2022: The pact of 1988 under the Sword of Damocles

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Introduction

In 1989, in the collection Democratizing Brazil, political scientist Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza published a text entitled: "The New Republic under the Sword of Damocles". At the time, the author pointed out that the democratic situation, based on a fragile alliance between the Partido da Frente Liberal (PFL), whose members supported the military dictatorship, and the opposition, gathered by the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), and which took place in the midst of a serious economic crisis, would still be incomplete, and created the expression "invertebrate centrism" to describe the actions of the opposition to the military regime (Kugelmas, 2006).

However, amidst such a scenario, a new political arrangement was forged: the democratic pact of 1988. Based on the new Constitution and on a mode of governance that became known as coalition presidentialism, this pact was responsible not only for sustaining the New Republic, but for marking a break with the sociopolitical model of the military dictatorship, qualified by the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1976) as a bourgeois autocracy.

In addition, the pact also pointed to the gradual construction of a post--bourgeois public sphere, whose horizon was to increasingly include socially subaltern groups in the public sphere, albeit slowly, gradually and safely. However, as of 2011, as the internet became popular in the country, the 1988 pact began to show signs of exhaustion while brand new characters entered the scene, such as a new right (Rocha, 2019) and a new feminist activism (Medeiros, 2017).

The new right, favored by a conservative reaction to progressive advances coming from the State and civil society, and by a growing opposition against the Partido dos Trabalhadores/Worker's Party (PT), fueled by the massive disclosure of corruption scandals associated with the left, reached its peak with the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff (PT) in 2016 and the election of the extreme right congressman Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The new feminist activism, on the other hand, led to innovative artistic-cultural performances and resistance movements to conservative sectors, as well as to the election of Bolsonaro.

Both the new right and the new feminist activism were phenomena that bypassed institutionality and the traditional public sphere forged within the fra-

mework of the 1988 pact. To this end, they made use of what we call counter-publicity, i.e., disruptive performances received as unseemly, as a way of drawing attention to certain demands in the public debate, as in the case of Bolsonarism, which, by promoting what we call dominant counterpublicity (Rocha; Medeiros, 2021), puts the New Republic back under the Sword of Damocles.

In view of this line of argument, we have divided this article into four sections, in addition to this introduction. In the first section, we briefly point out how the construction of the public sphere in Brazil took place from 1822 until the redemocratization in 1988. In the second section, we point out how the genesis and development of the post-bourgeois public sphere took place in the country, and in the third and fourth sections we point out how, from new dynamics fostered by the post-bourgeois public sphere itself, the crisis of the 1988 democratic pact that sustained it originated.

1808 to 1988: the construction of the public sphere in Brazil

Historically, the national public debate was considered by many Brazilian thinkers as fragile or even absent, given the hypertrophy of private life and the resilience of a patrimonial State in the country. However, we agree with political scientist Adrian Gurza Lavalle (2004) about the need to rethink Brazilian public life under new parameters. From a creative appropriation of concepts from the Global North, we understand the emergence and changes of the Brazilian public sphere from a periodization of its own: (1) the emergence and consolidation of a bourgeois public sphere between 1808 and 1930; (2) the emergence of a semi-bourgeois public sphere, marked by the democratic integration of the urban working class between 1945-1964; and (3) the genesis of a post-bourgeois public sphere initiated during the country's redemocratization between the late 1970s and the 1980s.[1] In this effort, we sought to take into consideration both a sociopolitical dimension, highlighting advances and retreats as different social actors are included or excluded from the traditional public sphere, and a technical-cultural dimension, analyzing how the various means of communication condition the public sphere, but without constituting a determination in the last instance, which distances us from techno-deterministic analyses.

The classic concept of the public sphere was conceived by Habermas (2014) through a historical analysis of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in key Western European countries. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, state and ecclesiastical authorities began to be questioned in coffee-houses in England, salons in France and in the *Tischgesellschaften* in Germany. Over time, the reading public that frequented such spaces became part of a public debate based on rational-critical argument, making it possible to limit the despotism of absolutist monarchies through criticism conveyed in the written press.

In Brazil, a bourgeois public sphere close to the model described by Habermas only emerged in a more permanent way and with a significant territorial scope in 1808, when the royal family, fleeing the Napoleonic invasion in Portu-

gal, settled in Rio de Janeiro. Until then, the printing of books and newspapers was prohibited, and some of the revolts against the Portuguese Crown, such as the Inconfidência Mineira and the Conjuração Baiana at the end of the 18th century, relied on the clandestine and underground circulation of anti-absolutist texts and speeches through smuggled books and secret societies (Pait, 2018). Liberal, Enlightenment or republican ideas were controlled and censored by the State as they were considered dangerous and revolutionary, given that the Empire had a strong Catholic orientation (Neves, 1999). It was only after 1808 that cultural life expanded and local political, economic and cultural elites began to try to influence the political process and limit the power of the State.

The expansion of press freedom, however, was still constrained by state censorship, which sought to contain ideas contrary to the monarchy and slavery. Furthermore, the public debate that existed at the time was mainly aimed at reconciling the divergent interests of elites, and not at the democratic inclusion of other sectors of society (Nunes, 2010). In this sense, the Brazilian public sphere resembled those of central countries, considering the domination of the bourgeois class over the working class, with the difference that, in Brazil, the economy was based on slave labor. Such limitations were decisively questioned only between the 1860s and 1870s precisely by the abolitionist movement, thanks to the expansion of the university system and the expansion of circuits that led to the emergence of a public opinion capable of criticizing imperial institutions (Alonso, 2015). Even so, the legal abolition of slavery, which took place in 1888, was not accompanied by other social reforms, such as the distribution of land, leaving the large rural property untouched.

In 1889 the monarchy was replaced by the republican regime by means of a military coup; however, this did little to alter the dynamic of the local bourgeois public sphere. Conflicts and negotiations between state political elites proceeded similarly to the way they had under the monarchy, so that the national public debate during the First Republic was reduced to a "theater of oligarchies", according to Viscardi (2019). After all, despite the existence of a working class alternative press, illiterate people, the majority in the country, still lacked the right to vote, which reinforced the working classes' exclusion from the public sphere even more.

It was only with the end of the First Republic and the start of Getúlio Vargas' government in 1930 that workers began to be incorporated as political subjects, although in a partial manner. Mass communication via radio was fundamental in this process, similarly to what happened in authoritarian European governments, such as those of Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, and Franco in Spain. However, despite the censorship of public opinion carried out by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP), a body created under the New State dictatorship between 1937 and 1945, there was no such thing as absolute manipulation or control of the popular masses by the State. After all, the radio

programs had resonance among the people, as they presented their concrete experiences, pleasures and emotions (Haussen, 2001).

Thus, during Vargas 15 years in power (1930-1945), the State worked to partially incorporate discourses from the working-class press since the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, even if it erased their origin, seeking to control the "working-class word". To that end, Vargas invented *trabalhismo*, a way of legitimizing working class political participation by including workers' demands in a manner subordinate to the State (Gomes, 2005). It was only at the end of Vargas' dictatorship that the voices of workers themselves began to be heard more emphatically in the public debate, on the radio and in neighborhood associations, giving vent to their demands and enabling the emergence of a semi-bourgeois public sphere in the country, that is, partially occupied by the working classes.

Still, while radio facilitated workers' political participation, the traditional print press contributed little to this regard, considering its fragile commitment to democratic institutions (Martins, 2020). That fragility became especially explicit in the early 1960s, when *trabalhista* President João Goulart announced his intent to implement Basic Reforms, which included agrarian reform, among other advances for the working class. This announcement caused an intensification of anti-communism among right-wing groups, and the press did not hesitate in explicitly supporting a civil-military coup to overthrow Goulart from power in 1964. Once in power, the military installed a dictatorship that lasted 20 years and interrupted the working class' gradual incorporation into politics, intensifying the kind of censorship, persecution and violence that had already been used by the New State dictatorship.

During the military dictatorship, mass communication took a new leap with the foundation of Globo Television Network, actively supported by the government. Created from a Rio de Janeiro communication group that already owned newspapers and radio stations, Globo soon became the country's main television network, and public debate began increasingly became ruled by the logic of images. However, at the same time that Globo's television journalism, aligned with the dictatorship, was false and fictional, the network also criticized the government through realistic narratives in its *telenovelas*, which incorporated the "anarchic creativity" of artists and screenwriters aligned with the left (Bucci, 2016). Thus, even though the consolidation of the country's mass communication industry grew alongside the suffocation of the public sphere (Ortiz, 2001), partial broadcasting of political dissidence on television was fundamental to captivating the growing urban masses, whose access to the country's wealth dwindled as the years passed.

For Florestan Fernandes (1976), the main objective of the dictatorship would be to avoid at any cost the democratization of wealth, prestige and power, hence his interpretation of the regime as a bourgeois autocracy. In his view,

the bourgeois autocracy would be a permanent counterrevolution aiming to disintegrate all modalities of the public sphere, bourgeois as well as semi-bourgeois, to assure, through violence, the reproduction of a pattern of extreme concentration of the economic surplus. Indeed, the dictatorship reversed the small income redistribution that the 1945-1964 democratic regime had enabled, as the violent repression of the union movement allowed the redesign of institutions to abruptly change income distribution in favor of capital (Souza, 2016). Alongside the growth in urban inequalities came the cultural and physical extermination of indigenous people, especially in the Amazon, made possible by an alliance between the military government, multinational companies and Brazilian private and state companies that furthered the advance of extractivism and the expropriation of lands and resources from the people who inhabited them (Davis, 1978).

Finally, Blacks, women and LGBTQIA+ were also repressed by the dictatorship. The former through a policy of surveillance and repression in order to eliminate dissidences thought to be destabilizing and subversive, even while miscegenation and supposed racial harmony were exalted (Kössling, 2007), and the latter by a government posture of defending "Christian morality" that sought to regulate dissident and stigmatized desires, affections and sexualities in a normative and authoritarian way, based on a justification of protecting youth and preserving Brazilian society's cohesion and integration (Quinalha, 2017). As such, the bourgeois autocracy, beyond being a "class dictatorship" as Fernandes (1976) put it, also inextricably arranged people by class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, revealing the intersectional character of the term "bourgeois": a property owner, white, male and heterosexual.

The notion of such arrangement is fundamental to understand both Brazil's political process of redemocratization and the emergence of Bolsonarism in the 20th century. After all, it was precisely the actions of workers, women, Blacks, indigenous people, LGBTQIA+, among other groups, that prevented the bourgeois autocracy and the cultural industry from controlling the country's redemocratization in the 1970s and 1980s from the top down. Though they did not have a strong decision-making power in the traditional public debate, peripheral circulation of discourses from these groups, in their own alternative press, allowed for the development of diverse public opinion that began to penetrate the State, mainly through the slow work of social movements (Coutinho, 2011).

When the dictatorship ended in 1985, the constitutional drafting process that followed, between 1987 and 1988, ended up incorporating many of the demands brought by social movements. Because of this, the new Constitution was composed of a progressive substratum that incorporated a series of demands that the military dictatorship had blocked from becoming public, mostly related to workers (Sader, 1988), indigenous peoples (Lacerda, 2008), issues related to the environment (Alonso et al, 2007), race (Neris, 2018), gender and sexuality

(Medeiros; Fanti, 2019; Alves, 2020) and the rights of children and adolescents (Pinheiro, 2005), among others, and for this reason it became known as the *Citizen Constitution*.

1988 to 2010: genesis and development of a post-bourgeois public sphere in Brazil

After the enactment of the new Constitution in 1988, an unprecedented array of new institutions emerged in the country, supported by a new political arrangement: the democratic pact of 1988. Sustained simultaneously by the new Constitution and by coalition presidentialism – a form of government based on the formation of large parliamentary coalitions – this pact was based on implicit understanding that implementation of the social changes announced in the Constitution should occur in a slow, gradual and "safe manner". (Nobre, 2013). In any case, despite the State's sluggishness in incorporating democratic demands, the public debate in Brazil started to expand and include different groups that co-existed despite their disparities in decision-making power, inaugurating in the country what political theorist Nancy Fraser (1997) calls the post-bourgeois public sphere. And here it is important to draw attention to the term "bourgeois".

The bourgeoisie, in addition to referring to a social class, has an intersectional meaning that also refers to the character of race, gender and sexuality of its members. After all, who participated in the original Habermasian model of public sphere? The bourgeois was not only someone from the social class of property owners, but also one who had cultural capital (was educated), a race (white), gender (cis man), sexuality (heterosexual) and age (adult). Fraser created the category of post-bourgeois public sphere to account for a new historical reality that succeeded that of the bourgeois public sphere. Thus, in the author's understanding, the post-bourgeois public sphere would be an ideal type of organization of the public sphere in which, despite the permanence of hierarchies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and age, subaltern groups such as women, Blacks, indigenous people, LGBTQIA+, children, among others, have a growing capacity to produce and circulate counter-discourses and influence the political system, the mainstream media, the culture industry and the educational system. But how did this happen in Brazil?

The national literature points out how subaltern social groups began to constitute alternative discursive arenas in the 1970s, as the military dictatorship was losing its power. Such groups, despite having few material and organizational resources compared to elite groups (Dreifuss, 1989), managed to influence the creation of new institutions in the re-democratization process, both during the Constituent Assembly and in the governments that followed, through the creation of specific public policies and new government bodies under democratically elected governments until Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Subsequently, many of these groups also underwent an important process of institutionali-

zation within the scope of civil society itself, as pointed out by Lavalle et al. (2018). However, despite the undeniable advances produced by the increased porosity of the State, and of civil society itself, the emergence and deepening process of a post-bourgeois public sphere from 1988 to 2010 was quite uneven and permeated by advances and retreats, ambiguities, and contradictions. And, in this sense, the case of the feminist movement is exemplary.

In the late 1990s, the literature on the status of the Brazilian feminist movement concluded that it had become institutionalized (Alvarez, 1994). Such institutionalization process would have occurred both at a state level, considering the role of feminists in the executive and legislative branches and their participation in councils and other bureaucratic bodies, and at the societal level as the movement migrated from informal groups to professionalized NGOs. In addition, it was also possible to verify a greater participation of feminists in international spaces such as conferences and political forums and the formation of national and international articulation networks (Machado, 2016).

From the first Lula (PT) administration onwards, the institutionalization process reached a new level with the massive entry of feminist militants into the state, promoting an "institutional activism" (Abers; Tatagiba, 2015). In the first year of the government, the Secretariat for Special Policy for Women (SPM) was created, with a budget of its own, ministerial status and directly linked to the Presidency of the Republic, meeting a historical demand of the movement. Subsequently, achievements were obtained, such as the enactment of the Maria da Penha Law (2006), against domestic violence, and the creation of specific institutions to implement it, in addition to advances in terms of comprehensive care for women's health, especially considering the policies enacted by the "Technical Area of Women's Health", that integrated the Ministry of Health.

Feminist "institutional activism", however, also faced difficulties and tensions, especially in view of the issue of abortion, one of the core agendas of the movement. As a result of the First Conference on Policies for Women, a Tripartite Commission had been created with the objective of drawing up a preliminary draft for the legalization of abortion, but when the Bill was presented in the Deputies Chamber, in September 2005, there was a retreat of the Executive Branch in supporting the proposal due to pressure from the National Commission of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), the evangelical bench, and tensions arising from the corruption scandal popularized as *mensalão*, that impacted the Workers' Party, caused the project to be shelved (Machado, 2016). There were few voices that spoke out against the government's retreat in relation to the abortion issue, which reinforced the diagnosis of analysts and activists that the feminist movement had become institutionalized , emptied and distanced from the streets.

Indeed, critical voices of the Workers' Party government were scarce in the public debate between 2006 and 2010, and substantive ideological and programmatic differentiations seemed to have ceased to exist in the political system

during the height of Lula's popularity. If on the left, various social movements seemed to have institutionalized and emptied themselves, as illustrated by the case of the feminist movement, on the right, certain segments began to feel orphaned in terms of representation regarding the actions of the opposition to the government, especially considering the discontent generated by the *mensalão* scandal. As a result, a new right, different from the right that operated within the frameworks established by the 1988 pact, began to express and organize itself on internet forums, especially on Orkut, a social network whose popularity preceded that of Facebook in Brazil, and whose users at the time were mostly people from the middle and upper classes, with high education and living in the South and Southeast regions of Brazil (Rocha, 2019).

The old network enabled the formation of communities in which the use of pseudonyms was frequent and the creation and circulation of counter--discourses that had little or no space in central discursive arenas. Among the issues debated and defended by the various groups that forged the new right, it is possible to highlight, in addition to the radical defense of the free market, the praise of the Brazilian monarchy, the radical opposition against the Wokers' Party, anti-communism, the need to fight the globalist elites and their project of world power, and the need to promote traditions linked to the Western Christianity. However, there was a main idea, propagated especially by the philosopher and writer Olavo de Carvalho, that was able to bring together these and other counter-discourses despite their differences: that the consolidation of the 1988 democratic pact and a post-bourgeois society in Brazil represented the consolidation of a "leftist cultural hegemony", which needed to be actively fought so that a new social pact could be built.

In the mid-1990s, Carvalho already defended this idea, even before the Workers' Party came to power in 2003. Carvalho considered that the left would dominate certain central arenas for the circulation of discourses in civil society: newspapers and magazines, NGOs, book publishers, and human sciences courses at major Brazilian universities, most notably at the University of São Paulo. In the midst of the Lula government's peak of popularity, such arenas, criticized by Carvalho for their lack of ideological plurality, also began to encompass the State itself, PT's connection via the São Paulo Forum with other Latin American countries that at the time claimed Bolivarianism, and Globo Network, whose *telenovelas* were denounced by Carvalho readers on Orkut for their "communist" content.

However, if the "leftism" attributed to the productions of the largest television network in Brazil is something that can be questioned, there was a discursive arena that was undoubtedly hegemonized by the left at the time: the student movement. Given that a significant part of the users of the new emerging right's digital forums were university students, it did not take long for them to share, to some extent, Carvalho's ideas, considering their own experience,

perceived as permeated by exclusions and silencing (Rocha, 2019). Over time, not only did the idea that there would be a "leftist hegemony" in the country gain more supporters, but the very way of fighting it began to be consolidated among the new emerging right: the politics of shock (Rocha; Medeiros, 2020), or, as we call it here, counterpublicity.

To understand the contemporary dynamic of the public sphere, first of all, it is necessary to understand that there is no such thing as a unified public sphere, but a multiplicity of *publics*. The publics to which we refer here are formed from the existence of texts, videos, images, photos, audios, performances, and other messages formulated from different languages, and their reflexive circulation. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that publics can be more or less local, more or less integrated, more or less official and institutionalized, and more or less digitalized (Celikates, 2015).

What all publics have in common, however, is the fact that they are self--organized, voluntary spaces oriented by sociability among strangers, that is, for the purpose of forming links between people who do not know each other a priori. Thus, participating in such publics requires a minimum of participation and attention, in addition to a shared understanding that their arguments must be based on a rational-critical mode of reflection, an understanding that acts as a kind of hegemonic ideology in dominant publics. This would occur because, while more performative discourses and modes of address are present to some degree in any public (Warner, 2002), rational-critical argument would have greater legitimacy in that it allows a more effective interlocution with the State, with Science and with Capital.

Publics can be more or less central and more or less peripheral (Fraser, 1997), and the post-bourgeois public sphere enables the constitution of two main types of peripheral publics: subaltern publics and non-subaltern publics. Both formulate and circulate counter-discourses seeking to use rational-critical arguments in order to penetrate central publics in which certain perceptions, questions or debates are neglected, silenced or even despised.

The former are called subaltern[2] because they are mostly formed by people who are objectively subordinate, and whose members, in their entirety, have a shared perception of the structural relations of domination that challenge them as subjects and that also permeate central publics, which explains to a large extent the difficulty of penetration of discourses formulated by subaltern publics in these discursive arenas.

The latter, on the other hand, are characterized as non-subaltern because they are formed by people who, regardless of whether or not they are objectively socially subordinated, do not recognize themselves as such or do not do so in a central way, but who share ideas and worldviews that they are neglected in central publics, hence the peripheral condition that characterizes them vis-à-vis central publics.

In this sense, an example of a subaltern public, taking up the example of feminism, would be feminist activists who seek to use rational-critical arguments to demand more day care, legal abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy and more public facilities to care for victims of domestic violence from the State, to draw attention to the negligence of Science regarding investigations about women's bodies and intellectual productions of black women, or even to critici-ze market dynamics that reinforce certain stereotypes of femininity.

On the other hand, non-subaltern publics could be formed, for example, by readers of the Austrian economist Ludwig Von Mises, or Brazilian monarchy admirers, who want their ideas to influence the organization of the State, be taught in universities and influence entrepreneurs.

Although, however, the post-bourgeois public sphere allows for a greater porosity of central discursive arenas considering the performance of subaltern and non-subaltern peripheral publics, this does not eliminate the possibility of forming counterpublics. That is, publics that elaborate and circulate counter--discourses that are directly opposed to a cultural horizon perceived as dominant and that are expressed from a necessarily disruptive, indecorous and shocking form of addressing, called counterpublicity (Warner, 2002). Considering their performance in the post-bourgeois public sphere, we understand that counter-publics are also divided into two main ideal types: subaltern counterpublics and non-subaltern counterpublics.

The former are formed mostly by people who are objectively subordinate, and whose members, in their entirety, have a shared perception of the structural domination that challenges them as subjects and that also permeates central pu-blics. In the understanding of the people who integrate them, the fact that central publics are permeated by structural relations of domination would limit the reach of rational-critical discourses in these arenas, which would motivate the use of shock policy to draw attention of society to these domination relations, as did the feminist activists who participated in the Slut Marches by exposing their breasts in public and breaking with the Brazilian society's rules of decorum related to body exposure read as female.

On the other hand, non-subaltern counterpublics are formed by people who, regardless of whether they are socially subordinated, do not recognize themselves as such or do not do so centrally. What unites them is the shared perception that their worldviews are subordinate to a dominant cultural hori-zon that alienates, silences, belittles and even ridicules them, hence the resort to counterpublicity. And here it is important to emphasize that this shared subjec-tive perception *may or may* not be aligned with objective subordination. Quite illustrative in this sense is Olavo de Carvalho's defense of the conscious use of expletives in order to shock by breaking with the decorum of the dominant pu-blic, understood by the philosopher as a "straitjacket".

Specifically considering the performance of counterpublics, it is possible

to say that, subordinate or not, they all resort to counterpublicity. That is, they all make use of intentional shock, of recourse to disruptive performativity and transgression of rules of decorum, which can be used consciously as a radical counter-hegemonic political strategy. This occurs when there is a perception on the part of members of certain publics that their ideas cannot circulate in dominant publics, and that the very manifestation of the worldviews and ways of life they defend are under imminent threat. In addition, it is also important to draw attention to the dimension of the role played by the dynamic that permeate the reception of counterpublicity, which also differentiates the performance of counterpublics from that of other publics, as we shall point out next.

2011 to 2018: publics, counterpublic and the conservative reaction

In an interval of just four years after Lula's departure from power, between 2011 and 2014, society's more conservative segments felt the advances made by the post-bourgeois public sphere as a real shock of progressivism. In 2011, the National Truth Commission was created to investigate crimes committed by the State during the military dictatorship, and, in the same year, the Federal Supreme Court (STF) recognized common-law same-sex marriage. The following year, the same court recognized the right to abortion in cases of fetal anencephaly and confirmed the validity of the racial quota system in public universities. In 2013, the Domestic Workers's PEC was enacted, which expanded domestic workers' labor rights, and in 2014 the "Spanking Law", which prohibits the use of physical punishment and cruel and degrading treatment of children and adolescents.

Although such policies have represented undeniable advances for subordinate groups in Brazil, this did not automatically imply reduction of oppressive relations in our society, on the contrary. The conquest of racial quotas occurred alongside the continuity of the genocide of black youth; the creation of the Maria da Penha Law did not prevent the increase in femicides in later years; the unprecedented recognition of rights to indigenous and *quilombola* lands coexisted with intense persecution and violence directed at these groups; and the right to same-sex civil union continues to co-exist with high rates of LGBTQIA+ community-related violence.

Beyond the movements in the institutional arena, manifestations of subordinate counterpublics began to spread at an ever-increasing speed. This occurred mainly due to a conjunction between the brutal intensification of socioeconomic and sociocultural conflicts (around income redistribution and the borders between public and private) and the growing popularization of the internet in the country,[3] which exponentially increased the potential reach of the most alternative individuals and groups, as was the case of the *Marchas das Vadias.* Inspired by the Canadian Slut Walk, the marches, whose central motto was the freedom of one's own body, popped up across the national territory

between 2011-2012. Soon, a series of photos of protesters with bare breasts, as well as images of disruptive performances carried out by cultural collectives, who appeared breaking saints and introducing crucifixes into the anus, flooded traditional media and social networks, provoking shock reactions, as testimonies of working-class people attest.[4]

> I feel attacked and even offended when I see the feminist movement attacking another person for their religion, political party or because of their side. This is not valid. It is a movement on behalf of women and not to attack other women or society. I saw on television in a feminist movement on Paulista avenue that they put crucifixes in their anus, I saw artists saying that Jesus was gay, or that God is homosexual.[5] I think that this is attacking other people's religion. (Woman, São Paulo, 2019)

In addition to the shock felt with progressive advances in the institutional arena, conservative segments of society also felt attacked within the scope of civil society, given the spread of feminist and queer counterpublicity, including what was perceived as an increase in their representation in the traditional media, as in the *telenovelas* on Globo Network:

> There are a lot of gay people who like to insult, that's the problem. They want the media, put it in the *novela*, in *Malhação*, impose it. They get empowered. They think they own the truth, they walk through malls holding hands, while you are there with your child. It is okay to do it between four enclosed walls, the home is theirs, but society is not obliged to put up with it, to watch it. (Man, Rio de Janeiro, 2019)

Although similar reactions can be found with relative ease in all income strata, given the deep-rooted dynamic of oppression in the country, in the specific case of the working classes, the "progressive shock" also unleashed specific resentment, especially among workers over 40:

> If we say fag to a fag, he will defend himself and we cannot. If you say Black to a black person, the same. Touch a woman, and she has Maria da Penha, what about us? Isn't it about equal rights? The rope always snaps for the weakest, and we are the weakest. There should be a law to protect us too. (Man, Porto Alegre, 2019)

Anxiety and the feeling of disposability in the face of a rapidly changing job market, and the fear of losing an already reduced economic power appeared consistently in the testimonies. Hence the observation, "the rope always snap for the weakest, and we are the weakest". However, unlike what happened in the Anglo-Saxon context, there was no reference to something similar to the figure of the welfare queen (Nunes, 2020), although occasionally people criticized alleged frauds in the Bolsa-Família Program, but a desire that the social protection for subordinated groups would cover more people and include labor rights: "there should be a law to protect us too". In addition, the feeling of lack of protection was coupled with feelings of betrayal and abandonment by the

Workers' Party and by the left in general, which left workers to their own fates while concentrating their energies on combating other kinds of oppression:

> I have voted for the PT as long as I have been a voter and I felt misled. They promised that they were going to govern for the people, for the poor, and they simply distorted the left. They took the left that was the Workers's Party and turned it into a left that is the party of women, gays, LGBTs. Everything that is on the margins teamed up with the PT and it all became the same anarchy. Instead of them carrying out things in a way that would contribute to our society, they wanted promiscuity. (Man, Rio de Janeiro, 2019)

One way of reading this statement is from the notion of reprivatizing discourse (Fraser, 1989): the conservative resistance to politicization and denaturalization promoted by feminist and LGBTQIA+ oppositional discourses, received as disorder in the face of a "natural order". On the other hand, statements like this did not necessarily mean a rejection of the figures who represented the fight against these oppressions and most of their demands. In the perception of the people interviewed, the problem is that such struggles would make little or no reference to the collective dimension, connecting materially with the daily life of the popular classes, so that, as a rule, the discourses conveyed about the oppression of women, Blacks and LGBTQIA+, began to be welcomed by a significant part of people as if they were "reducing reality" superficially to certain markers of difference:

> Ah, because Marielle was a heroine, but why was she a heroine? Because she was a woman, Black and lesbian. Damn, the woman did so many important things, but they put that first, they reduce it to woman, Back and lesbian. (Man, Rio de Janeiro, 2019)

Given the scarcity of intermediary discursive arenas that would enable reflexive formulation and circulation of other discourses specific to the working classes, in addition to those circulated on social networks and digital forums, neo-Pentecostal churches ended up being, sometimes, the only spheres of sociability accessed by the working classes in which such themes were addressed more frequently.[6] Thus, if their most assiduous believers tended to be more emphatic in rejecting a progressive discourse, which they perceived as attacks on the Church and its ways of life, it is possible to say that practically all people, regardless of their professed creed, felt trapped. On the one hand, the State produced progressive public policies and textbooks without discursive mediations that included the popular classes, and, on the other hand, they encountered the shock and aggression arising from subordinate counterpublicity. Hence the reported feeling that certain speeches were being imposed on them.

Such perceptions were soon echoed by the emerging new right that had been consolidating since 2006. Jair Bolsonaro, at the time a federal deputy,

historically marginalized and despised by political elites, did not hesitate to take the lead in reacting to the "progressive shock". Along with other conservative parliamentarians, he managed to stop the printing of school material related to the "School without homophobia" project, originating from the "Brazil without homophobia" program, originally formulated in 2004 and derogatorily called the "Gay Kit". However, he did not have the same success regarding the installation of the National Truth Commission, nor regarding the approval of same-sex civil union, regulated by the National Council of Justice in May 2013, which made right-wing counterpublicity come to be actively used as a way of combating what they perceived, in line with the theses defended by Olavo de Carvalho, as a "leftist cultural hegemony".

Thus, as Bolsonaro and his sons became better known in the discursive arenas frequented by members of the emerging new right, the formation of Bolsonarist counterpublics accelerated. This was due both to the relative ease of triggering and mobilizing subjectivities with a view to the naturalization of domination dynamics,[7] and to the strengthening of Jair Bolsonaro's candidacy for the presidency amid the protests for Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, permeated by anti-PT, anti-corruption and anti-system discourses (Ortellado; Solano; Moretto, 2016; Telles, 2016). By incorporating all these elements into his rhetoric, in addition to the law-and-order discourse, which responded both to insecurity in the face of crime and to the "progressive shock", the retired military captain came to be seen by the protesters as a possible option for office.[8] Known for his controversial and disruptive speeches, the retired captain soon received the nickname *bolsomito*, in reference to his *mitagens*. *Mitagem* and *lacração* are slang terms that refer to the ability to end a discussion in an exemplary way, leaving the interlocutor without reaction and that became popular on the internet precisely amid the dynamics created between publics and counterpublics.

Bolsonarist counterpublicity is, however, as a rule, much more radical than just a *mitada*, especially in view of the frequent exaltation of Colonel Carlos Brilhante Ustra, a well-known torturer who worked during the military dictatorship. In this sense, it is possible to mention two highlights of Bolsonaro's counterpublicity before his victory at the polls. The first is the tribute to Ustra carried out by Bolsonaro in the plenary amid the vote on Rousseff's impeachment, in which he declared: ""In memory of colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, Dilma Roussef's horror, of the Caxias Army, in the name of Brazil and above all in the name of God, my vote is yes [yes to proceed the impeachment]". The second took place amid the 2018 election campaign, when Carlos Bolsonaro shared an image in his Instagram account's stories[9] that mocked the anti-Bolsonaro campaign organized by women's groups on social media known as #EleNão. The photo, shared with the caption "about parents who cry in the shower!", referenced a torture scene and

showed a bloodied man, his head wrapped in a plastic bag, his mouth open, and the name of the movement spelled in his bare chest.[10]

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Considering everything that has been exposed so far, we understand that counterpublics have two central dimensions: an ambivalent character and a paradoxical character. Regarding ambivalence, it is possible to say that counterpublics foster a potential for democratization of the dominant public sphere by pointing to the absence of plurality in public debate and calling attention to social sufferings that do not appear in dominant publics, as we tried to point out from the working class people's testimonies, and which also appear in those collected by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) with supporters of the Tea Party in Louisiana, United States.

At the same time, however, counterpublics also encourage sociocultural fragmentation – through the multiplication of oppositional codes – and sociopolitical polarization. Political polarization is fueled by counterpublics as they operate according to a logic in which there are only political enemies to be destroyed, not political opponents who could be co-opted, negotiated, or temporarily defeated. For members of the counterpublics, the impossibility of debate rests on the perception that their enemies always act with malicious intent, are perverts, "liars with psychotic ambitions", in the words of Carvalho, have neither humanity nor rationality, or else they were victims of some "brainwashing" that indoctrinated them to defend evil ideas, which makes any rational debate of ideas impossible.

Thus, even though the members of the counterpublics have arguments of a rational-critical type to support their positions, they preferentially choose to refuse the debate. On the other hand, the paradoxical character of counterpublics lies in their relationship with conflict. Counterpublics not only establish the conflict between the dominant cultural horizon and an alternative horizon, but also allow the naming of the conflict and outlining their own utopia of reorganization of public life (Warner, 2002). In general, dominant publics work with the naturalization of their own cultural horizon and, thus, perpetuate the domination of their codes, performances, ideas and structures, since they present themselves as consensual, that is: free of conflicts. Counterpublicity denaturalizes these false consensuses; but its paradoxical dimension lies in the difficulty in getting out of pure conflict and creating new consensuses that can be more inclusive and more reflective.

In this sense, the performance of Jair Bolsonaro and his sons in the government would be a paradigmatic example of pure conflict: he betrays and abandons allies, sabotages agreements, prevents new consensuses (as this would precisely betray the very principle of counterpublicity) and does not inspire building social solidarity, not even in times of a pandemic. His sole objective is to

demolish the foundations of the dominant publics that still operate within the confines of the 1988 pact and support him in the state and civil society. To this end, he seeks to naturalize extremism itself, by moving the cultural horizon increasingly to the right (Nunes, 2020), pointing to the rupture with the 1988 pact, and with the political arrangement that corresponds to it, and signaling the future establishment of an authoritarian regime in the midst of demonstrations by radicalized groups, putting the New Republic, once again, under the Sword of Damocles in 2022.

Notes

1 The work of Perlatto (2018) served as methodological inspiration to mobilize Brazilian historiography in order to sociologically understand the structural changes in the Brazilian public sphere.

2 The use of the subaltern qualification refers to a dominated or dominant social position within systems of oppression (Hill Collins, 2009). Considering that subalternity has, necessarily, both a structural, objective aspect and a symbolic, subjective aspect.

3 On the correlation between Internet popularization and counterpublics growth, see Downey and Fenton (2003).

4 Such testimonies were collected in 2019 within the scope of the research "Conservatism and social issues" carried out by Plano CDE and Fundação Tide Setúbal, in which Camila Rocha acted as technical consultant and field researcher together with Esther Solano. The research report is available at: <http://content. fundacaotidesetubal.org.br/downloadconservadorismo>.

5 Reference to images captured in 2015 at the São Paulo LGBT Pride Parade, such as that of a man dressed as Jesus Christ kissing another man and that of a transsexual tied to a cross. The reference to the introduction of crucifixes in the anus is, apparently, a case of contextual collapse: instead of a scene from Av. Paulista that would have been televised, the interviewee must have in mind the performance of Coletivo Coiote in the Marcha das Vadias in Rio de Janeiro in 2013 (cf. Gomes, 2018).

6 Churches were often the only community experience in which it was possible to establish bonds of trust and talk about certain topics, so that there was often a fear among more assiduous believers that the PT and the left, when "attacking religion", would destroy precisely the only space of cozy sociability they had. For more information on the topic cf. Valley (2020).

7 We thank Fernando Baldraia for his valuable comment on the oral presentation of our arguments made in the 5th episode of the podcast Diálogos Mecila: Conservadorismos em debate.

8 According to a survey conducted at the time by Esther Solano and Pablo Ortellado.

9 Photos and short videos that can only be viewed on that network for a short period of time as they go offline within 24 hours.

10 Interestingly, according to the newspaper El País, the creator of the image would be a supporter of #EleNão and would have created the montage to denounce the censorship of the campaign; however, when shared by Carlos Bolsonaro from the profile @ direitapvh, it was re-signified and welcomed as Bolsonarist counterpublicity.

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ABSTRACT – In this article, we point out how the crisis of the 1988 democratic pact originated from the new dynamics fostered by the Brazilian post-bourgeois public sphere itself, which developed in the midst of the national redemocratization process. In the first section, we briefly indicate how the public sphere in Brazil was built from 1822 until redemocratization in 1988. In the second section, we show the genesis and develop- ment of Brazil's post-bourgeois public sphere. And, in the third and fourth sections, we describe how its crisis originated from clashes in the public debate that bypassed the institutions and mobilized counterpublicity: disruptive performances perceived as inde- corous. In this sense, we argue that Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters, by fostering what we call dominant counterpublicity, puts the New Republic, again, under the Sword of Damocles.

RESUMO – Neste artigo apontamos como a crise do pacto democrático de 1988 se originou a partir de novas dinâmicas fomentadas pela própria esfera pública pós-burguesa brasileira, a qual se desenvolveu em meio ao processo de redemocratização nacional. Na primeira seção apontamos de forma resumida como se deu a construção da esfera pública no Brasil desde 1822 até a redemocratização em 1988. Na segunda, apontamos como se deu a gênese e o desenvolvimento da esfera pública pós-burguesa no país, e, nas terceira e quarta seções, apontamos como sua crise se originou a partir de embates no âmbito do debate público que passavam ao largo da institucionalidade e mobiliza- vam a contrapublicidade: *performances* disruptivas e recebidas como indecorosas. Nesse sentido, argumentamos que o bolsonarismo, ao fomentar o que denominamos como contrapublicidade dominante, coloca a Nova República, novamente, sob a Espada de Dâmocles.

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