curse-words at random (line 9), as well as directed at drivers (line 83), pilots (line 23 and 28-29), members of her staff and political allies (lines 87, 91, 93 and 94); destroying the furniture when reacting to bad news (line 16). In a similar vein, the magazine cover shows the president with her mouth open, seemingly screaming (image 2 below), suggesting that that image is an example of Ms. Rousseff's screams and curse-words. The photograph, however, was taken when president Dilma Rousseff was celebrating a goal scored by the Brazilian national team (image 3 below) during the 2014 World Cup, hosted by Brazil.

³⁰ See Sérgio Pardellas and Débora Bergamasco, "Uma presidente fora de si", *Istoé* (2016), https://istoe.com.br/450027_UMA+PRESIDENTE+FORA+DE+SI/.

³¹ The Palácio do Planalto (Highland Palace) is the official federal government headquarters.

³² Line 20 in the text actually says the medicine is not effective, as is easily noticeable, indicating the level of sarcasm with which Ms. Rousseff was being treated.



Image 2: Ms. Rousseff screaming in *Isto É* cover



Image 3: Ms. Rousseff screams in celebration of a goal scored by the Brazilian team

As a result, this construction of Ms. Rousseff is built around a chronotope of disorder, mainly due to the president's reactions, which cause a state of permanent stress. In other words, her figure of personhood is the cause of this permanent stress and chaos. Moreover, the situations narrated are all problematic, such as delays, airplane turbulences, corruption accusations, not to mention the impeachment request being processed in congress. In this timespace configuration, and considering her supposed reactions, Dilma Rousseff is constructed as the reason for the economic and political crisis, invoking the Freudian concept of hysteric woman. It should be noted that Ms. Rousseff does not fit the female model advocated by the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer. Rather, Ms. Rousseff was involved in the armed movement against the dictatorship and has a reputation of never crying (not even when she underwent torture). So, Ms. Rousseff performs a kind of femininity which is very different from Marcela Temer.

Consequently, in a state of absolute chaos, the political crisis will be resolved by restoring order. The construction by *Isto É* of a woman in a position of power, together with the construction by *Veja* of an ordered and balanced world with a woman in a secondary position, allows for the interpretation

that the order to be restored to the country begins by restoring the patriarchal order of gender hierarchy. The bourgeois family ideal offers a synecdoche of a broader social order discursively embodied by the Temers. They inhabit a chronotope of order and equilibrium, as Michel and Marcela perform the activities in accordance with the patriarchal gender division and hierarchy. Replacing Dilma Rousseff with Michel Temer is the alternative to resolve the crisis, whose bigger cause, according to *Isto É*, is the fact that a woman is in charge. Indeed, when Michel Temer took over as president, all his 24 ministers were (white rich) men.³³ Shortly afterwards, the figure of personhood embodied by Marcela Temer would become the basis of an official government programme.

4.3 Marcela Temer launches “*Criança Feliz*”

The role of femininity, specifically in relation to Marcela Temer, was once again entextualised on October 05, 2016, when the Temer administration launched the program *Criança Feliz* [Happy Child]. Its goal is to provide medical, pedagogical and psychological assistance to children from poor families. Marcela is attributed the role of program ambassador, and she delivered its launching speech.³⁴ The ceremony was closed with a speech delivered by president Michel Temer.³⁵



Image 4: Marcela Temer speaks during the launching of *Criança Feliz*

Marcela states in her speech that she considers the care of children during early childhood one of the most relevant social causes. According to her, “Each time we kiss our small children, we talk to them. Each time we carry them in our arms, we read them a story or sing them a lullaby, we are helping their development. What we, mothers, notice instinctively has been proven by science”. Among other things, the program aims at having government officials visit poor people’s homes and

³³ Filipe Matoso, Fernanda Calgaro and Alexandro Martello, “Michel Temer dá posse a 24 novos ministros do governo”, *GI* (2016), <http://g1.globo.com/politica/processo-de-impeachment-de-dilma/noticia/2016/05/michel-temer-da-posse-aos-novos-ministros-do-governo.html>.

³⁴ See “Marcela Temer faz seu primeiro discurso como primeira-dama”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPi1j3mOmAc> and “Marcela Temer lança ‘Criança Feliz’ e faz discurso sobre amor”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSRFgycn9T4>.

³⁵ See “Governo Federal lança Programa Criança Feliz”, *YouTube* (2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1chgrNYHno8&ab_channel=TVBrasilGov.

talk to them about the need of emotional involvement with their infants. Marcela's speech works, therefore, as a lesson: a mother should kiss, talk, carry, read stories and sing lullabies to her children.

Paradoxically, she constructs the knowledge of the importance of such actions as instinct and yet the program aims at teaching it to poor mothers. The idea is to inform poor mothers about the importance of being emotionally involved with their children. If poor mothers need to be taught about that, then the assumption is that poor families don't know how to take care of their children. Hence, it is possible to argue that *Criança Feliz* operates in a classist, even racist, manner, given that the majority of poor people in Brazil is black.

The profile outlined for Marcela Temer in the *Veja* article is recontextualised in this political event very successfully. Having constructed Marcela as a good woman, who takes good care of her husband, home and children, the figure of personhood projected for the first lady is a perfect fit for an ambassador of a program directed at assisting poor children. So, the chronotope is an unequal world, with good and bad, poor and rich mothers. Poor bad mothers must be taught to be good through a program whose symbol is a nationwide recognised symbol of motherhood: Marcela Temer. Moreover, Ms. Temer will be a volunteer, which means she would not receive any wages. She constructs herself as a mother concerned, not just with her kids, but with poor kids as well, and that concern, not money, is the reason why she will put her efforts into the program. In his speech, president Michel Temer stated that "Marcela's presence [as an ambassador in the program] aims exactly at encouraging the ladies, women of the country". He urges the women of the country to take care of the country's children.

Marcela Temer's profile by *Veja* magazine managed to travel from the media field to the political field. Marcela's volunteer work with underprivileged children buys her, and by extension her husband, political capital as concerned solidary people in a position of power. Moreover, this organisation of genders in the political field helps consolidate the restoring of order mentioned earlier. The gender divide and hierarchy are reiterated and even amplified: the president requests that the women of the country be concerned with the welfare of all Brazilian children, thereby emphasising the role of women as mothers, within the private sphere. So, emphasized femininity - the construction of women within the heterosexual matrix – becomes the basis of an official government programme, aimed at buying political capital with the Brazilian population.

This construction of Marcela Temer was also perceived as an intertextual response to the *Veja* article in the comments section of the video on YouTube. In other words, the figure of personhood constructed for Marcela seems to have circulated effectively, buying her and her family political capital. In the comments section of the video, a user qualifies Ms. Temer as "beautiful, maidenlike, a housewife and... TERROR OF THE FEMINAZI".³⁶ In other words, Marcela Temer embodies the antifeminist ideal, reifying the rigid norms of femininity, and this ideal was recontextualised in this comment as a positive attribute, while at the same time suggesting a very negative evaluation of feminists (implied by the comparison with the Nazis).

In a nutshell, gender hierarchy became the basis of a government programme after Ms. Rousseff's impeachment, especially on the basis of Marcela Temer's figure of personhood. Moreover, as is known, Jair Bolsonaro won the election in 2018, so I now turn to examine how his campaign used discourses about gender.

4.4 Femininity and anti-feminism in the 2018 election

During the presidential campaign, on September 29, 2018, public demonstrations occurred in several cities in Brazil with the *#EleNão* (Not Him) motto. These demonstrations were led by women and were very critical of Jair Bolsonaro and his reportedly sexist remarks. On the following day, Jair's

³⁶ "Feminazi" is a contraction of feminist and Nazi. This neologism seems to imply that feminism is an authoritarian movement.

son,³⁷ Eduardo Bolsonaro, stated during a public counter-demonstration: “Right-wing women are prettier than left-wing women. They don’t show their breasts in the streets nor do they defecate in the streets. Right-wing women are more hygienic”.³⁸

It is remarkable that Eduardo chooses beauty as the fundamental criterion to separate women into two groups: the beautiful right-wing women and the ugly left-wing women. This division indexes the female figure of personhood whose main positive characteristic is beauty (as opposed to intelligence or sense of humour, for example). Furthermore, he reinforces this separation on the basis of behaviour, because “right-wing women do not defecate in the street or show their breasts”, which implies that left-wing women do.

Uttered in a public demonstration, this text is directed at potential voters (whose slight majority, in Brazil, is female). According to the article on the website, other people present in the event praised the female participation in it. They emphasised women’s importance as mothers, friends, who take care of the house, of men and their families. Eduardo’s statement was made before the election that made him the most voted deputy in Brazilian history. So, this construction of good women as beautiful and maidenlike is a successful electoral strategy, thereby making the relation between gender and institutional politics a key issue in the growth of the far-right across the globe.

In other words, the compliment to women in the role of mothers, wives and housewives completes the transposition of the figure of personhood constructed by *Veja* for Marcela Temer. Right-wing women are beautiful (at least more than left-wing women), maidenlike (they behave accordingly in public) and housewives (mothers, wives, housewives). The model of good woman, previously embodied by Marcela Temer, now performatively creates a political group supposedly coherent, that is right-wing women. Moreover, deviations from this model, implicit in *Veja*, are now explicit and form the opposed group, that is left-wing women. Eduardo also makes explicit the relation between gender roles and political division and identification (specifically left and right).

5. Final Considerations

The *Veja* article about former first lady Marcela Temer is an intertextual response to Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. Considering how popular institutional politics has become in Brazil, gender appears as a key element in people’s perception of the political scenario in the country. Seen together, the articles by *Veja* and *Isto É* project complementary realities. The chronotope in *Isto É* is one of total disorder due to Ms. Rousseff’s actions as president. The chronotope in *Veja* presents order and peacefulness, due to Marcela Temer’s actions as a beautiful and maidenlike housewife. A woman in power, acting in the public sphere as the country’s commander, generated crises; a woman at home, taking care of a powerful man and his family, generates peace and tranquillity. No country wants to be in a crisis, and resolutions are obviously necessary. Replacing Ms. Rousseff with Michel Temer provided such resolution: the public sphere is now inhabited by a man, who has a wife at home.

This is not saying Ms. Rousseff was impeached simply due to the fact that she is a woman, as indeed the process is more complex than that. However, her femininity, especially because it does not conform to gender norms, was used politically, to help communicate the idea of the impeachment. Her femininity, alongside her insistence in following the rule of law, allows us to read her as a feminist killjoy, as mentioned by Sosa.³⁹ The killjoy impedes the others’ happiness by pointing out problems only she can see, thereby going against overall consensus. Sosa states that “[w]hen the killjoy points

³⁷ On September 06, 2018, then candidate Jair Bolsonaro was stabbed during a campaign act and did not participate in any further ones.

³⁸ See Gilberto Amendola, “Eduardo Bolsonaro: Mulheres de direita são mais bonitas”, *Terra* (2018), <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/eleicoes/eduardo-bolsonaro-as-mulheres-de-direita-sao-mais-bonita-que-as-da-esquerda,59522ad8735ac9edb07fb3c5e6b26e9ejucf0k1i.html>.

³⁹ Sosa, *Subversive, mother, killjoy*, 736.

out a problem to others, people begin to treat her as the problem”,⁴⁰ which explains the need for Ms. Rousseff to be removed from office. I should also point out that, although there was general consensus that the Senate would impeach her, Dilma Rousseff refused to resign.

As discourse moves from one context to the next, we see that the division of gender roles becomes the basis of a government programme, thereby shaping part of Temer’s incumbency, framing it as conservative. In an official setting, president Michel Temer states that the country needs women to unite and take care of our children. Therefore, gender has a key role in a government programme, which means it is tied to country’s official political field explicitly. Even though Marcela Temer is now acting in the public sphere (both delivering the speech and working in the programme), her role is limited to children: she extends her maternal skills to all children - while her husband and his male ministers discuss the budget deficit and the monetary policy. Gender division and hierarchy had an impact on the impeachment and it also helped Temer to govern. It is possible to argue that Brazil moved from a more left leaning government to a right-wing one, not only due to the neoliberal reforms Temer did put forth, but also due to the conservative view of gender relations lying on the basis of a programme such as Happy Child.

Furthermore, when examining the 2018 election, we can observe that the performance of gender vis-à-vis the heterosexual matrix becomes a matter of right and wrong, and differentiates between left and right. Eduardo Bolsonaro constructs left-wing women as uncivilised people, which leads readers (and his listeners during his speech) to understand that left-wingers want to corrupt society and destroy the values of civilisation. This oversimplification of reality creates a dichotomous structure: good and evil, us and them, right and wrong, right and left, which, according to Cesarino, is systemic in the communication of team Bolsonaro.⁴¹ Moreover, Eduardo Bolsonaro’s remarks, by implying left-wing women (feminists) defecate in the streets, illustrate the points raised by Borba, about the political use of disgust, and Silva, about the use of a pattern of outrageous language (‘incendiary framing’).⁴²

This construction of political reality is consistent with fascist politics, according to Stanley (2018).⁴³ He argues that the very basis of fascist discourse is the creation of an enemy, which creates a social division between us (the good citizens) and them (the enemy). This logic is reproduced in Eduardo Bolsonaro’s speech, as he represents left-wing people as the enemy to be destroyed, on the basis of their depravity. Unsurprisingly, sexual anxiety is a key aspect for the rise of fascist politics, as “the good citizens” feel victimised by feminist and LGBTQ movements, who want to destroy traditional gender (and sexual) roles.⁴⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, hatred towards feminism and gender equality is at the heart of right-wing extremism around the globe, and it has been used strategically to gain popular support. Indeed, this rhetoric helped elect Jair Bolsonaro president and Eduardo Bolsonaro the federal congressman with the highest number of votes in Brazilian history.

Brazil has moved from a progressive, left-leaning government under Dilma Rousseff to a conservative Temer administration, and then to a far-right proto-fascist government under Jair Bolsonaro, all within 2 years. This paper has argued that the rise of such extremism has a strong element of gender, and therefore the discursive construction of the impeachment against Ms. Rousseff provided momentum for the rise of ever more radical discourses against progressive policies, especially the ones related to gender and sexuality. Furthermore, observing the movement of discourse through different contexts, the conservative view of gender, in the post-impeachment, becomes extremist incendiary far-right discourse, denouncing the left-wing as sexually depraved and, therefore, a threat. To be sure, bolsonarismo is a very complex phenomenon and this paper does not aim at

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Leticia Cesarino, “On Digital Populism in Brazil”, *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* (2019), 2.

⁴² See Borba, *Disgusting Politics*; Silva, *The Pragmatics of Chaos*.

⁴³ Jason Stanley, *Como Funciona o Fascismo: a Política do “nós” e “eles”*, trans. Bruno Alexander (Porto Alegre: L&PM, 2018).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 127.

explaining what it is or how it works; I do, however, state that the impeachment proceedings provided the socio-discursive conditions for the election of a far-right extremist. Jair Bolsonaro now openly attacks democratic institutions and flirts with demands to close down the Supreme Court and Parliament, through the use of military force. The proliferation of Nazi-fascist symbols and mottos from members of government should function as a warning: fascism is a real threat to Brazil and fighting it must be our priority.